Moral Education with Special Reference to Lawrence Kohlberg's Moral Development

H G Mithra*

Moral education is a part of the process of educating, through which each new generation acquires its human values and is prepared to participate in the process of humanization. It includes the communication and inculcation of values as the heritage of a tradition with its convictions, principles and wisdom about life for discernment of the common good.[1] In other words moral education is the process by which boys and girls in the school are facilitated to live well, and its goal is to teach them to reach for the higher good. It is commonly held that the fundamental human need is to get on with others, to love and be loved, be concerned and be considerate of others.[2]

What is Moral Education ?

Moral education is therefore concerned with directing human energies toward constructive social goals. Morality is not a quality which human beings acquire automatically. It has to be instilled by training and education so that a set of values may be formed. Thus the whole person is prepared for participation in the moral institutions with a proper sense of conscience, polity, law and economy. It implants in each individual such dispositions as shall enable them to live and work harmoniously with others, both in the present school premises and for the future, and on every level of human interaction.[3]

Moral education is a stimulation of the natural development of the individual learner's own moral judgement and capacities, thus allowing them to use their own moral judgement to control their behaviour. The stimulation of natural development does not rule out the role of teaching, however, it is used in a sense of a stimulation of development rather than the teaching of fixed rules. But it involves helping the learner to take the next step in a direction toward which he/she is already tending, rather than imposing an alien pattern upon them.[4] Thus, Moral education is equated with the teaching of rules and the development of character, which is expected to manifest itself in behaviour that exemplifies the traditionally revered virtues of honesty, self-control, courage, friendliness and respect.

Moral education is concerned with character formation, building up of good, honest citizens and to develop cordial interpersonal relationships, personal, interpersonal and societal

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*   Rev H G Mithra is Lecturer of Christian Ministry, Serampore College.

virtues, moral values, friendly interactions and an ability to make right moral judgements etc.

Why Moral Education ? – (Importance of Moral Education)

The different sections of the society express the need for M.E. like parents deem it essential to have M.E. in the school curriculum. Teachers feel it necessary and students themselves have expressed their desire as several surveys and articles written on M.E. reveals.

Objectives of M.E.

The objectives of M.E. are primarily that of laying a proper or sound foundations for the development of character, conduct and attitudes toward oneself as well as society in general.

The Goal of M.E.

The primary goal of M.E. is the development of mature and dependable character and the enlistment of every person in the struggle for the good and against evil. To put it succinctly,

> The goal of moral … instruction as its very name implies is to inculcate moral…values in the children of our country. Religion through the ages has influenced men (now women too) and most of his attainments in several fields like literature, philosophy, art and music are entirely due to the inspiration he got from religion. The civilization of human beings is very much rooted in religion. Apart from the general elevation of humankind, it has contributed much to his individual happiness as well. He can enjoy that peace of mind essential to healthy living in modern society only if he understands the religion in the best sense of the term.[5]

M.E intends to initiate young people into 'moral values' or developing a responsible citizen. It assists them to grow into well integrated persons, able to live in full and creative life.

Function of M.E.

M.E. must respond to individuals, groups, religions, cultures and modern challenges. The importance of M.E. lies in knowledge of value issues, a sensitivity towards others and ability to reason about social and moral issues that enable learners to consider and act for personal development and about social and moral concerns.[6]

To fulfill any of the above functions of moral education, a well planned curriculum is a must. If it is not implemented effectively it remains a theory not a useful means to achieve a fruitful end. Central Ministry of Education and Educators hope to impart moral values to the students. Since moral education has become a matter of increasing concern due to rapid social and cultural change, which includes the decline of the traditional extended family, religious tolerance, community living, respect for traditional values and social consensus. Individuality, selfish interests, negligence of cultural values, extreme modernity and violence rule the day. However, in an age of rapid and far reaching social change it is useless to impose readymade traditional rules of conduct. Instead moral education should come as the integral part of their studies in the schools as recommended by government of India. This programme should not be treated as optional but core subject as Dr.Radhakrishnan's Education Commission of 1949 indicates. Previously moral values were transmitted by tradition and

culture, but it has taken a new direction in the modern world. Therefore, schools are recommended to include Moral education in the school curriculum. But moral education seems to have very negligible place in the school programme. Of course schools are also under pressure to respond to other academic competition, community and cultural needs as well. The precise use of moral education is subject to the society within which it takes place and the state of development of that society for eg. One of the important schools in Bangalore has dropped Moral education programme since they are not able to find room in the timetable due to induction of new professional and vocational courses. How then, are these aforesaid values developed in students? A teacher therefore, is supposed to teach the right values, the right way, to the right (students) people, at the right time against the backdrop of the complexity and on-going quality of ethics and developmental psychology.[7] This leads to a relevant discussion about few psychologists and their contribution to the study of moral development and moral education. They are Lawrence Kohlberg, James Fowler and Paul E. Johnson. This paper discusses mainly Kohlberg's moral development and his contribution. Lawrence Kohlberg, one of the experts in moral development theory explains that there is a right stage for right teaching. The child has the innate ability to discover and develop different values at different stages. He elaborately discusses moral development from psychological, religious and educational perspectives.

Lawrence Kohlberg

Lawrence Kohlberg is an American, who was professor of education and social psychology at Harvard University where he carries on and directs the research in moral development. Lawrence Kohlberg is one of the psychologists of moral development, who in fact bases his studies on the work of the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget and the American philosopher John Dewey.

He is seen as the front runner in the field and his research has gone a long way towards putting his theories on an empirical basis – he has carefully collected his evidences and sought experimental confirmation to bolster his claims. While he is clearly the leader in the field of Moral Education.[8]

He offers valuable information to parents, educators and adults for their personal lives and their relationships with children and adolescents. Without doubt, moral development provides a useful framework to the educated adult for understanding the sophisticated process of moral formation.[9] Kohlberg has done a tremendous work on Moral development in relation to moral education which, is the main concern of this paper. Moreover, he has done theoretical and empirical research into the dynamics of moral development and texture of moral education. Therefore, Kohlberg is selected from among many scholars. Kohlberg's research showed that when one looks at the reasons a person gives to his/her judgements or moral actions, significant differences in people's moral outlook become apparent, for e.g., one person might say that cheating is wrong because one can get caught doing it, another may say cheating betrays the confidence reposed in person by the society. Here he shows the significant difference in maturity of the reasoning process. These reasons indeed are the indicators of the levels or stages of moral maturity.[10]

Kohlberg finds three levels of moral development and two stages at each level. These levels and stages are discussed below:

1.   *Pre-Conventional Level[11] or Pre-Moral*

At this level the child is responsive to cultural rules and labels of good and bad, right and wrong but interprets these labels in terms of either pleasure or pain, consequence of action or in terms of the authorities who enunciate the rules and labels.

   Stage One : The punishment and Obedience Orientation (ages 3-7)

If asked whether or not to 'tell on' a playmate, a child of this age is likely to say, 'I would better tell or I will be spanked.[12]

   In other words, the physical consequences of action determine its goodness or badness regardless of the human meaning or value of these results. Avoidance of punishment and unquestioning defense of power are valued in their own right, not in terms of respect for an underlying moral order.[13] Rather obey rules to avoid punishment.

   Stage Two : The Naïve instrumental relativism orientation (ages 8-11)

A few years later child moves from one stage to other growthwise, if posed the same question that of the first stage, the child is likely to give different answer, that is "I will not tell so I will get along better with others."[14] Here child is not afraid of the consequences but concerned about his/her acceptance among the peer group and to safeguard the other person. Elements of fairness, reciprocity and equal sharing are present. This is to say if punishment is given let it be to all but not reveal the culprit because tomorrow may be his turn. Reciprocity here is a matter of 'you cover my mistakes and I will cover yours but not of loyalty, gratitude or justice.[15] Stage two can be summarized as to conform to obtain rewards, have favours returned.[16]

2. *Conventional Level[17] or Morality of conventional role conformity*

At this level, maintaining the expectations of the individual's family, group or nation is perceived as valuable in its own right, regardless of immediate and obvious consequences. The attitude of the student here is not only one of conformity to personal expectations and social order, but also of loyalty to it, of actively maintaining, supporting and justifying the order and of identifying with the persons or group involved in it.

   Stage Three :   The Interpersonal concordance or morality of maintaining good
                        relations, approval by others (ages 12-17)

This is a crucial age group that this paper is concerned about. Rest of the stages are recorded in support of stage three in its proper context. Here the youth is able to understand and take into account the perspectives and intentions of others. Justice usually involves conventional images of what is right, including advance of disapproval and of hurting others. Even the rebellious youths ordinarily have a group of peers to whom they may turn for support of their moral ideas.[18] In other words, good behaviour is that which pleases or helps others and is approved by them. There is much conformity to stereotypical or traditional images of majority behaviour. It is frequently judged by intention. That is to say one earns approval by being 'good' or 'nice'.[19] And conformity to avoid disapproval and dislike by others.[20]

   Stage Four :   The Law & Order or Authority maintaining morality (ages 18-25)

The appeal now is to law and order. The concern is mere societal than the self.

Whether one should tell about a friend's misdeed now depends upon whether the deed violates the law or seriously disturbs the public order. Justice is established by the maintenance of the values of one's own society, by doing one's own duty.[21]

At this stage, there is inclination toward authority, fixed rules and maintenance of the social order. According to this age group, right behaviour consists of doing one's duty, showing respect for authority and obeying the given social order for its own sake.[22]

3. *Post-Conventional, principled level[23] or Morality of self-accepted moral principles*

At this level, there is a clear effort to define moral values and principles which have validity and application apart from the authority of the groups or persons holding these principles and apart from the individual's own identification with these groups.

> *Stage Five :* The Social, contract legalistic orientation or Morality of contact, of
> individual rights and of democratically accepted law.[24] (age 25 plus)

For an individual at this stage, society becomes an agreement among people of differing convictions, for mutual benefit. Therefore, it is in the interest of all that the rights of all individuals, including minorities, poor, be respected. Here justice is defined in terms of the protection of individual rights.[25] Apart from what is constitutionally and democratically agreed upon, the right is a matter of personal values and opinions.[26]

> *Stage Six :* The universal moral principle or morality of individual principles of
> conscience.[27] (No age is given because few individual seem to attain this
> level)

Reverence becomes paramount for the moral principles that are binding upon all societies and all people. Truth-telling is obligatory because it leads to the highest level of human relationships.[28] 'Right' according to this stage is defined by the decision of conscience in accordance with self-chosen moral principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality and consistency. There are universal principles of justice, of the reciprocity and equality of the human rights and respect for human dignity.[29]

Kohlberg's concerns therefore, include both obvious and overt attempt at moral education by lesson at each stages. Direct study and discussion of the issues on the one hand and the hidden curriculum on the other. The hidden curriculum consists of the many ways in which moral atmosphere of the classroom is established. The way in which learner's are treated and are encouraged to treat each other and their teachers, with the choice of maintenance of rules. Why cheating, dishonesty, telling lies, fighting, or foul language is not allowed? Whether co-operation is encouraged, when and for what purpose? Teaching morality by both lesson and example all day long, and what is talked about is no more important than the way in which it is lived out, the conditions of the room and the school where such learning and discussion go on.[30]

Kohlberg briefly explains how these stages of moral development work. He says, stages are structured wholes or closely organized systems of thought. It is also argued that the stages form an invariant sequence and movement is almost always forward, and it is never thought to be backward. Stages are not skipped they are like steps of ladder towards upward and are passed through one after the other in order. These stages are built one upon the other or developed on the previous one i.e., every higher stage has the ingredients of the lower

stage, they are not created in isolation but interlinked with one another. There is a room provided for learners to opt for the highest stage available because the tendency in human being is to move forward. He discovered that not only basic moral concepts are common to every culture, that the stages of moral development too are same in every culture. Basing on this notion he recommends how moral education is to be achieved:

There are universal human modes or principles of moral thinking which progress through an invariant order. In addition there are differences in more specific moral beliefs that are culturally or individually determined and are, therefore, relative in content. Differences which can be seen in the basic structures of (sic) moral thinking are differences in maturity or development. Accordingly, the teacher may take the stimulation of moral development as the aim of moral education. Such stimulation of development is not indoctrination; rather it is the facilitation of the child's development through a sequence that is natural progression for him/her.[31]

The key factor here is facilitation in his recommendation. He argues that the aim of M.E. is to help the student move through the stages and not get stuck at a lower level which may appear both adequate and final to the student at that stage. It is probable to become senile at any age as it is said earlier, and moral senility comes with the assumption that what one has come to hold is both adequate and the termination of one's development. This danger can occur in any age group, therefore, moral education should help students to aspire for higher level of moral development in life. The stages of moral development depicts clearly the way learner begins to value things or person year by year is amazing. The moral educator therefore, must not talk at a level too far removed from the actual stage at which the student is currently thinking. To facilitate moral growth, teacher should help students to understand the kind of thinking representative of the next stage i.e., one stage higher than their own.[32] Kohlberg defines moral judgement as normative concepts about human interactions, these concepts are universal, influential, consistent and grounded in objective, impersonal or ideal grounds. "Kohlberg is of the opinion that the most reliable indicator of moral maturity is moral judgement."[33]

Re-Capitulation of Six Stages of Moral Development (Evaluation)

A brief examination of six stages of Kohlberg is essential in order to see what value is learnt at different stage and what role can M.E. and educators play in enhancing and encouraging the moral development in a person.

A child at the pre-conventional level has very narrow view of society gained from his or her own concrete experiences. Some actions performed bring pain like touching candle light. Others bring pleasure like eating sweets. These children simply judge actions in terms of expected consequences.

Children live under rules. The rules, so far as the child knows, were always there. They see no value in the rules themselves, rules are simply indicators of what brings pleasure or pain.[34]

At this level children feel that older people are different and they know what to do, but we do not know therefore, they tell us what to do. However, is it only the children who reason morally at this stage? Not necessarily, even the adults do. For eg. Kohlberg has done

some studies with prisoners and found some adults at stage one level of reasoning.[35] Although their age may be different but moral reasoning is at level one.

According to Kohlberg in stage one the physical consequences of an action determine its goodness or badness, no matter what adults value in the action, the child at stage one does not see the value; he/she just see older people approving or disapproving of it, and that is enough to indicate to the child that it ought to be pursued or avoided.[36]

Thus at this stage the child is afraid of punishment. Fear and not respect generates his value. So, if someone is at stage one in their thinking they can be attracted by stage two thinking. By stage two the child begins to experience concretely that those in authority also make mistakes. They are not infallible.

Along with this concrete realization that authorities are not all wise and all powerful, a new perspective of society as a whole comes with a developing ability to put oneself in the place of another... A child at this stage sees himself for the first time as an individual equal to others. If authority makes mistake then they too are like him.[37]

This discovery should not lead to disrespect but help develop more positive and constructive attitudes, within the normative values of the society. To aid this sort of a development within the educational setting, moral education should play a dominant role to inculcate just values in the life of students. The conventional level necessitates a move from the concrete egoistic view of the pre-conventional level to a cognitive recognition of the value of group, practices and rules. It also moves from action in terms of consequences to actions in terms of how well these actions fulfill the expectations of the group regardless of the consequences to oneself. The characteristic of conventional level is that they involve a valuing of a group and the sense of belonging to a group in a way that indicates a real socialization. That means more than simply 'you do something and I will do something for you'. In normal development this stage is characterized by socialization, harmony, gratitude and involves some sort of self-sacrifice on the part of group members. This stage also reinforces ones notion of self-worth, and satisfaction. However, there is a difficulty in this stage. The ideals are naïve and stereotyped and the individuals presumably take opposite course of action. On the other hand there is a definite model to emulate ie., service to community or group is more important than service to oneself. Therefore, one has become aware of conflicting roles, that people do not live up to their roles and finally society is made up of all sorts of different group whose goals and values conflict.[38] A person at stage four then will appear as a passionate devotee of the law. This stage is the highest stage of moral reasoning. It is a stage of majority of adults, relevant for the law and legitimate authority. This stage insists that no person or group is above the law.

The chief point about stage four, however, is that the person relates to the law as something given which commands his respect and obedience, as well as the respect and obedience of all people. It is society's law, and as a member of the society the person comes under the law.[39]

Stage five logically follows stage four. Here the person distinguishes between the areas of personal freedom, areas that concern public good. In the former stage a person is entitled to his own beliefs, practices and opinions as long as he/she does not hurt anyone else. But the major difference between stage four and five is in the belief that the law is given or fixed which gives order to society. Stage five sees law as something created by people, who have

framed it on the basis of what they saw as common good. They are people's invention, democratically designed to meet people's needs. It is important to note that stage five thinking, although critical, is not arbitrary. Society is seen as absolutely essential, and its preservation is seen to rest on a critical appraisal of its rules and practices. After having discussed five stages one is tempted to say that great segment of society is probably located at the fourth stage or in the transitional stage of four and five as far as their moral development is concerned.

Stage six has been debated by several other scholars and it has been most controversial in many aspects. Even Kohlberg himself is not clear in his explanation, he has not succeeded in resolving in his own mind. Kohlberg mentions some specific examples of stage six individuals. They seem to be persons who are motivated by an extreme sensitivity to and concern for others. His list includes Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi. This is the stage of moral heroes.[40]

Having sketched the six stages of moral development, it helps one to see both positive and negative effects of each stage on the development of the individual and the society in general. As it is said earlier that Kohlberg has many critics who have reacted to his work, some considered his approach undermines the authority of the home, teacher, the school and the nation. Because Kohlberg's statement that "respect for the parents rights is not respect for child's autonomy... respect for child's autonomy is more important than the respect for parents right."[41] Such explanations have led to criticism of Kohlberg's theory of moral development. What people have failed to see is that Kohlberg provides full cognitive value and a balanced moral value development in the student. He is indeed a staunch defender of the democratic way in the schools and in the society, undermining of those institutions does not arise. Kohlberg[42] is for freedom and his critics are totalitarians. Whereas Kohlberg is interested in content not in form. When it comes to Moral education he is willing to consent that the content of moral rules, such as honesty, punctuality, tidiness, is learned by instruction and drill, aided by rewards and punishment, praise and blame. But he is not merely interested in habit formation for habits are short lived. What Kohlberg wants is, insight into the formation of moral rules, those fundamental principles, like freedom, fairness, truth-telling, promise keeping and the like by means of which specific contents are judged to be moral or not. In other words, Kohlberg is saying articulate the reasons, why tell the truth, why it is right to tell the truth, why telling truth is morally obligatory way of behaving, if such ability is encouraged to reason out abstractly, both cognitive and moral capacity can develop in the students. He attacks the 'common sense' approach to morality. Because the common sense theory behind traditional moral education takes the position that everyone knows what is right and wrong or at least most law abiding adults do. But what about those who are at the beginning of moral development? Common sense will not make sense to these beginners. Therefore Lawrence Kohlberg contends that moral development is a learning process. A person's moral standards and moral activity are not 'stamped in' by an external force or institution, moral judgement and overall moral development are the outcome of a set of transformation of earlier learned attitudes and conceptions. This happens through the dynamic interaction between the growing person and their environment.[43] The intention of Kohlberg is to show that moral development is not mere formation but a learning process in the context of the learner. He views the process of development as itself being the aim of all education. Kohlberg's fundamental position is that any adequate theory of the aim of education must be

based on adequate psychological facts and explanation of development.[44]

To conclude, the great virtue of Kohlberg's work and related applications and materials is: 1. It gives the teacher some way of ascertaining the actual level of understanding and development that a student is at; 2. it provides the means of helping the student grow and catch up ie., by exposing the student to the level of reasoning immediately above his or her level; and 3. it gives a clear and remarkably detailed account of the stages of development which lie ahead.

As far as his contribution with regard to 'diagnosing' a student's moral ability and to determine where he or she should move on is concerned, it is great and scholarly.[45] However, one has to keep in mind that moral development may not keep pace with cognitive and physical development. Therefore, moral education as an integral part of school curriculum can help enhance moral growth in the lives of students.

Having said so much about Kohlberg's theory of moral development and its direct connection to moral education, it is ascertained that the aim of all education is development of personality, because the basis of and essential nature of education is the development of the capacity to stand one's own intellectual abilities, to think for oneself and come to 'see' for oneself, as unique creation of God.

NOTES

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4.   Lawrence Kohlberg, "Stages of Moral Development as a basis for M>E." in *Moral Development*, M.E, and Kohlberg, ed. Brenda Munsey, (Birmingham : Religious Education Press, 1980), p.72.
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6.   Peter Kutnik, "A Survey of primary school teachers" understanding and implementation of Moral Education, *The Journal of Moral Education*, Vol.19, No.1 (Jan 1990), p.48.
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9.   Ronald Duska & Mariellen Whelan, *Moral Development – A guide to Piaget & Kohlberg*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), p.42.
10. Ronald Duska & M.Whelan, *Moral Development*, p.43.
11   Ronald Duska & M.Whelan, *Moral Development*, p.45.
12   Jack L.Seymour et.al., *Contemporary approaches to christian education*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), p.81.
13   Ronald Duska & M.Whelan, *Moral Development*, p.46.
14   Seymour et.al., *Contemporary Approaches...*, p.81.
15   Ronald Duska & M.Whelan, *Moral Development*, p.46.
16   *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, 1968 edition, S.V. "Moral Development, by Lawrence Kohlberg.
17   Ronald Duska & M Whelan, *Moral Development*, p.46.
18. Seymour, et.al., *Contemporary Approaches*, p.82.
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26. Ronald Duska & M Whelan, *Moral Development,* p.47.
27. *Ibid.,* p.47.
28. Seymour, et.al., *Contemporary Approache p.82
29. Ronald Duska, *Moral Development,* p.47.
30. Robert Carter, *Dimensions of Moral Education,* p.55.
31. *Ibid.,* p.58.
32. *Ibid.,* p.58-59.
33. Jack L.Seymour, et.al., *Contemporary approaches to christian education,* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), p.81.
34. Ronald Duska, *Moral Development ,* p.51.
35. *Ibid.,* p.52.
36. *Ibid.,* p.53.
37. *Ibid.,*p.56.
38. *Ibid.,* p.59-64.
39. *Ibid.,* p,68,
40. *Ibid.,* pp.74-79.
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42. *Ibid.,* pp.85-86.
43. James Michael Lee, "Christian Religious education and moral development" in *Moral Development, moral education and Kohlberg,* edited by Brenda Munsey (Birmingham : Religious education press, 1980), p.337.
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45. Robert E Carter, *Dimensions of Moral Education,* p.88.