



## A STUDY ON CORRELATION BETWEEN RELIGIOUS PRACTICE AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT USING DIT-2

Mr. Sunghak Joo

Ph. D Researcher, Satya Nilayam Research Institute, Chennai

### Abstract

Religion is one of the primary factors formulating one's moral capacity. Religion gives ethical principles and criteria judging what is 'right' or 'wrong'. One's moral decision is made according to his belief system. Through research we studied the extent to which religious practices could mould one's moral capacity. The Defining Issues Test (DIT-2) developed by Rest and his colleagues is used to measure moral developmental indices of participants. The result of DIT-2 presents the moral schema stages of participants who have different religious background and their religious practices. Furthermore, we can understand the correlation between religion and moral development through personal interest score, maintain norms score, Postconventional score (P score) and N2 score.

### 1. Introduction

Even with rapid development of science and technology in the twentieth century, human beings are facing regional and religious conflicts, terrorism, food crisis, disease, dehumanization, and moral crisis. Most existing problems are closely connected to the collapse of morality and the absence of ethics. Moral decisions are made based on what we believe to be 'right' or 'wrong' and moral judgments vary with every individual's moral capacity. It is said that cultural values, education, tradition, and religious doctrines are essential factors facilitating one's moral development.

Through this research we studied the extent to which religious practices could mould one's moral capacity using Defining Issues Test developed by Rest and his colleagues in order to measure one's moral development. The result scored by the center for the study of Ethical Development, shows participants' moral schema stages in personal interest score, maintain norms score, Postconventional score (P score) and N2 score of people following the ethical principles laid by respective religions; Jainism, Christianity, and Hinduism.

### 2. Moral development and DIT

The study of moral development examined how an individual internalizes socially approved rules and restrictions and oriented their behaviors accordingly. One of the most influential scholars in this field was Jean Piaget who developed a theory of moral development and placed great importance on the education of children. Lawrence Kohlberg agreed with Piaget's theory and developed it to the cognitive-developmental stage theory, which dominated research on moral psychology for two decades from the 1950s. He used Piaget's story-telling methodology to tell people stories carrying moral dilemmas in them.

Kohlberg expanded Piaget's two stages into six at three levels-each level consisting of two stages. Stage 1 is the period of obeying and avoiding punishment from authorities. For children in this stage, to avoid breaking rules and to be obedient to authorities are considered as right things. Regardless of value, children understand the consequences of actions according to 'goodness' or 'badness'.<sup>1</sup>

Stage 2 is the stage of individualism making a fair exchange. At this stage, children make a moral judgment relevant to a good deal that is good for themselves as well as others'. Right actions are not based on loyalty or justice but equal sharing or fairness. Stage 3 is the level of pleasing other people and getting approval from the people. The main purpose of morality is to maintain good relationship with others.

Stage 4 is the stage of maintaining law and social order. People are in this stage oriented to follow authorities, fixed rules and the maintenance of the social system. At the stage 5, people respect rules and laws but begin to recognize social contract or individual right. More than 20 years old people make moral judgment according to the norms of right or wrong that defined by the laws and moral judgment is related to laws and duties based on a rational calculation of overall utility, which is "the greatest good for the greatest number."<sup>2</sup> Stage 6 is the stage of the universal ethical principle orientation that an individual follows the universal ethical principles such as justice, human right and life, and equality.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ronald Duska and Mariellen Whelan, *Moral Development: A guide to Piaget and Kohlberg* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 45-47.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Lickona ed, *Moral Development and Behavior* (Holt: Library of Congress Cataloging In Publication Data, 1976), 35.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald Duska and Mariellen Whelan, *Moral Development: A Guide to Piaget and Kohlberg*, 47.



Neo-Kohlbergians developed a theory that four inner psychological process: moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character based on Kohlberg's theory. They used Defining Issues Test (DIT) an internationally validated paper and pencil test of moral development derived from the work of Kohlberg's theory. The DIT was designed for studying the different ways of judging what is important in making decisions about the social problems. DIT-2 is the updated version of DIT-1 that shortened the test, updated the dilemmas and items and has clear instructions. It is aimed at improving the measurement of moral judgment.<sup>4</sup> Generally, DIT result indicates three moral schemas: stage 2/3 level-personal interests, stage 4 level-to maintaining social laws and norms, stage5/6 level-postconventional score. These schemas have a relation to Kohlberg's stage and it indicates that how people conceptualize, how it is possible to organize cooperation in a society.<sup>5</sup> The results of the test provide the following scores.<sup>6</sup>

#### DIT scores<sup>7</sup>

- 1) **Personal interest score (Stage 2 – Stage 3):** Personal interest score represents the participant's consideration from stage 2 focusing on the personal interest of the actor making the moral decisions and stage 3 focusing on the good or evil intentions of the parties.
- 2) **Maintaining Norm Schema Score (Stage 4):** This score represents the stage 4 that a participant focuses on maintaining the existing legal system, fixed rules, social order and formal organizational structure.
- 3) **Postconventional Schema Score (P score: Stage 5 – Stage 6):** P score represents that a participant focuses on organizing a society by appealing to consensus producing procedures such as abiding by majority vote and stage 5B/6 (focus on organizing social arrangements and relationships in terms of intuitive moral principles or ideals)<sup>8</sup>
- 4) **New Index Score (N2 score):** N2 score is a new index that outperforms the P score for construct validity.<sup>9</sup> This score is adjusted to have the same mean and standard deviation as the P score to allow for comparisons.

### 3. Design and Procedure

90 participants residing in Chennai, hailing from Tamilnadu, Kerala, Rajasthan, and Uttarpradesh, with different religious backgrounds possessing good knowledge of English were shortlisted for the research. Jains from the department of Jainism and other Jaina institutions, Christians from the department of Christian Studies, University of Madras and Department of Social Work, Madras Christian College, Hindus from Madras Christian College and other institutions, and employees who are working for the multinational companies took the DIT-2. The collected samples were sent to the Center for the Study of Ethical Development, The University of Alabama to be scored. The report suggested 62 participants are reliable samples.

### 4. Result and discussion

**Table 1 Means of developmental and experimental indices**

	Personal Interest (Stage 2/3)	Maintain Norms (Stage 4)	Post Conventional (P Score)	N2 Score
<b>Mean</b>	28.03	35.21	25.45	21.98
<b>Std. Deviation</b>	11.94	12.76	13.70	11.47
<b>N</b>	62	62	62	62
<b>Jains</b>	29.09	32.45	28.45	21.68
	22	22	22	22
<b>Christians</b>	22.25	35.90	28.0	26.36
	19	19	19	19
<b>Hindus</b>	32.15	34.75	19.99	18.33
	21	21	21	21

<sup>4</sup> Muriel J. Bebeau, DIT2: Devising and Testing a Revised Instrument of Moral Judgment, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 1999, vol.91, No.4, 644-659.

<sup>5</sup> Muriel J. Bebeau and Stephen J. Thoma, *Guide for DIT-2* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2003), 30.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 18-20.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>8</sup> Neo-Kohlbergians combined the scores from 5A, 5B, and 6 score because usually they behave empirically very similar and theoretically they are all versions of Postconventional moral thinking. The P% score can range from 0 to 95. It is interpreted as the extent to which people prefer Postconventional moral thinking. See, Muriel J. Bebeau and Stephen J. Thoma, *Guide for DIT-2*, 18-20.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*,19.



Table 1 shows the participants' moral stages in developmental indices: personal interest score (stage2/3), maintain norms score (stage4) and Postconventional scores (stage6). Third column of Table 1 shows that participants have scored a higher maintaining norms score thereby suggesting a slightly lower level of moral understanding. Each religious group has high moral schema scores and hence it is obvious that participants focus more on complying with the legal systems, regulations and formal organizational structure. It is to be noted that Jains' Postconventional score is slightly higher than other groups' P score, which means Jains intend to focus on religious discourse, universal ethical principles or ideals and relationships.

**Scripture and moral developmental indices**

		Once a day	Std. Dev.	More than once a week	Std. Dev.	Less than once a month	Std. Dev.
<b>Jains</b>	N	13		6		3	
	Personal interest	28.3	11.7	30.0	10.6	30.7	11.3
	Maintain norms	32.3	8.7	32.3	11	33.3	6.4
	P score	28.6	14.1	29.3	17.6	26	10.6
	N2 score	21.7	11.3	21.8	9.7	21.3	7.5
<b>Christians</b>	N	17		2		0	0
	Personal interest	21.8	11.7	25.6	8	0	0
	Maintain norms	35.4	16.9	39.9	5.5	0	0
	P score	28.1	15.2	27.4	9.3	0	0
	N2 score	27.1	15.8	22.2	9.8	0	0
<b>Hindus</b>	N	0	0	8		13	0
	Personal interest	0	0	26.4	8.4	35.7	13
	Maintain norms	0	0	42.4	10.9	34.4	14.9
	P score	0	0	26.6	13.3	17.4	9.4
	N2 score	0	0	22.1	6.9	16.8	8.8

**Table 2 Scripture reading and DIT scores**

Scripture reading is one of the essential religious activities and it influences a believer to have an active conscience and thus a moral foundation. People who do not read religious scripture regularly have higher personal interest score and they tend to focus on the situation they are in and its circumstances. Table 2 shows us that the maintaining norms score is higher for those who regularly read their scriptures. Scripture reading moulds believers to focus on following fixed and accepted norms of life.

**Prayer/ Meditation and moral developmental indices**

		Once a day	Std. Dev.	More than once a week	Std. Dev.	Less than once a month	Std. Dev.
<b>Jains</b>	N	20		0	0	2	
	Personal interest	28.2	11.0	0	0	38	2.8
	Maintain norms	31.9	8.97	0	0	38	0
	P score	29.5	14.4	0	0	18	0
	N2 score	21.8	10.7	0	0	20.5	0.05
<b>Christians</b>	N	17		2		0	
	Personal interest	21.9	11.7	25.6	7.9	0	0
	Maintain norms	35.4	16.9	39.9	5.5	0	0
	P score	28.1	15.2	27.4	9.3	0	0
	N2 score	27.2	15.8	22.2	9.8	0	0
<b>Hindus</b>	N	17		1		3	
	Personal interest	30.5	11.9	22	0	44.7	4.2



	Maintain norms	38.9	15.1	34	0	34.7	9.0
	P score	21.7	11	30	0	10	5.3
	N2 score	20.1	8.3	17.9	0	8.7	2.2

**Table 3 Prayer/Meditation and DIT scores**

Most participants are found to spend time on meditation or prayer. Jains and Christians have less personal interest score and they have higher stage 4 score and P scores. However, there is no specific pattern in Hindu participants. Postconventional and N2 scores reveal that people who do not pray frequently are less than those who do.

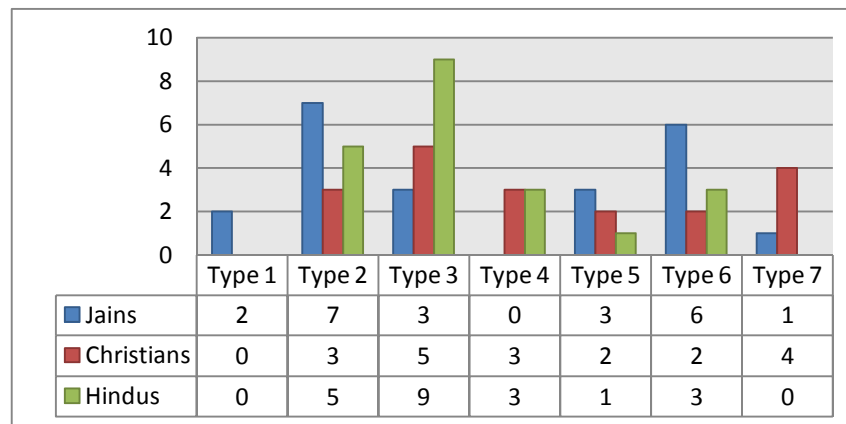
**Religious activities and moral developmental indices**

		Once a day	Std. Dev.	More than once a week	Std. Dev.	Less than once a month	Std. Dev.
<b>Jains</b>	N	5		8		9	
	Personal interest	29.6	12.4	29.5	12	28.4	10.3
	Maintain norms	27.2	8.1	34.3	7.8	33.8	6.9
	P score	28	9.3	27	19.8	30	11.57
	N2 score	21.4	5.1	19.5	13.2	23.7	9.3
<b>Christians</b>	N	6		13		0	0
	Personal interest	28.9	6.6	18.6	8.9	0	0
	Maintain norms	24.1	12.2	41.3	13.8	0	0
	P score	28.8	14.5	29.3	16.3	0	0
	N2 score	29.4	9.9	26.7	16.6	0	0
<b>Hindus</b>	N	1	0	10		10	
	Personal interest	34	0	32.1	12.9	31.9	12.4
	Maintain norms	40	0	41.7	12.5	37.9	12.1
	P score	14	0	23.8	15.1	25.7	16.6
	N2 score	17.3	0	19.0	8.6	17.7	9.2

**Table 4 Religious activities and DIT scores**

Table 4 provides answers to a pertinent question as to if religious activities formulate one's moral capacity. The above results convey that there is a closed connection between religious activities and moral development. People participating religious activities or visiting temples have higher interest score than those who do not care to. The P score and N2 scores are higher for Christians than other religious group indicating that any relationship or activity has its foundation on intuitive moral principles.

**Primary moral schema types of participants**



**Table 5 Primary Moral Schema Types**



Based on the DIT scores, participants can be categorized as the primary moral type. There are seven schema types according to the moral schema scores;<sup>10</sup> 1) Type 1 samples live by personal interests, 2) Type 2 also has personal interest as priority thereby tends to maintain norms, 3) Type 3 samples give most importance to maintaining norms and thus takes care of personal interests, 4) Type 4 has maintaining norms as the uppermost criteria, 5) Type 5 samples transit to Post conventional from maintaining norms, 6) Type 6 samples are observed to be an opposite of type 5 i.e. transitioning from post conventional to maintaining norms, 7) Type 7) seems to be at the Post conventional level. The Table-3 shows participants following different faiths with primary moral schema. Just over half of the samples fall between Type 2 (personal interest) and Type 3 (maintaining norms). Many Hindu participants fall under the personal interests and maintaining norms schemas with more of them transitioning towards maintaining norms from personal interests. The pattern shows that Jaina group belong to Type 6 and Christian groups to Type 7. According to the present study Jain and Christian participants are found to have developed a moral schema. Further studies with a larger sample belonging to different age groups, social strata, economic and educational background could help clarify if these patterns are typical of participants from different religious beliefs.

## **5. Conclusion**

The research findings indicate that religious practices and moral development are interwoven. Jaina group has higher P score and N2 score than other groups and their primary moral schema is found to transit to higher stages. This research study proves that Jaina ethical principles are related to soteriology and hence the belief that an individual can reach liberation only through moral excellence. Therefore I conclude that a Jain's personal moral endeavor facilitates his/her moral development. Taking this research forward with a larger sample and more participants taking pre and post-test could help clarify if these findings are typical of Indians' moral capacity who practice different religious traditions, in relation to religious background and if their primary moral schema and moral stages change according to education, individual experience, and societal pressures.

---

<sup>10</sup> Muriel J. Bebeau and Stephen J. Thoma, *Guide for DIT-2*, 20-21.