



Review Paper

Crime Rates in India: Role of Morality and Moral Reasoning

Bipin P. Varghese and S. John Michael Raj

¹Dept of Psychology, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu, INDIA

Available online at: www.isca.in

Received 25th November 2013, revised 28th December 2013, accepted 7th January 2014

Abstract

Morality is the key psycho-philosophical faculty of the human mind that enables an individual to take right moral decisions and thus exhibit a moral behaviour. Moral behaviour is the act that is valued by an observer as right or good which effectively results in a common good. The concept of morality and moral behaviour has been pondered upon by various philosophers and psychologists and there are numerous views and theories on the nature of morality. However a moral action is said to be so in terms of its reference with its desirability in the society or to the significant other. Various researchers have found that there is an inverse relation between criminality and morality. Accordingly the rate of increase of criminality in the world population is a direct indicator of the decline of morality. In the Indian context too the alarming increase of the crime rates and incidents of harm towards individuals signals to the fact that moral orientation in the Indian population is facing a notable shift that needs to be viewed seriously. The present study in its co-relational review form delineates the crime rates in India in the context of Morality.

Keywords: Morality, moral reasoning, moral behaviour, criminality, crime in india, decline in morality, crime, ethical behaviour.

Introduction

Morality originating from the Latin word 'moralitas' refers to "manner, character, proper behaviour" which differentiates intentions, decisions, and actions between those that are "good" [or right] and those that are "bad" [or wrong]. Morality is the psycho-philosophical faculty of the human mind that enables an individual to take right moral decisions and thus exhibit a moral behaviour. Moral behaviour is the act that is valued by an observer as right or good; (Wayne, Langley, 2010)¹. The concept of morality and moral behaviour has been pondered upon by various philosophers and psychologists resulting in numerous views and theories on the nature of morality. Development of morality or ability to make moral judgements or decisions is one of the most vital psychological events in the process of social development and life span of an individual. It is as a result of moral development that a child or individual becomes capable of differentiating between right and wrong and do moral judgement. Thus, making use of one's own knowledge, the individual makes the right choice amidst a set of difficult ones, towards taking a step in the right direction. Such a step also makes that individual acquire the courage and independence to take further action in line with the choice made, despite any inconvenience that could arise in the due course. For example, during a child's development, his/her experiences with family, peers, and other adults influences his/her moral development substantially. In addition, their physical, cognitive, emotional and social skills that mature over time, work together in influencing moral development².

Approaches to Morality

Morality has been viewed upon by various philosophers and social scientists through different terms of reference and thus formulating different views and approaches. The Relativistic position claims that there exist no absolute moral laws. The Right and wrong are relative to the customs of one's society; Mahavira (c. 599-527 BC), Protagoras (c. 481-420 BC), Herodotus (c.484-420 BC). According to the Naturalistic view of morality, the universe is governed by reason or rational principle. Humans have reason within them and can therefore know and obey its law. Marcus Tullius Cicero (c. 106-43 BC) argues that right reason is always in agreement with nature, of universal application, unchanging and everlasting. As per Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) the natural law which is defined by God is naturally authoritative and knowable by all human beings. The Social Contract theory defined morality as a set of rules that rational people will agree to obey, for their mutual benefit, provided that other people will obey them as well; Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Bordley Rawls (1921-2002). According to Utilitarianism, an action is right if it leads to the greatest possible balance of good consequences or the least possible balance of bad consequences in the world as a whole; Jeremy Bentham, (1748-1832) John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). According to Deontology of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), in order for an action to be morally good, it is not enough that it conform to the moral law, but it must also be done for the sake of the law. What makes human beings different from mere things according to the Rights and Justice approach is that people have dignity based on their ability to choose freely what

individuals want do with their lives, and they have a fundamental moral right to have these choices respected. Virtue Approach; Aristotle (c. 384–322 BC) views virtues as attitudes or character traits that enable an individual to act in ways that develop our highest potential. Virtues enable one to pursue the ideals they have adopted. Honesty, courage, compassion, generosity, fidelity, integrity, fairness, self-control, and prudence are all examples of virtues. Virtues are like habits; that are, once acquired; they become characteristic of a person. Moreover, a person who has developed virtues will be naturally disposed to act in ways consistent with moral principles.

Morality and Crime

In the late centuries criminal acts were regarded as direct indications of either moral or intellectual retardation or as a general deficiency of the person committing them, (Beirne, 1993)³. Recent theories that include moral judgment in their explanation of delinquent criminal behaviour are, however, much more cautious in postulating a simplistic causal relationship between immature moral cognitions and criminal behaviour. Mature moral judgment is one of the most important psychological variables that determines moral behaviour.

According to a study conducted by Anna Margorzata Palucka of University of Toronto in 1997 entitled, “Relationships of moral judgement, emotional empathy and impulsivity to criminal behaviour in young and adult offenders” criminal offenders were found to be lower on moral judgement and higher on impulsivity than non-offenders⁴. The research also found that there was a significant interaction effect between age and level of violence implying important differences between violent young and adult offenders.

In an another study conducted by Addad et al., criminals were found to score higher than control subjects in neuroticism and immoral judgment thereby indicating a direct influence of immorality on antisocial and criminal behaviour⁵.

Palmer explored the link between moral reasoning and criminal behaviour in the work entitled “Offending Behaviour: *Moral Reasoning, Criminal Conduct and the Rehabilitation of Offenders*”. The research inferred that adolescent offenders generally reason at less mature moral stages compared to non-offenders even when other demographic factors were controlled⁶.

According to a study conducted in the University of Cambridge, morality is the key factor that resists criminal behaviour. Around 700 young people in Peterborough were closely studied for over a decade, leading to the discovery that most of the adolescent crimes observed were not just the result of youthful opportunism but weak morality, which was the biggest factor. The Study conducted on 716 teenagers found that 3.8% of those surveyed had carried out 47% of the 16,000 offences. This group of 27 youths had committed 7,523 crimes in five years. The average youth committed up 278 offences between the ages of 12 and 16 – more than once a week. They were responsible for the most serious property crimes such as burglaries, robberies and car theft, with many of them having criminal records before the age of 12. This group admitted having the weakest morals, being impulsive and short-sighted, and having no self-control. Thus, in these studies, criminality was found to be inversely proportional to morality⁷.

An in-depth review of social sciences research done so far; in the area of morality and criminality shows that changes in the society, values and motives of individuals have resulted in significant changes in the moral behaviour of individuals⁸⁻¹².

Table-1
Summary of incident rates and increase of various crimes in India from 2002 to 2012

Year	Murder	Attempt to Murder	Rape	Kidnapping and Abduction	Breach of Trust	Cheating	Counterfeiting	Hurt	Dowry Deaths	Other IPC Crimes	Total Cognizable Crimes	Total Population of the Country
2000	37399	30743	16496	22871	14581	41701	2299	240580	6995	779757	1771084	1042261758
2001	36202	31523	16075	22487	14798	44727	1683	271487	6851	701362	1769308	1059500888
2002	35290	30380	16373	21850	14027	46271	1522	265025	6822	730297	1780330	1076705723
2003	32716	25942	15847	19992	13432	47478	2055	261444	6208	700412	1716120	1093786762
2004	33608	27890	18233	23327	14176	51939	1529	276868	7026	741031	1832015	1110626108
2005	32719	28031	18359	15750	13572	53625	2383	270861	6787	741977	1822602	1127143548
2006	32481	27230	19348	23991	13636	58076	2169	264748	7618	779697	1878293	1143289350
2007	32318	27401	20737	27561	15531	65326	2204	273067	8093	829206	1989673	1159095250
2008	32766	28598	21467	30261	16487	66579	2991	284969	8172	856963	2093379	1174662334
2009	32369	29038	21397	33860	16326	72718	2935	279214	8383	865541	2121345	1190138069
2010	33335	29421	22172	38440	16678	78999	2589	289022	8391	924072	2224831	1205624648
2011	34305	31385	24206	44664	17457	87656	2307	302847	8618	966032	2325575	1221156319
2012	34434	35138	24923	47592	17901	94203	2351	332324	8233	966244	2387188	1236686732

Table-2
Percentage of increase of some major crimes in India from 1988 to 2012

Year		Murder	Attempt to Murder	Rape	Kidnapping and Abduction	Cheating	Counterfeiting	Hurt	Dowry Deaths	Other IPC Crimes	Total Cognizable Crimes	Population Increase in the Country
Last 10 Years	2003-2012	5.25%	35.44%	57.27%	138.05%	98.41%	14.40%	27.11%	32.61%	37.95%	39.10%	11.55%
Last 25 Years	1988-2012	19.68%	69.83%	173.90%	201.76%	314.89%	52.96%	X	X	28.81%	65.73%	52.80%

Crime Rates in India: An Overview

With the revolution in the field of information technology and advent of media resources available at finger tips, incidents happening around the globe are accessible even to laymen population these days. The large number of incidents reported daily in the media, if seen through a psychologist’s eye bear wider scope of in-depth research. The various reports appearing in the daily media were either not known earlier or are newly emergent with the change in the social structure and individual motives. On viewing the data across the world countries, it is seen that there is a significant increase in the crime rates. In India too, the crime rates are found to have shown a considerable increasing trend in the past few years. Despite improvements and innovation in the modes of crime prevention and systematization of the law enforcement agencies in the country, most major forms of crimes and incidents of anti social behaviour are increasing at a faster pace disproportionate to the increase in population and the measures implemented by law enforcement agencies in the country to prevent crime¹³. A brief comparison of the incidents of crime reported and recorded in the country, in past few years is presented below. Data source: - National Crimes Record Bureau¹⁴, Govt. of India, World Bank¹⁵ et al.

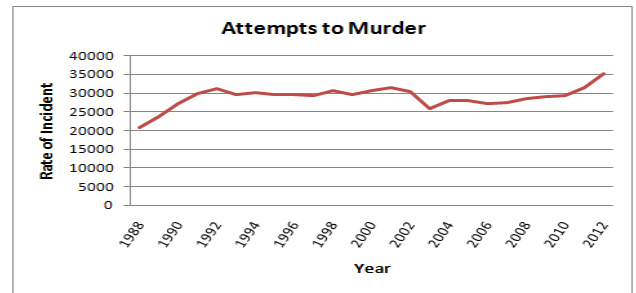


Figure-3
Rate of Attempts to Murder from 1988 to 2012

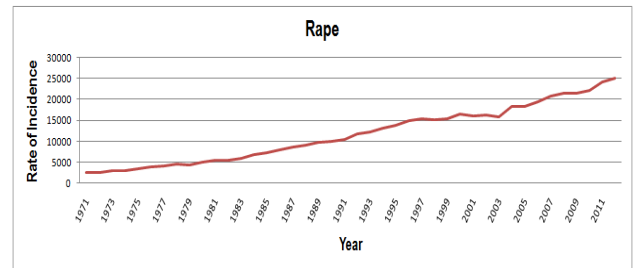


Figure-4
Rate of incidents of Rape from 1971 to 2012

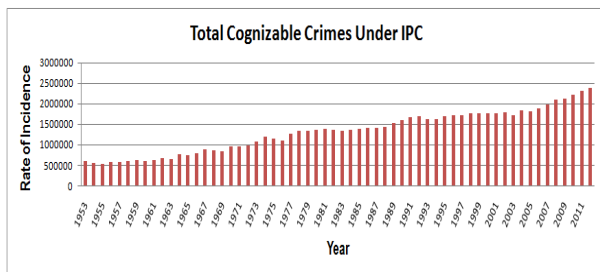


Figure-1
Rate of increase of total cognizable crimes in India from 1953 to 2012

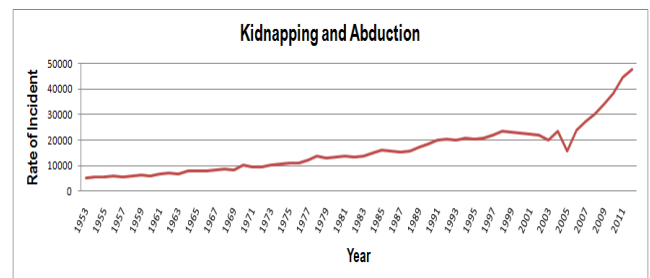


Figure-5
Rate of kidnapping and Abduction from 1953 to 2012

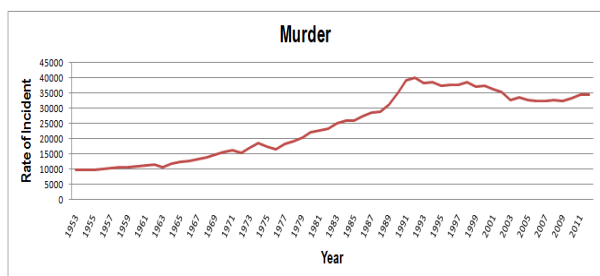


Figure-2
Rate of Murder from 1953 to 2012

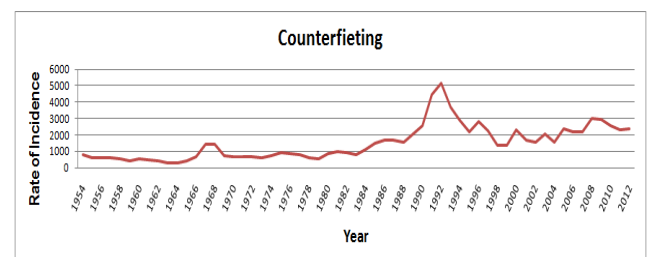


Figure-6
Rate of counterfeiting from 1953 to 2012

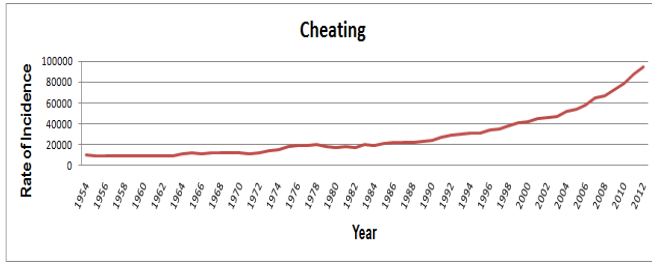


Figure-7
 Rate of cheating from 1953 to 2012

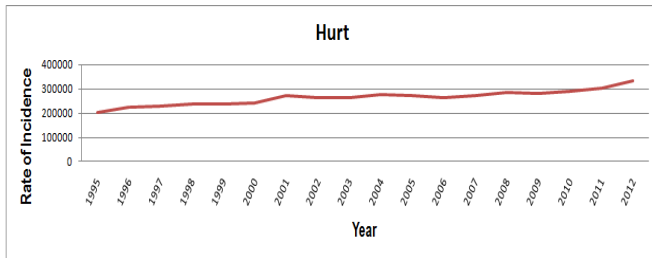


Figure-8
 Rate of Hurt from 1995 to 2012

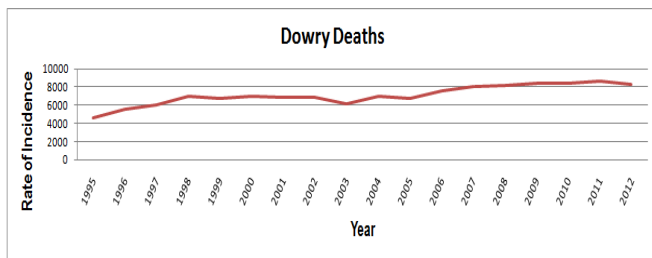


Figure-9
 Rate of Dowry Deaths from 1995 to 2012

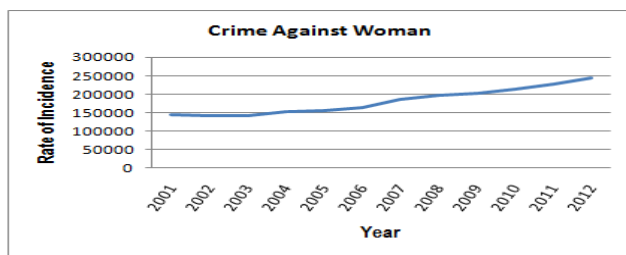


Figure-10
 Rate of Crimes against Women from 2001 to 2012

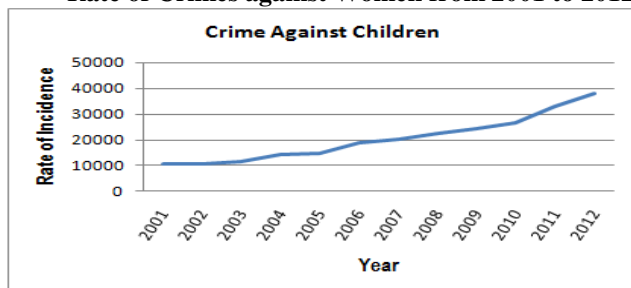


Figure-11
 Rate of Crimes against Children from 2001 to 2012

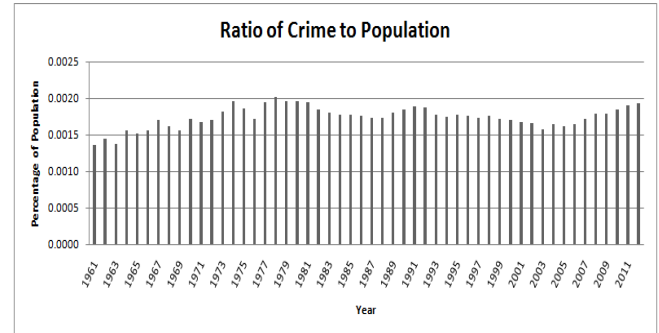


Figure-12
 Ratio of Crime to population [2003 to 2012]

On examination of the data of various forms of crime and antisocial behaviour in the country in the past few years, it is evident that the crime rates in India are going up at an ever-increasing pace. On analysing the records of incidents of crime in the country, it is found that crimes involving murder has increased by 5.25% in the last 10 years and 19.68% in last 25 years. Reports of crimes involving attempt to murder increased by 35.44% in the last 10 years and 69.83% in the last 25 years. Reported incidents of rape increased by 57.27% in the last 10 years and 173.9% in the last 25 years. Crimes involving kidnapping and abduction increased by 138.05% and 201.76% in the last 10 years and 25 years respectively. Cases of cheating, increased by 98.41% in the last 10 years and 314.89% in the last 25 years. Crimes involving counterfeiting increased by 14.4% in last 10 years and 52.96% in the last 25 years. Crimes involving grievous hurt increased by 27.11% and reports of dowry deaths in the country increased by 32.61% in the country in the last 10 years.

The crime ratio in the county increased from 0.01364 in 1960 to 0.01845 in 2010. The average ratio of crime rates in the country in the last 5 years i.e., from 2008 to 2012 is 0.01849. Total crimes in country punishable under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) shows an alarming rate of 39.1% of increase in the last 10 years and 66.73% in the last 25 years. In conclusion a total of 20391021 crimes were reported in the country in the last 10 years and a total of 45587831 crimes were reported in the last 25 years.

Discussion: Morality involves moral reasoning, moral judgement, moral decision making and moral behaviour or moral action. Moral reasoning helps one to make right moral judgements and thus exhibit morally acceptable behaviour. Morality is inherent in the psyche of every individual which is influenced by various internal personality characteristics and external social factors. Although every individual has the faculty of moral reasoning, there may be situations where the individual makes wrong moral judgement or opt to be dishonest to his/her own moral judgement. Exercising of moral behaviour and action depends upon the moral integrity with which an individual chooses to act or not act morally.

Previous studies have fairly and consistently demonstrated the existence of relationship between morality and criminal behaviour¹⁶⁻²¹. Other reviews which include more in-depth studies generally support the finding that immorality is an important indicator of criminality²²⁻²³. Considerable agreement exists in the literature regarding delinquents possessing less mature moral judgment than non-delinquents. Thus it is evident that the growing crime rates in the global context in many of the world countries is a consequence of the decline of the moral values which requires ample attention and in depth research in the socio-behavioural sciences²⁴.

The data reveals that the total crimes in India over the past 10 years i.e., between 2003 to 2012 increased by 39.10% against the 11.55% of increase of population. From 1988 to 2012 i.e., in the last 25 years the crime rates in India increase by 65.73% against the population growth of 52.80%. With reference to the data it is understood that there is a considerable increase in the number of people involved in crimes and antisocial behaviour. Crimes incident rate per population of 1 Lakh in 1960 was 134.5 where as it increased to 172.2 in 1970 and 195.9 in 1980. Though a minor decline in rate was observed in 1990 and 2000 with figures pointing 184.7 and 169.9 respectively, in 2010 the rates again increased to 184.5. In the last five years i.e., from 2008 to 2012, crime rates in the country shows an average of 184.89 per 1 Lakh persons.

The figures discussed here is only with reference to the national records where the data is available only for the crimes reported and cases registered. What percentage of crime are actually reported and registered is a relevant question and the actual numbers may be even higher that what is discussed here. In addition, some of the other crimes in India unlisted above including drug trafficking, money laundering, extortion, murder for hire, fraud, human trafficking, poaching, sexual harassment, prostitution, dowry, female infanticide, sex selective abortions, black marketing, political violence, religiously motivated violence, terrorism, homicide, robbery, assault, motor vehicle theft, arson, cyber crimes etc. and above all the corruption existing in the society are also increasing at a faster rate. Invention of new modes of scams and frauds are being reported daily in the media which denotes to the fact that individuals are tending to get more interested into easy ways of attaining wealth, power, and fame etc. giving least consideration to human values^{25, 26}. The prevalence of such antisocial activities is increasing in a higher rate further confirming the decline of morality in the society²⁷.

Upon closely examining the records of crime data in India and alarming percentage of increase of criminality and antisocial behavior, it is evident that the Indian society is facing a negative paradigm shift in its attitude towards morality and moral behavior. Many of the behaviour that was once considered to be socially and culturally unacceptable and immoral are slowly changing its identity and meaning in the society²⁷. The changes in the family structure, advent of westernization, the media

revolution etc. are speculated to have played a determining role in redefining the value systems in the Indian society. Therefore the increasing rate of crimes and harm towards others thus directs towards a conclusion that there is a decrease of morality in the society.

Conclusion

There is a considerable shift seen in the Indian society with regard to the attitude towards morality and moral behaviour. Morality is the most important deterring factor of crime and antisocial behaviour and it is important to realize the potential perpetuating threat of decrease of morality in the society. Moral orientation of individuals needs to be strengthened to build up a moral and harmonious society. From a psychological perspective, it is undoubtedly the need of the hour to formulate methods of intervention to impart awareness and moral education. Exploring the various psycho-social variables involved in moral behavior and moral development in the context of Indian society is a scope of further research.

References

1. Exploring Moral Reasoning in a Cognitive Architecture, Wayne Iba, Westmont College, 955 La Paz Road Santa Barbara, CA 93108; Pat Langley, 2010, Westmont College, 955 La Paz Road Santa Barbara, CA 93108 (2010)
2. Campagna A. and Harter S., Moral judgment in sociopathic and normal children, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **31**, 199-205 (1975)
3. Beirne P., Inventing criminology, State University of New York Press (1993)
4. Palucka, Anna Malgorzata, Relationships of moral judgement, emotional empathy and impulsivity to criminal behaviour in young and adult offenders, National Library of Canada, University of Toronto (1997)
5. Addad M. and Leslau A., Extraversion, neuroticism, immoral judgment and criminal behaviour, *Med Law*, **8(6)**, 611-22 (1989)
6. Emma J. Palmer, Offending Behaviour: Moral Reasoning, Criminal Conduct and the Rehabilitation of Offenders, Devon, UK: Willan Publishing (2003)
7. Morality Prevents Crime, <http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/morality-prevents-crime>, University of Cambridge (2012)
8. Kant, Immanuel, Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, ed., *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785)
9. Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to Principles of Morals and Legislation*, (printed for publication 1780, (1789)

10. John Stuart Mill, Two Letters on the Measure of Value, (1822)
11. Jean Piaget, The Moral Judgment of the Child, (1932)
12. Lawrence Kohlberg, Essays on Moral Development, Vols. I and II, The Philosophy of Moral Development (1981) and The Psychology of Moral Development (1984), published by Harper and Row (1985)
13. The Tyranny of Morality, Indian Morality changing at the fast pace, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/living-anti-indian-ways-in-this-hpocratic-moraly-india-a-crime/1/155757.html>; India Today, Cover Story, May 14, 2007 (2007)
14. National Crimes Record Bureau, Govt. of India. [www.ncrb.nic.in] (2013)
15. www.worldbank.org (2013)
16. Addad M. and Benezech M., Judgement moral et prediction de la criminalite, *Annales Medico-Psvcholoiaues*, **146**, 927-939 (1988)
17. Emler N., Heather N. and Winton M., Delinquency and the development of moral reasoning, *British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, **17**, 325-331 (1978)
18. Hanson R.A. and Mullis R.L., Moral reasoning in offender and non-offender youth, *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, **144**, 295-296 (1984)
19. Hains A.A., Variables in social cognitive development: Moral judgment, role-taking, cognitive processes, and self-concept in delinquents and non delinquents, *Journal of Early Adolescence.*, **4**, 65-74 (1984)
20. Jurkovic G.J., The relationship of moral and cognitive development to dimensions of juvenile delinquency. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Texas at Austin), Dissertation Abstracts International, SI 52628 (1975)
21. Jurkovic G.J. and Prentice N.M., Relation of moral and cognitive development to dimensions of juvenile delinquency, *Journal of Abnormal psychology*, **86**, 414-420 (1977)
22. Hayes S.C. and Walker W.1., intellectual and moral development in offenders: A review, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, **19**, 53-64, India's Moral Churning-- Excerpts from August 16, 2003, Tata Lecture, Delhi (1986)
23. Jennings W.S., Kilkenny R. and Kohlberg L., Moral-development theory and practice for youthful and adult offenders, In W.M.S. Laufer and J.M. Day (Eds.), *Personality theory, moral development and criminal behaviour*, 281-355 Lexington (1983)
24. Morality through the ages: Old strategies, new threats; Nazarband Auratein: Neytikta ki Chaukhatein', Jagori Notebook, published by JAGORI, New Delhi (2006)
25. Decline of Morality in India, <http://kashmirwatch.com/news/print.php/2013/09/17/decline-of-morality-in-india.phtml>, Pritam K. Rohila, PhD. (2013)
26. The Telegraph, Aug 9, 2010, The Decline of Morality, Liberalization and Globalization have increased greed. http://www.telegraphindia.com/1100809/jsp/opinion/story_12759927.jsp, SL Rao. (2010)
27. Vidya Bhushan Rawat, Ethics And Morality in Public Life: Need For Cultural Revolution In India, Countercurrents.org (2010)