

Chapter 3

lajjA: Learning, Unlearning and Relearning



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Abstract *lajjA* is a personal virtue to be cultivated, not a social sanction to be avoided, to lead a noble life. It guides us in life by (1) prescribing what we ought to do and (2) proscribing what we ought not do. It is cultivated through cultural socialization process from early childhood, but as young adults we make choices that leads to further learning, unlearning, and relearning *lajjA* in multiple social contexts. In this paper, I employ autoethnography to show how I learned, unlearned, and relearned *lajjA* hoping to throw some light on the developmental trajectory of this construct.

Keywords *lajjA* · Shame · Autoethnography · Religious scriptures and practice · India · Nepal

Harvard-Kyoto protocol for transliteration for *devanagari* is used for all *saMskRtaM* and *hindi* words and names, and the first letters of names are not capitalized. All non-English words are italicized.

अ a आ A इ i ई I उ u ऊ U ए e ऐ ai ओ o औ au ऋ R ॠ RR ल IR लृ
IRR अं M अः H क ka ख kha ग ga घ kha ङ Ga च ca छ cha ज ja झ jha ज्ञ
Ja ट Ta ठ Tha ड Da ढ Dha ण Na त ta थ tha द da ध dha न na प pa फ
pha ब ba भ bha म ma य ya र ra ल la व va श za ष Sa स sa ह ha
क्ष kSa त्र tra ज्ञ jJa श्र zra

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3.1 *lajjA*: Learning, Unlearning, and Relearning

Menon and Shweder (1994, 2003), concluded that *lajjA* is associated with being shy, having modesty, and showing deference to elders. Having *lajjA* is akin to being a civilized person who knows his or her place in the society and acts properly as demanded by one's duties and responsibilities. Thus, *lajjA* prevents people from any transgression. Employing films, advertisements, conversations, and written narratives, Sinha and Chauhan (2013) identified the behavioral representations of the construct of *lajjA*, and showed how it is used by women in defining their identity in India. For example, one of the participants stated that *lajjA* provides a woman beauty and gracefulness without robbing her of determination or ambition.¹ They noted that *lajjA* not only seems to be the core of womanhood in India, but also can be used as a manipulative tool against women in certain situations.

I examined dictionary meanings, synonyms, and antonyms of *lajjA* in *saMskRtaM* and *hindI*, and analyzed the usage of the word in two popular scriptural texts, namely, the *bhagavadGItA* and *drugA saptazatl* (Bhawuk, 2017). In that paper, I further examined uses of *lajjA* in the literature in *kAmAyanI*, a modern *hindI mahAkAvya* or epic as well as in daily communications and proverbs. This multi-method approach resulted in a thick-description of the construct, showing that *lajjA* is one of the 26 virtues enumerated in the *bhagavadGItA* that guides human behavior, and has both internal and external aspects, or guilt and shame elements. Such a structure is at odds with the Western literature that views guilt and shame as distinct and independent constructs (Creighton, 1990; Lewis, 1971; Tracy & Robins, 2006). There is evidence that, *lajjA* is an important virtue that guides human behavior in Asia (for example, Fung, 1999; Lebra, 1983); in general and India in particular (Bhawuk, 2017; Menon & Shweder, 1994, 2003; Sinha & Chauhan, 2013). However, it is not clear how *lajjA* is learned or unlearned. This paper fills that lacuna.

In this paper, I trace how *lajjA* is learned through the socialization process from childhood so that we can develop a sense of right and wrong. I also document how *lajjA* is unlearned or relearned. I reflect on my personal experience and present critical incidents that help understand the social and cultural processes of acquisition of *lajjA*. I hope the paper contributes not only to the indigenous literature but also to the nuanced understanding of global psychology of shame and guilt.

3.2 Methodology

Through reflexive investigation, autoethnography (Anderson, 2006; Bhawuk, 2009; Ellis, 1997, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000) allows us to use the lived experience of an individual to examine cultural phenomena by presenting insightful evidence

¹“*lajjA* makes me feel like a woman. Having *lajjA* does not make me any less determined, any less ambitious or any less strong as a human being. It just makes me graceful in my mannerisms and I appreciate the beauty in that (Sinha & Chauhan, 2013, p. 134)”.

connecting the experience of the individual to the cultural level construct. It can be a necessary first step in understanding the process of how an indigenous phenomenon operates or how a cultural skill is acquired over time. Therefore, I reflected on my own life experiences to map the process of learning, unlearning, and relearning *lajjA*. I provide some examples from my school days but focus mainly on my experience during college years. Further, I corroborated the results of autoethnography using comments from colleagues, and synthesized their ideas to enrich the findings with multiple perspectives. This autoethnographic approach complements my previous work (Bhawuk, 2017), and further enriches the understanding of the construct of *lajjA*.

I focused on college years for three reasons. First, often going to college entails living away from the sheltered environment of home and family for the first time except for those who go to boarding school from childhood. In college we are forced to make decisions building on the values learned at home and in school. Second, we are legally considered responsible adults who can make their own decisions and face the related consequences. Finally, these four or five years are considered formative and shape how we act in later life. A fuller description of my childhood experience and how it shaped my college years, and how the college years shaped my later adult years will be discussed in another paper presenting a multiphase longitudinal perspective on the learning, unlearning, and relearning of *lajjA*.

3.3 Learning *lajjA*

I learned from the experience of my four elder siblings that in our family academic excellence was rewarded, so I studied hard. My father was a historian, but an intuitive Skinnerian. He rewarded me nickels and dimes for memorizing texts, and told me that it will help me assimilate the language of the text as my own. It helped me form good study habits. Outside of studies, behaving appropriately, which included speech and action, was an important lesson that I learned from my parents, uncles, aunts, siblings, teachers, and village elders. I was scolded if my speech or behavior was not proper, and avoided punishment by learning from the mistakes of my siblings.

lajjA was used in multiple ways in my socialization process. My parents used the idiom, “*zarma nahiM AtI hai?*” in *hindi* or “*lAjA lagdaina?*” in *nepAlI* (since we are multi-linguals we used whatever came to us naturally) as a question (Aren’t you ashamed?), which implies that I should be ashamed of what I did. If a child takes more than his share of food on many occasions, then the parents may use this expression to chide him or her. I had a weakness for sweets and sneaked sweets on many occasions. I received my fair share of shaming for it. Another expression *zarma se pAnI-pAnI ho gayA/gayI* is used when one is thoroughly embarrassed for not doing something or doing something that should not have been done. The target person is so embarrassed that he or she would like to hide from everybody.

I was also aware of the expression, *cullu bhar pAnI me dUba maro* (drown yourself in the water in your cupped hand, meaning the person should be ashamed of himself

or herself). This is what an elder tells a youngster who is constantly failing to do something, often a weak student hears this in relation to studies, and a problem child hears this in relation to social embarrassment that he or she constantly causes. I was aware of it and avoided such situations.

The earliest incidents in which I experienced *lajjA* pertained to incontinence (bed-wetting and diarrhea related soiling of my pants because of eating too many mangoes). I can still recall felling really small and wanting to vanish from the eyes of others. Fortunately, these problems happened only a few times, and I naturally grew out of them before I was seven years old.

I remember feeling extreme *lajjA* when my father caught my lie when I was about 14 years old. Two teams of boys played a football match. Our team lost, but the goal was disputed, and the match could be called a tie game. So we refused to pay the bet money to the other team. Things got rough, and I ran away since the money was with me. When somebody from the other team complained to my father, he asked me if I had run away with the bet money. I told him that I did not have the money, not to let down my team. The following day my lie was exposed, and he showed strong displeasure that I had lied to him. I felt like drowning myself in the water in my cupped hand (or *cullu bhar pAnI me dUba maranA*), the proverbial case of feeling extreme *lajjA*. I gave the money to the captain of the other team. I don't think I lied ever after that.

Another time at an embassy social event at a public auditorium some of us sitting behind a family were not proper with our language. The couple in the front asked us to behave properly. Shortly after the intermission, the couple left. After the show was over I learned that my friend's older brothers had whispered something to scare them and that is why they left before the program was over. The next day in the evening when my father came home from work he told me that one of his colleagues who knew me had complained to him about how I had misbehaved at the event. He said he was embarrassed, and I felt the proverbial *lajjA - zarma se pAnI-pAnI ho gayA*. I was about 16 years old then.

I picked up a few swear words in Nepali and Hindi, and used them among my peers in school. But I avoided using swear words in the presence of the elders. I was raised non-vegetarian and we ate mutton and chicken at home, but no pork or beef. I did sneak a sip of whisky at home during a party when I was sixteen. I also smoked a few times in the company of older cousins but did not pick it up as a habit. I did get into some fights at school, but they were not serious enough to be reported to my parents. While living at home, I was always careful and avoided trouble so that no report of bad behavior reached home. I had a sense of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, and was able to act properly to avoid causing *lajjA* to my family or myself.

The incidents I presented show that *lajjA* is caused when one does something inappropriate—bed-wetting, not managing diarrhea well, lying, and using inappropriate language. Incontinence is physical and messy, but usually one may receive some sympathy from others as one is helpless. However, lying and using inappropriate language are avoidable, and we are likely to receive disapprobation from other people. Therefore, *lajjA* is always associated with *akaraNIya* or ought not to do actions, but some of these actions are rather involuntary whereas others are choice

behaviors (see choice theory by Glasser, 1998). One experiences *lajjA* in either case, but in case of choice behaviors one is responsible and likely to feel extreme *lajjA*.

3.4 Unlearning *lajjA*

I went to the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur ((IITKh), in August 1974 to study mechanical engineering. It was a five-year program. This was the first time I was living by myself in a dormitory. I got to visit home (i.e., Kathmandu) during the winter break only as I used the summer break for doing internship. My first shocking experience was with hazing (or ragging as it is known in India), which lasted for about a month. The senior students who ragged us became our friends at the end of the month, which was quite exciting.

I noticed that the norm for students was to use abusive language, and the four letter word (f***) was generously used to create a variety of phrases such as f*** it, f*** that, f*** him, f*** off, f*** knows, I got f***ed (did not do well on examination or test), and so forth. It was as if the only way to emphasize anything was to use the f-word. For example, it was not enough to say “What is wrong with you!” and it had to be “What the f*** is wrong with you!” What used to be boring became “f***ing boring”; what was exciting became “f***ing exciting”; and so forth. Thus, foul language became casual conversational habit (Jay, 2009). If a fellow female student said, “I got f***ed,” meaning she did not do well on the test, she was considered emancipated. The f-word became a part of my language. One could make a dictionary of unprintable words and phrases that I had acquired during my stay at IIT-Kh. Using swearwords in our language is acquired implicitly in childhood by watching adults, and speech pollution marks the opening ground for shedding some *lajjA*. The institute had not only imparted a world-class engineering education but also provided the social context for opening the flood gate for foul language, and other socially undesirable behaviors causing the loss of *lajjA*.

There was a wide range of individual differences in shedding *lajjA*. For example, some of my peers remained cautious in their choice of words and expressions. On the other hand some students used to call even their best friend a son-of-a-b****. Interestingly, the measure of closeness between two friends was the extent to which they could hurl insults at each other! Thus, a person like me who was intolerant of those using an abusive term for his or her own mother or someone’s mother became tolerant of such abusive words. I lost a lot of *lajjA* in those five years (1974–79) at IIT-Kh. I take full responsibility for my own transformation. Until I started working on *lajjA* and took up writing this paper, I never realized that I had actually lost a lot of *lajjA* becoming coarse, harsh, and insensitive in many ways.

I shared the draft of this paper with some colleagues and students. Two students from IIT-K (Kanpur) noted that while they had acquired the use of foul language after coming to IIT-K, their friends back home had not changed. Thus, there is some support that academic institutions provide an environment for students to cultivate the use of foul language and they lose *lajjA* in the process. A female colleague who went

to another engineering college reported that in her college women called each other stupid or *cudaail* (or witch) and that was the extent to which they used inappropriate language. Thus, there is a range of variation among students, and there are also some gender differences.

I also picked up some inappropriate behaviors like smoking and drinking alcohol at IIT-Kh. Many of my friends tried some other inappropriate behaviors and clearly each person chose what he or she wanted to do. I would like to note two caveats. First, it seems that it is conformity and peer pressure that leads people to pick-up vices. However, there is much more interaction between person and environment, and personal choice plays an equally important role. Second, we all picked up many positive skills in each other's company and developed life-long friendships. So, loss of *lajjA*, though a serious drawback, there were other qualities that we developed, which counter balanced the loss. For example, I had full support of my friends when I led an ascetic life in the final year at IIT-Kh, which included, among other practices, having one salt-less meal a day at lunch time, wearing clogs, not taking a haircut, not looking into a mirror, and leading the life of a recluse right in the dormitory!

3.5 Relearning *lajjA*

In *aSTAGgaYoga* or the eight-fold path of yoga,² the practitioner is first required to exercise five controls (or *yamas*), namely, *ahiMsA* (non-violence), *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-stealing), *aparigraha* (non-accumulation), and *bramhacarya* (pursuing *bramha*; practice of celibacy for single people and fidelity for married people). Next, one has to practise five *niyamas* or additional restraints including *zauca* (purification), *santoSa* (contentment), *tapaH* (austerities), *svadhyAya* (self study), and *IzvarpraNidhAna* (contemplation on *bramha* or the formless God). These ten practices are to be practiced at three levels, at the level of *karma* (or action), *vacana* (or speech), and *vicAra* (or thought). The three levels are not independent, and purification at one level could lead to positive change in the other two. Similarly, dilution at one level could lead to pollution at the other two levels.

The ten practices covered by *yama* and *niyama* are used by all spiritual aspirants irrespective what path they follow, including Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism.

lajjA is the virtue that guides behavior. It helps us avoid doing inappropriate behavior and also prevents us from shying away from what is our duty even if the situation is burdensome. Therefore, *lajjA* is the gentle virtue that is needed in cultivating any virtue (see Bhawuk, 2017) including the *yamas* and *niyamas* discussed above. Therefore, to relearn *lajjA*, we will need to cultivate virtues, and the *yamas*

²*asTAGgayoga* or the eight-fold path of yoga includes the following eight practices: *yama* (or controls), *niyama* (or restraints), *Asana* (or control of posture with effort), *prANAyAma* (or control of breath with effort), *pratyAhAra* (control of senses with effort), *dhAraNA* (holding of *manas* with effort), *dhyAna* (holding of *buddhi* with effort), and *samAdhi* (*buddhi* is in equanimity without effort).

and *niyamas* being the foundation of all *sAdhanAs* (or spiritual practices), cultivating them will slowly regenerate the lost *lajJA*.

Failure is the first step in learning of any skill. No project can be completed without facing unexpected and undesirable outcomes. A spiritual journey is analogous to walking on the razor's edge,³ and so lapses are natural and many. There are stories in Indian scriptures about how many noble aspirants experienced failure in their spiritual journey, but they kept trying without letting the failures hold them back.

A wise saint ("Cloudburst," 2008) advised spiritual practitioners to confess their mistakes publicly, without hesitation because hiding the act binds one to it but not hiding it frees one of the karmic bondage. Public confession not only helps to develop the ability to take responsibility for one's failure (an internal process), but also forces one to face others in making amends (an external process). In group therapy, it is possible to pursue growth through shame and humiliation (Rutan, 2000). It is also plausible that a self-reflective person can grow by dealing with humiliation in his or her own unique way as I did (Bhawuk, 2009). It is not surprising, therefore, that Tony Robbins (Robbins, 2016; see the Netflix documentary that is publicly available on YouTube) uses public shame to treat distressed people. Once people accept their weaknesses, wrong doings, or how others exploited them, they possibly free themselves from the burden of covering it. Thus, *lajJA* can be relearned by (i) cultivating the ten practices of *yama* and *niyama*, and (ii) publicly acknowledging one's short comings and working on them. I have adopted both the strategies and find them to bear fruits.

I started my journey by announcing to my family that I had become a *vaiznava* sometime in 1998. The *vaiznavas* are devotees of Lord *viSNu*, the protector god of the trinity of creator (*brahmA*), protector (*viSNu*), and destroyer (*ziva*), who are not supposed to get angry with anybody. Controlling one's anger is a form of the practice of *ahiMsA*. I started with speech purification and making effort not to get angry with anybody. My family became the mirror to show my failures and encouraged and supported me in my journey. I used the f-word to show my extreme displeasure with my sons, what they called the f-bomb, when things got really bad. When I did that they knew the matter was really serious, and they needed to change their behavior. With practice, I was able to let go of my anger and stop using the f-word, and still could negotiate with them that they needed to change their behavior. For the past few years, I have been working on annoyance, which is the subtlest form of anger and violence.

³*uttiSTha jAgrata prApya varAnnibodhata, kSurasya dhArA nizitA*
duratyayA durgAM pathastatkavayo vadanti (kathopaniSada: 1.3.14)—

उत्तिष्ठ जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत | क्षुरस्य धारानिशिता दुरत्यया दुर्गं पथस्तत्कवयो वदन्ति॥
 Finding a teacher, rise, wake up, and realize. The wise say that the path is like a razor's edge, difficult to walk on.

3.6 Discussion

lajjA is a social psychological construct, and so it is plausible that we learn it through the socialization process (see Fung, 1999, for how shame is used to socialize children in China so that they can develop a sense of right or wrong) (Wang and Sang, in this book). This fits well with my own personal experience. When we examine my college experience, we could be satisfied with the socialization argument and even add the conformity argument (Asch, 1955, 1956). However, I contend that I learned as well as unlearned *lajjA* not only through the socialization process but I also exercised a personal choice, or what Asch (1955, 1956) called independence. There is interaction between socialization, conformity, and personal choice in our learning, unlearning, and relearning of *lajjA*. I would like to present some other examples.

Smoking was a taboo when I was growing up. My father never smoked, nor did my elder bother. The latter did not drink either. Nevertheless, I did smoke sometimes in my early adulthood. Given those role models, I should not have smoked. That I did smoke suggests that conformity to the majority alone is not sufficient for acquisition or loss of *lajjA*. Personal choice is also necessary and no less important in acquisition and extinction of *lajjA*. Researchers have given more importance to conformity and neglected the importance Asch ascribed to independence in the face of pressure from the group (see also Friend, Rafferty, & Bramel, 1990).

Greasing palms of civil servants is a normative behavior in collectivistic cultures (Hellman, 2017). During my professional career in Nepal (1979–91), a collectivistic culture (Bhawuk & Udas, 1996), I did not accept any kickback. When deciding about what branch of engineering to pursue, I was advised by many to study civil engineering. However, I took a stand and chose mechanical instead of civil engineering (CE), because CE was well-known for generating kickbacks. Since I could do it at the age of 17, personal choice or independence does play a role in learning or unlearning *lajjA*.

When I was 25 years old, a friend and I joined my father and uncles in drinking at a family gathering. My elder brother told me after the event that the embarrassment our elders experienced was palpable. However, I was unaffected as if I had not only unlearned *lajjA* but also took pride in being *lajjA-hIna* (one devoid of *lajjA* or *bezaram*). A female colleague noted that Indian women sometimes hide their drinking habit from their in-laws but not their parents, highlighting gender differences in drinking behavior. Although *lajjA* is a general guideline against doing what is inappropriate and not doing what is appropriate as scriptures define (see Bhawuk, 2017), one can engage oneself in some inappropriate behaviors but not others or choose some appropriate behaviors over others. Thus, *lajjA* is learned and unlearned by one's personal choice under certain behavioral settings, given that the social environment is conducive to such changes. As noted above, without the supportive environment provided by the academic institution of IIT-Kh, I could not have imbibed the abusive language, or picked up smoking or drinking alcohol.

A female colleague pointed out that while going to college in the 1980s, she felt that she was expected to show *lajjA* as a woman following the dictum, *lajjA narI*

kA zRGgAra hai or *lajja* makes a woman look good (or it is the makeup she should always wear). She noted that as her daughter has grown to be an adult, her daughter has empowered her to be more of herself, and so she is able to shed *lajja* in many domains. However, she observed that her daughter does not use foul language or raise her voice, and conjectured that perhaps *lajja* runs deep in the Indian female blood. Her observations provide much insight from Indian women's perspective.

I may also have an idiosyncratic reason for acting the way I did. I considered feeling guilt for any transgression unhealthy. As a consequence, I consciously cultivated the skill of suppressing guilt (Wenzlaff & Wegner, 2000) right from my adolescent years. This skill might have been an outcome of a story narrated to me by my father about Motilal Nehru (ML), the father of Jawaharlal Nehru (JL), the first prime minister of India. ML was a successful and affluent barrister who could afford a wealthy western lifestyle during 1900–1930, before he gave up much of his wealth and legal practice to join the freedom movement of India, accepting the leadership of Gandhiji. He sent JL to England to study, and his two daughters also received Western education in India and had European governesses. He entertained guests at his large home, was known to be non-vegetarian, and consumed alcohol socially (Nanda, 1962). When he joined politics, his love of drinking and entertaining others was not viewed positively by Gandhiji, who suggested that if he could not stop drinking, he should at least not drink in public. ML felt strongly about hiding it from the public eyes, and thought it would be twice wrong to do so. The moral of this story⁴ for me was that one should neither hide a seeming wrongdoing nor feel guilty about it. My father acted in the same spirit in his own social interactions. In hindsight, this moral lesson might have laid the foundation of my unlearning of *lajja*.

In Indian philosophy, spiritual aspirants (or *sAdhakas*) monitor themselves at the levels of *vicAra* (i.e., thoughts, the *manas*⁵ referred to as *manasA*), *vacana* (words or *vAcA*), and *karma* or actions (*karma* done by the *kAyA* or actions done by the body). As in the Western psychology, *karma* is an overt response but *vicAra* is a covert response. *vacana* falls in between and supposedly translates *vicAra* into *karma*.

⁴I have not been able to find a written evidence of this episode, though more than one person has reported hearing about it. In my studies of the biographies of ML, JL, and Gandhiji (Nanda, 1962; Gandhi, 1957/1993; Nehru, 1942) it is clear that ML was a very strong person who could publicly disagree with Gandhiji on issues and defend his position. I do not mean to slight either ML or Gandhiji. My father never slighted other people, and admired ML, JL, and Gandhiji. So, I believe the incident is likely to be true. The story is an important part of my development process even if it were made up.

⁵*manas* in *sanskrit* or *mana* in *hindi* is the center for cognition, affect, and behavior (Bhawuk, 2011), and, therefore, it is difficult to translate it in English. Mind is a widely used translation, which only captures the cognitive function of *manas*, but not the affective and behavioral functions. Therefore, I use *manas* in my writing, and use “*manas* or mind” from time to time to remind the readers of the translation issue. See bhAwuk, 2011, Chap. 4, for a definition and discussion of *manas*, *buddhi*, *ahaGkAra*, and *antaHkaraNa*. The closest translation of *ahaGkAra* would be ego, which comes at the cost of much loss of meaning. People often use mind for *manas*, which is simply wrong, since *manas* is the locus of cognition, affect and behavior, whereas mind is only cognitive. And *buddhi* is closest to the super-ego in Freudian parlance, but without ego, which makes the similarity rather superficial. And *antaHkaraNa* is the composite internal organ or agent combining *manas*, *buddhi*, and *ahaGkAra*.

lajjA guides people at all the three levels. Awareness of one's motives and intentions is purely internal; crafting one's words and deeds are seen by observers and are external. Smoking, drinking, disrespecting elders, and neglecting one's duties to the needy are examples of socially undesirable behaviors. When one displays such acts, he or she is effectively snubbing *lajjA* as if *buddhi* (see Footnote 2) is unable to guide *manas*.

The use of foul language is *akaraNiya* (or something we ought not to do) and evokes *lajjA*. Similarly, one's failure to deliver on the promise would evoke *lajjA*. I have experienced *lajjA* on the occasion of not delivering a paper on time or not attending a committee meeting. Similarly, a parent would experience *lajjA* when he or she is unable to provide what is promised to his or her child. All these scenarios entail behavior but the cause of *lajjA* is not behavior per se but the target's inability to fulfill one's promise. In the *rAmacaritamAnasa*, *tulsidAsa* creates an exemplar in king *dasaratha* who gives up his life but honors the word he had given to his queen—*raghukul rIta sadA call Ayi, prANA jAye par vacana na jAye* (the great tradition of the descendants of king *raghu* is that, they would rather die than go back on their word).

Socially unacceptable behaviors like smoking, drinking, going to a prostitute, and adultery ought to cause *lajjA*. In the Indian worldview, there are six enemies of spiritual practice - *kAma* (desire), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *moha* (attachment), *ahaGkAra* (ego), and *mAtsarya* (jealousy) (see Bhawuk, 2011, Chap. 7; Fig. 7.1). Those who cannot detach themselves from these evils would experience *lajjA* themselves and would also cause *lajjA* to their families.

lajjA can operate at the level of *manas* also. Whenever a person does a wrong, he might feel angry, guilty, envious, or jealous merely because of the awareness of that misdeed. A reflective person can recognize the loci of such feelings and work on them to deal with those thoughts and feelings. Thought suppression and diverting attention (Wenzlaff & Wegner, 2000) are likely to be ways of coping with ideas that transpire *lajjA* in both short- and long-term. One's *buddhi* is the citadel of *lajjA*. *buddhi* uses *lajjA* to guide behaviors, such as choosing right over wrong or healthy over unhealthy. As *lajjA* is a *sancarI bhAva* or a fleeting emotion (Bhawuk, 2017), it stops appearing in our *manas* when it is ignored or flouted a few times by indulging in behaviors that are improper. Therefore, if our speech and acts are polluted, our thoughts will be polluted. And if our speech and acts are polluted in a wide range of domains, our thoughts are likely to be equally polluted. Purifying the thoughts would require the purification of actions and speech. Hence, the emphasis on the three levels, thought, speech, and action, for spiritual aspirants. Relearning *lajjA* would require a public commitment to a set of proper behaviors, which constitute performing actions that are proper, and not performing actions that are improper.

There is a need to differentiate between *lajjA* and *viveka* (or discretion). They are similar in that they guide us to make right or ethical decisions in doing what we ought to do (*karaNiya*) and not doing what we ought not to do (*akaraNiya*). Ideally, when *viveka* guides us properly, we do not experience *lajjA*. However, our *viveka* may be clouded by desires for certain outcomes or for favoring people we love. These are the situations where we are likely to experience *lajjA* both while making the decision

and later when we face the outcome. But if we consider such situations as having absence of *viveka* (or we are being *vivekahIna*), then we could say that absence of *viveka* (or *vivekahInata*) leads to *lajJA*.

We often use *viveka* in making decisions about how to approach a problem, since a problem can be solved in many ways. We use *viveka* in deciding if we should cross a river or not based on our estimate of how good a swimmer we are and how strong the current is. We use *viveka* in choosing what to say to people to make friends. We use *viveka* in guiding our students. There are many situations like these where *viveka* is the instrument of *buddhi*, and *lajJA* is not salient, primarily because we are choosing from a pool of right decisions (i.e., none of the decisions would cause *lajJA*) of which one may be better. Sometimes choosing one decision may lead to poorer outcome, and the outcome may be a cause of *lajJA*. But in the selection of the decision itself *lajJA* need not be salient.

For example, using *viveka*, I would be able to guide myself on a test—(i) I should not be stuck on a problem that I am not able to solve; (ii) I should move on to another problem, and return to it if I have time at the end; (iii) I may not be able to solve all the problems on the test, if I spent too much time on a problem I am not able to solve; (iv) I am likely to get a poor grade because of this. If I did not have *viveka*, I would get a poor grade choosing the less efficient process. Thus, *lajJA* may be associated with the outcome, whereas *viveka* is associated with the process only.

When we want something that *viveka* does not recommend, because it is not right for the other person to do it, because it is burdening the other person, and so forth, we are becoming selfish and we may experience *lajJA* in the situation. We find parents begging for forgiveness for their children's wrong doing so that the kids do not face stiff penalties. Parents rationalize their behavior because it is to protect their children. Parents may punish the children later, in the privacy of their home, for causing them extreme *lajJA*. We may find subordinates asking for favors from their superiors even when they know they do not deserve them. Superiors may concede to the groveling subordinates, causing *lajJA* to both of them, for the one for obliging and for the other for asking.

I noted that *lajJA* is an instrument of *buddhi*, and it is associated with *buddhi* in mediating thought and action (Bhawuk, 2017). It is a fleeting emotion (or a *saJcarI bhAva*). Metaphorically, *lajJA* is the wife of *dharma*, and so it is always present where *dharma* is present (see Bhawuk, 2017 for a discussion). Both *viveka* and *lajJA* are instruments of *buddhi*, but whereas *lajJA* is associated with emotion, *viveka* does not seem to be associated with emotion and is rather associated with *tejas* (fiery energy, vital power, or efficacy)—*viveka* is associated with discriminating the spiritual from the material, and, therefore, it does not get confounded with desires and passions.

Therefore, there will be difference in the *viveka* of a worldly and that of an enlightened person, and using their *viveka* two people could come to two different decisions in the same situation. We found this in the battlefield of *mahAbhArata* when *arjuna* used his *viveka* and decided not to fight the battle because wars destroy the families and societies. His anti-war arguments presented in the first canto of the *bhagavadGItA* are quite convincing. Using his *viveka*, on the other hand, *kRSNa*,

presented multiple arguments that countered *arjuna's*, and convinced him to fight the battle. *viveka* often is related to quality rather than appropriateness of decisions.

3.7 *ahiMsA* in Speech: A Practice

Citing his personal experience, *gAandhiji* concluded his autobiography (Gandhi, 1957) by stating that there was no other God than truth, and the only way to God was through the practice of *ahiMsA* or nonviolence. The test of such a practice lies in one's daily behavior of loving the smallest living entity as oneself. Identifying with all living beings⁶ calls for self-purification in all walks of life by becoming "absolutely passion-free in thought, speech and action; to rise above the opposing currents of love and hatred, attachment and repulsion."⁷ He further extolled the practice of *ahiMsA* by stating that it was "the farthest limit of humility," and it could only be achieved when one puts oneself last. His stated goal for writing the autobiography was to describe truth so that common people's faith in truth and *ahiMsA* would be restored, and he recommended only one practice for the realization of truth, that of *ahiMsA*. He even entreated the readers to pray for him⁸ so that he could master *ahiMsA*; such was his faith in the practice of *ahiMsA*.

Following *Gandhiji*, I too would like to recommend only one practice for the cultivation of *lajjA*, *ahiMsA* in speech. I think purification of speech will lead to the purification of actions and finally the cleansing of thoughts. Of course, if one is a violent person, then therapy would be needed to curb the violent behaviors first. But often in interpersonal interactions it is violence of speech that leads to physical violence. If violence in speech can be controlled, violence of action can be avoided. Focusing on purifying thoughts would be relevant for a person who has mastered nonviolence in action and speech. Further, the practice of affirmation, using positive words, could be a positive psychological practice that could help cultivate purification

⁶Gandhiji is instinctively quoting *bhagavadgItA* verse 6.29 that captures the idea of *samadarzana* or harmonious perspective where one sees the self in others and others in the self. Verse 6.29: *sarvabhUtasthamAtmAnaM sarvabhUtAni cAtmani, IkSate yogayuktAtmA sarvatra samadarzanaH*. One who sees the self in all beings and all beings in oneself, such a person, who is absorbed in yoga, has a harmonious global perspective.

⁷Gandhiji is instinctively quoting *bhagavadgItA* verses 2.56 and 2.57 that describe the person whose *buddhi* is in equanimity or one who is free of all passions, a *sthitaprajJa*. 2.56: *duHkheSvanudvignamanAH sukheSu vigatsprihaH, vItarAgabhayakrodhaH sthitdIrmmunirucyate*. When facing sorrow one's *manas* is not agitated, and when facing pleasure one does not desire more; one who has transcended attachment, fear, and anger is said to be in equanimity by the seers. 2.57: *yaH sarvatraAnabhisnehastattatprApya zubhAzubham, nAbhinandati na dveSTi tasya prajJA pratiSThitA*. One who is without attachment or fondness in all situations, and neither celebrates the appearance of what is pleasurable nor mourns the appearance of what is detestable; such a person's *buddhi* is in equanimity.

⁸"In bidding farewell to the reader, for the time being at any rate, I ask him to join with me in prayer to the God of Truth that He may grant me the boon of *ahiMsA* in mind, word and deed." (Gandhi, 1957).

of speech. Cultivating *ahimsa* in speech and the practice of affirmation have both been rewarding for me on my spiritual journey, and in the cultivation of *lajjA* and other virtues. I have not used the f-word, even for dramatization, in more than a decade. However, I still think one should be able to use it without feeling guilty, and then not use it as self-discipline.

3.8 Coda

I presented an account of my subjective experiences in learning, unlearning, and relearning of *lajjA*, using autoethnography as the method. I also corroborated the findings with the experience of others, and synthesized the comments of colleagues to enrich the narrative. Reflecting on how *lajjA* was learned, unlearned, and relearned helped me demonstrate the role of socialization, conformity, and personal choice in the cultivation of *lajjA*. Institutions provide the socio-psychological space that is necessary for learning or unlearning *lajjA*, which has important implications for creating positive workplace environment. Relearning *lajjA* requires personal commitment and the support of one's social group, and cultivating the ten practices of *yama* and *niyama* and practicing affirmation can facilitate the process.

The value of cultivated *lajjA* is highlighted in other cultures too. Fung (1999, p. 180) presented the pedigree (and Familial Instructions) of the Zhou Clan

What distinguishes the human being from the animal is shame. When a person does not know shame, his/her conscience would vanish. For such a person parents would have no way to discipline; teachers and friends would have no way to advise. Without the will to strive upward, how could one improve? To be an official without shame is treacherous; how could he be loyal? To be a son without shame is disobedient; how could he be filial? To be a neighbor without shame is wicked; how could he be kind? ... As one knows shame, the sense of right and wrong would be realized, and his dying conscience would have a chance to revive.

The Chinese wisdom is consistent with how Prophet Mohammad emphasized the role of *hayA* or *lajjA* in shaping human behavior—If you don't feel *hayA* do whatever you like (see Bhawuk, 2017).

After leaving IIT-Kh, I had stopped using *lajjA* as a guide and used conscience instead. I visualized conscience as a multifaceted diamond that pricks us when we do something inappropriate. When we insist on continuing with such inappropriate behaviors, we grind away that facet of the diamond. Ultimately, a person may end up having a spherical shaped conscience that does not prick at all, whatever the person does. I have met some people in my life who could rationalize everything they did, and have no *lajjA*. Conscience worked for me for many years as an organizing framework, but now I am cultivating *lajjA* all over again since it is a richer construct consisting of both internal and external elements. *lajjA* is a virtue that nurtures a tender heart. Since conscience lies in a tender heart, *lajjA* can be an instrument

to cultivate and nurture conscience. I hope that future indigenous researchers will develop other culture-specific constructs similar to *lajjA* that can enrich the literature on behavior, culture, and management, and help create a more conscientious global village.

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