CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The chapter reviews literature related to the concept of emerging adulthood, its evolution, and its applicability in non-western contexts followed by a description of the Indian cultural context, both traditional and contemporary.

The chapter is organized in the following sections:

- Emerging Adulthood
  - Evolution of the term emerging adulthood
  - Important five feature of emerging adulthood
- Emerging Adulthood across cultures
  - Empirical evidence of emerging adulthood in American and European context
  - Empirical evidence of emerging adulthood in non-western context
- The Indian context
  - Traditional cultural notion of youth
  - The Indian psycho-social orientation
- Contemporary Indian context
- Relevance of emerging adulthood in Indian context
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- Highlights of reviews
- Rationale for the study
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Emerging Adulthood

There have only been a few contributions to the theoretical framework for transition to adulthood by eminent western theorists such as Erikson (1950, 1968), Keniston (1971) and Bockneck (1986). Most of these works are decades old and rapid socio-economic changes over these years make the above mentioned theories inadequate to portray the life of young people in the current scenario. More recently Arnett (2000a, 2006a) has addressed this theoretical gap and put forward a new stage of emerging adulthood, as a way to conceptualize the development of youth 18-25 years in western, industrialized societies.

Evolution of the term “emerging adulthood”.

There is a significant evolution in the markers of adulthood over a period of time. Historically, the period of adulthood was marked by youth attaining legal adulthood at the age of 18 years. Youth over 18 years old were expected to complete education, take-up work responsibilities and get married (Macek et al., 2007). However, over a period of time there has been a transformation in the perception of adulthood, especially in industrialised societies. There has been a significant delay in transition to adulthood with a variety of educational and employment opportunities available for young people. The effects of globalisation, technological advances, and widespread economic development are the principal drivers of such transformation (Nugent, 2006).

A key factor in the shift in traditional normative markers of adulthood is the extension in education, with youth pursuing a variety of professional and vocational courses in
search of a lucrative career and a subsequent delay in age of entering work life. Even on entering work life, ambitious youth tend to change jobs in search for an aspired job option. There is consequently a delay in the age when a young individual attains financial independence and considers marriage and parenthood (Arnett, 2000a, 2004). This leads to an enlarged transitional stage, whereby youth remain subject to an ambiguity about their adulthood status.

“Many young people today, certainly, feel lost and cannot relate with either adolescent or adult typical phenomena, attributes, or subjective feelings” (Arias & Hernández, 2007, p. 477). Though psychological, sociological, and anthropological models suggest different terms: late adolescence, young adulthood, and transition to adulthood, according to Arnett (2000a, 2004) these terms are too vague and do not fit into this phase. He has provided explanation for why each of these terms does not fully represent this phase.

During “late adolescence”, individual are in the pubertal age and have not developed full reproductive maturity unlike in the youth phase. Moreover, they have parental control or supervision, and cannot leave parents’ home and live independently. On the other hand young people above 18 years in age have a right to vote and indulge in independent decisions which is not the case for adolescents (Arnett. 2000a. 2004).

The term “young adulthood”, indicates young people have already attained their adulthood whereas there is ambiguity in the youth in this phase about the attainment of adulthood. However, this term relates more to the young people in thirties who have undertaken adult responsibilities while still young (Arnett, 2000a).
The phase “transition to adulthood” implicitly suggests that the period between adolescence and young adulthood is momentary and hence referred to as a transition. This is not the case as the period is longer (18-25 that is seven years) than the other stages of development, so it should be definitely studied as a separate stage of life (Arnett, 2004).

The concept of “emerging adulthood” was thus introduced as it seems to offer a new stage of human development and is being increasingly accepted globally. Emerging adulthood is described as a unique period of development between adolescence and adulthood, with five distinct characteristics: (i) it is the period of identity exploration, specifically exploration of love relationships, work responsibilities and world views; (ii) it is the period of instability, as young people tend to change their jobs as well as residence rather frequently; (iii) it is the period where young people are rather self-focused as they intend to become independent individuals; (iv) it is the period of feeling in-between, as young people believe that while they have crossed the stage of adolescence, they are not yet fully prepared to take adult roles; (v) it is the period of possibilities for young people to fulfil their aspirations making difference in their lives (Arnett, 2000a, 2004, 2006a). The following section describes each characteristic in detail.

**Important five feature of emerging adulthood.**

**Identity exploration.**

According to Erikson's theory of life-span (1950) identity formation is established in the adolescent stage to avoid role diffusion and identity confusion - a stage where an
individual must establish a sense of personal identity through self-exploration, specifically in the areas of love, work and ideology. However, Arnett (2000a) debated that identity exploration continues into emerging adulthood phase and in fact, it is the most important feature of this period of development. Arnett referred to Erikson's (1950, 1968) belief in a “prolonged adolescence” in many industrialized societies, allowing young adults to self-explore. Arnett argues that this is in fact applicable to most young people today in industrialised societies, and to a significant extent, identity exploration takes place during the emerging adulthood phase (Arnett 2000a, 2004, 2006b).

The three pillars of identity formation including love relationships, work responsibilities and world views, start curing adolescence but continue into emerging adulthood (Arnett 2006a). With respect to love, romantic relationships for adolescents are momentary and uncertain in contrast to the emerging adulthood phase where such relationships gain more focus and are part of identity exploration (Arnett 2004). Similarly, in the area of work, emerging adults are more serious and focused about their work, in order to explore their career goals, whereas work for adolescents is generally for a shorter duration, and often to utilize their spare time in order to fulfil short term desires such as new clothes, bikes, cosmetics, entertainment, etc. (Arnett, 2004; Steinberg & Cauffman, 1995). And it is during the emerging adulthood phase that youth decide upon their own beliefs and values, independently of parents and other influences. Therefore, emerging adulthood is also considered as an important period for development of worldviews as it helps in the development of individual identity (Arnett, 1997, 1998, 2004, 2006a).
These identity explorations of love relationships, work responsibilities and world views for emerging adults also involve risk factors as they can come across rejection, failure and non-formation of their own beliefs during exploration (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). This also leads to substance use, drinking and involvement in crime (Schulenberg, Malley, Bachman & Johnston, 2005).

**Period of instability.**

The identity explorations in areas of love, school and work, make this period of human development, the age of instability. In search for the right answer, emerging adults frequently change their choices in terms of selection of educational fields, career paths or romantic partners (Arnett, 2006a; Tanner, Arnett & Leis 2008). This also results into frequent residential changes during this period, for example, moving out of parental household, residing in hostels or with friends for education, mobility for work, moving to live together with their partner or moving back to their parental home for temporary stay (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1999 cited in Arnett, 2006a; Arnett, 2004, 2006a). Such mobility in residential status peaks during the ages 20 -30 years, especially for Americans, making emerging adulthood an unstable period (Rindfus, 1991; Jang & Snyder, 2012).

Important signs of instability include significant changes and variation in school and work patterns. There could be frequent variations in school-work combinations in search for the most suitable option (Arnett 2006b). Notably the degree of instability tends to decrease with time, particularly, as youth starts feeling more mature and satisfied with their prospective career and they take over more adult roles (Arnett, 2004).


**Self-focused age.**

Emerging adulthood is a distinctive phase where youth tend to be more self-focused than any other period, it is also known as a self-focused age. The phase is marked by unique characteristics of being relatively less regulated and at the same time there are lesser duties and obligations towards others. The adolescent phase is highly controlled by rules and regulations set by parents and school authorities. In comparison, during young adulthood phase, people aged 30 and beyond are bound by several obligations and duties which they have to follow while performing adult roles such as being a spouse, being a parent or an employee, and these duties regulate and absorb most of their time. However, only during emerging adulthood period, youth with relatively higher degree of freedom to take decisions and free of responsibilities towards spouse, children and employers are able to enjoy much more leisure and personal time (Arnett, 2004, 2006a; Tanner, Arnett & Leis, 2008; Seiter, 2009).

Some researches consider the self-focused youth as selfish. In Japan, unmarried young people in their twenties are associated with term ‘parasite singles’ (Rosenberger, 2007) and in America, most college students are considered to be narcissistic (Twenge, 2006). However, Arnett argues that this is likely due to the advantages of their self-focused freedom to travel, live anywhere they desire and to do any kind of job so as to gain experience before entering adult roles (Arnett 2006c). Furthermore, Arnett (2006c) argues that it is a myth to consider emerging adults as selfish, since they are more considerate, able to understand perspective of others effectively and are less egotistic in comparison to adolescents or adults. Emerging adulthood is a self-focused time of life as during this phase most youth leave parental homes and start living independently, which gives them an opportunity to focus on
their self-development both educationally and professionally in order to attain self-sufficiency (Arnett (2004, 2006a, 2006c). Notably, such experiences also enable them to enhance their skills to do daily chores, understand their priorities for life and start developing a base for their adult lives (Arnett 2004). Therefore, emerging adulthood is a phase, wherein a person develops his own identity, according to his own terms and conditions and with limited influence from parents and other related people (Arnett, 2000a, 2006a, 2006b; Seiter, 2009).

*Feeling in-between.*

Emerging adulthood is the period of feeling in-between, wherein emerging adults are neither adolescents nor adults. They do not consider themselves adolescents, because they believe that they have crossed that age post the hormonal changes at puberty, they are not restricted by parental rules, many of them live away from home independently and moreover they have completed their secondary education. On the other hand, they do not consider themselves as adults because they think that they are not fully prepared to take all adults roles and responsibilities (Arnett 2004, 2006a; Tanner, Arnett & Leis, 2008). This is also evident from numerous studies in the United States as well as in other industrialized countries, when emerging adults were asked about their attainment of adult status, then a majority of them responded as “in some ways yes, in some ways no” instead of stating “yes” or “no” for their adult status (Arnett, 2001, 2003; Mayseless & Scharf, 2003; Facio & Micocci, 2003).

For most young people, this feeling of in-between remains for the period till they satisfy the criteria they deem as important for being an adult. A key question is which are the criteria that are given the highest level of preference as markers of adulthood.
It is surprising that traditional transition markers such as finishing education, marriage and parenthood are not regarded necessary for being an adult, and rather preference is given to intangible and individualistic criteria such as accepting responsibility for self, being able to make decisions independently and gaining financial independence (Arnett, 1998, 2000a, 2004, 2006a; Nelson et al., 2007). Almost all studies in the United States and other countries, including various regions, social classes and ethnic groups ranked above criteria as the top most important characteristics for being an adult. Since the criteria are indefinable unlike traditional markers therefore are obtained gradually, resulting in gradual attainment of adulthood (Arnett, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2006a).

Period of possibilities.

Lastly, emerging adulthood is the age of possibilities: (i) it is time of high optimism and great expectations and (ii) it is the age of possibilities as it provides an opportunity for people with difficult backgrounds to make differences in their life (Arnett 2006a). Emerging adulthood is the time for high hopes as young people work on their aspirations and make effort to fulfil them. It is an opportunity to transform themselves into an individual they wish to be rather than being a parent’s image (Arnett, 2004). Even if their present life is stressful and difficult, they believe that adulthood will turn out well for them. They have great expectations of finding a well-paying and satisfying job through which they are able to represent their identity well, as well as a reliable life partner who would become a soul mate and a lifelong partner (Tanner, Arnett & Leis, 2008).
Emerging adulthood is a time of possibilities especially for people from deprived and dysfunctional families (Arnett, 2004, 2006a). It is also revealed by Arnett (2000b) that youth from lower socio-economic backgrounds, express more optimism about their future versus youth from higher socio-economic backgrounds (Eskilson & Wiley, 1999). Children and adolescents are truly reliant on their parents and have to live in the environment provided by their parents, even if it is unhealthy and incompetent. On the another hand emerging adults have an opportunity to not only leave their parents and their problems behind but also have a chance to re-direct their lives and take their own decisions, which in turn transform them for the positive future before attaining adulthood (Arnett, 2004, 2006a).

The above section discusses the term emerging adulthood and its evolution and significance, with reference to the western context. It is relevant to know how much this phase is relevant across world, the applicability of the term and the way the phase of emerging adulthood is conceptualized across cultures. All these aspects are addressed in the following section.

**Emerging Adulthood across Cultures**

Emerging adulthood is not a universal phase of human development, but a stage that has become more prevalent in recent times under certain social and economic conditions which are gradually becoming pervasive due to globalisation. Therefore, emerging adulthood tends to exist mostly in industrialized and post-industrial nations which include countries from the west, such as the United States of America as well as European and Asian countries (Arnett, 2000a, 2004). Within developed countries, it is most likely to be prevalent in those segments of society (upper and middle
classes) which are economically stable and that allow an option for youth to delay their adult roles, ensuring economic support in the phase of exploration (Arnett, 2000a, 2004). In particular, the phenomenon is most prevalent in individuals who can pursue higher level of education essential for rewarding professional careers, providing them time for exploration, instability and self-focus, increasing future options (Arnett, 2000a; Seiter, 2009).

Emerging adulthood tends to exist more prominently in countries where the median age of entering marriage and parenthood is relatively high, typically in late twenties or early thirties. This delay in marriage and parenthood provides sufficient time for emerging adults to explore their own self, consider various possibilities and experience the related feeling of instability before entering into marriage or parental responsibilities (Arnett, 2000a, 2004). The age of marriage in traditional cultures was mostly fixed by family members according to certain set norms and expectations, however, this trend is changing with youth having more control over the resources, thereby giving more opportunity to take independent decisions of their own life transitions (Arnett 1998). Such changes are observed to a higher extent in industrialised and post-industrialised countries, where the youth has managed to delay the timing of marriage, given their ability to regulate their resources in their own ways (Arnett, 2000a).

Importantly, emerging adulthood is more closely associated with cultural environment than geographies. Within any given country, there may be certain cultures (socio-economically more developed classes) where emerging adulthood exists, while in others (belonging to minority class) it may not exist or exist over a shortened period in others (Arnett, 2000a, 2004). For example, youth from minority groups within a
country typically have lesser prospects available for exploration in their late teens and early twenties in comparison with youth from more developed classes (Arnett, 2000a, 2004). For example, for Mormons, age of marriage and parenthood is relatively low in comparison to other communities in America and thus they have limited period to self-explore, before entering adult roles (Arnett, 2000a, 2004).

The concept of emerging adulthood is currently being structured globally. Researches have been conducted in both western as well non-western countries. An overview of findings from such researches is discussed in the following two sections.

**Empirical evidence of emerging adulthood in American and European context.**

Numerous researches have been conducted in the United States (focused on American majority culture) to know how young people conceptualize the transition to adulthood (e.g., Arnett, 1994, 1997, 1998, 2001). The main results of these studies were: i) a significant proportion of emerging adults felt ambiguous about their status and did not consider themselves as adult (Arnett, 1994, 1997, 2001); ii) significance of traditional markers like finishing education, marriage and parenthood has been observed as diminishing criteria for adulthood, iii) preference were given to individualistic criteria for adult status and the three most widely endorsed characteristics were a) "accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions", b) "financial independence from parents" and c) "ability to decide on personal beliefs and values independently of parents or other influences" (Arnett, 1994, 1997, 1998, 2001). Similar evidences are available from other researches, which imply that the transition to adulthood occurs in more psychological and individualistic terms, as young people predominantly

A recent study in Canada by Molgat (2007) focused on self-conceptualization in adulthood. The results revealed that out of 45 respondents, most respondents (25-29 years) identified themselves as adults (24), whereas some of them either had ambiguous stance (15) or clearly did not identify as adults (six). Further, the respondents linked their individual notions with their life events such as leaving home, finding a job, forming a couple, parenthood and even financial obligations.

Researchers have lately focused their attention on European countries in order to find out views prevalent therein about emerging adulthood. Due to wide diversity across Europe, the concept of emerging adulthood has varying parameters across different countries, but at the same time it also has some common features (Bhul & Lanz, 2007). For example, European countries like Czech Republic, Austria and Romania show similarities in perception of emerging adulthood. In all three countries, majority of young people did not consider themselves to be adults but they felt "in between" about their status and widely endorsed individualistic criteria as markers of adulthood. These studies also revealed that in both Austria and Romania, individualism is followed by norm compliance, and in Czech Republic and Romania special emphasis is given to feeling of freedom, enabling youth to leverage all available opportunities (Macek et al., 2007; Sirsch, Dreher, Mayr, & Willinger, 2009; Nelson, 2009).

Researches were conducted in other European countries such as Spain (Arias & Hernández, 2007) to identify if the traditional markers of adulthood have changed and
how adulthood is conceptualized in their context and Welsh (Leo & Marion, 2010) to examine the concept of emerging adulthood.

Arias and Hernández (2007) conducted a research on the perception of the concept of adulthood in Spain and Mexico, focusing on the views and experiences of youth (16-34 years) about transition to adulthood and also to understand the influence of cultural and developmental differences between the two countries. Results revealed that both “Mexicans and Spaniards seem to be rather sure about adolescence’s end, but they have doubts about adulthood’s onset, personally and by age” (p.501). Seven factors (adulthood postponement, instability, autonomy, exploration, possibilities, worries and identity moratorium) related to transition to adulthood indicating different patterns according to age and country were revealed by the factor analyses performed on the data from both countries. For example, with older age, there is decrease in the postponement of adulthood and instability whereby autonomy increases, and exploration followed an inverted U pattern. Spaniard young individuals displayed more instability and identity moratorium, whereas Mexicans young people displayed more determinate future, possibilities, and postponement of adulthood. The results on parameters such as autonomy, exploration, and worries were relatively similar across the two countries.

Recently Leo and Marion (2010) conducted a research among Welsh young people to know how they perceive the concept of emerging adulthood. Young individuals 17-20 years who were working or unemployed (i.e., not in higher education) were interviewed about their lifestyles and their perceptions of being adult. Results indicated that many participants perceived themselves as adult and other people also perceived them as adult.
Other studies were conducted in Italy (Lanz & Tagliaabue, 2007) to discern the influence of romantic partnership have on emerging adults, and in Germany (Buhl, 2007) to know the influence of entry into the working world. Lanz and Tagliaabue (2007) investigated the impact of romantic relationships on emerging adults in Italy. Results revealed that young people considered romantic relationships as a pioneer marker to adulthood because marriage is a primary reason to move out of the parental home. There were differences in thinking and opinion about future plans, leaving home and influence of relationships which leads to different pathways among young people in Italy. Further, Buhl (2007) conducted a longitudinal research focusing on the influences of work life on participants’ well-being and relationship with parents in Germany during the end of emerging adulthood. Results concluded that young people’s well being and relationship with parents improved upon entering work life.

**Empirical evidence of emerging adulthood in non-western cultural contexts.**

Numerous researches in traditional and non-western cultures have been conducted to understand perceptions of transition to adulthood among emerging adults. The core focus of such researches has been to understand the impact of globalisation as well as that of indigenous cultural beliefs and values on emerging adulthood. For example, Arnett (2003) studied conceptions of the transition to adulthood in three different minority groups that is African-Americans, Latinos and Asian-Americans. The study revealed the effect of globalisation, as young people in these ethnic minority groups emphasized on bi-cultural conceptions of transition to adulthood whereby giving importance to both individualistic criteria for transition to adulthood as well as greater significance on obligations toward others, which is influenced by values of their
ethnic minority cultures (Arnett, 2003). Another research done on a highly religious sub-culture, the Mormons in America, revealed that influence of indigenous cultural beliefs make their transition to adulthood distinct from the majority culture of the country, as the emerging adulthood phase is generally shorter and more structured in comparison to the majority cultures (Nelson, 2003).

Studies conducted in Argentina (Facio & Micocci, 2003) and Israel (Mayseless & Scharf, 2003) revealed both similarities as well as differences between perceptions of adulthood among youth from western and non-western cultures. Key similarities in Argentina (still constituting a large proportion of impoverished people) emerged with western cultures (e.g., Americans) were: (a) existence of a distinct period of emerging adulthood among most young people, (b) instability indicated by frequent changes in jobs and romantic relationships, (c) importance for education including higher studies and (d) ambiguity about their status (45% felt in between and 46% felt they have reached adulthood), and (e) importance to individualistic criteria as markers to adulthood. However, despite the above mentioned similarities, the influence of indigenous culture was observed through prominence of family capacities, interdependence and norm compliance as important markers of adulthood (Facio & Micocci, 2003).

In Israel (Mayseless & Scharf, 2003) similar to American culture, emphasis was on psychological attributes as important markers of adulthood which included individualistic criteria like accepting responsibility for consequences, ability to decide upon personal beliefs and establishing relationship with parents on equal status, while, external markers such as biological transition as well as role transitions of marriage
and parenthood were viewed as much less important. However, the influence of culture leading to differences between America and Israel were observed as Israelis endorsed significantly higher importance to norm-abiding behaviour (such as driving safely and avoiding getting drunk) and to role transitions (such as being employed full time or getting married) versus young people in America.

Nelson, Badger and Wu (2004) provided evidence for cultural influences on perceptions of adulthood. They conducted a survey on college students in China, and found that majority of Chinese college students felt that they have reached adult status in their early twenties, indicating that there may be a materially shorter emerging adulthood phase in the culture. The criteria deemed necessary for adulthood had similarities as well as differences versus those observed amongst young people in Western majority cultures. Chinese young people gave importance to accept responsibility for one’s actions and become financially independent from parents similar to Western culture. However, they also strongly endorsed criteria that reflected the collectivistic culture such as becoming less self-oriented, developing greater concern for others, and becoming capable of supporting parents financially different from western culture. Results also revealed more norm-abiding behaviour (e.g., avoiding getting drunk, using illegal drugs, and shoplifting) and less exploration than their American counterparts, indicating the reflection of their culture in many ways (Nelson, Bager, & Wu, 2004).

The above section has described the relevance of emerging adulthood in non-western cultures. The following section focuses specifically on the Indian society and the relevance of emerging adulthood in India.
The Indian Context

India is a culturally diverse country wherein a significant proportion of the population comprises of youth 13-35 years (37.9%)\(^2\). With the changes driven by globalisation, the emergence of the phase of emerging adulthood is particularly likely in the urban Indian context. The manner in which this phase of life is interpreted and understood is influenced by several socio-cultural and economic factors such as culture and religion, gender, level of education and family background. Similar to other non-western cultures, there could potentially be marked differences in the perception of the concept of emerging adulthood compared with western cultures such as the United States. The Indian culture lays great emphasis on family and hence its role is very important in influencing the behaviour of individuals, their attitudes and future perspectives, unlike in the western culture where the emphasis is on the individual (Kakar, 1981; Madan, 1993). To further consider this issue, it is important to briefly discuss the Indian cultural context that is likely to influence transition to adulthood and the psychosocial experience of youth throughout this period.

Traditional cultural notions of youth.

Hinduism is a major predominant religion in India. It has a significant influence on all features of daily life of an individual - ideas, beliefs and practices for his/her development. Hence Hinduism is defined more as a way of life than a religion. The Hindu culture defines the values for children and goals and set principles for child / parenting (Saraswathi & Ganapathy, 2002).

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\(^2\) Source: Indian Youth: Demographics & Readership, 2010
According to the Hindu model of *asramadhrama*, human life is conceptualised in four stages whereby in each phase of life, Hindus ought to follow a set sequence and time frame. These are called "ashramas" and every man should ideally follow life as per these stages: The first stage is *brahmacharya*, a time for formal education and preparation for future professional life, as well as for the family, social and religious life. This is followed by *grhasthasrama*, when a person should get married, *Vanaprastha* or the retirement stage and *sanyasa*, where one should renounce all relationships (Kakar, 1981; Saraswathi, 2005; Menon, 2012). *Brahmacharya* has been a stage for youth development in ancient India where a person learns all duties and responsibilities of each of the four "ashramas" (Kapadia & Bhangaokar, 2012).

According to Saraswathi (1999) the process of transition to adulthood is gender and class-based, and in most traditional settings, the adolescent phase has little relevance and no clear definition given the continuity between childhood and adulthood. Since childhood, individuals are prescribed roles for adulthood and are expected to fulfil them accurately. However a marked discontinuity is observed between childhood and adulthood in contemporary Indian society, given the ongoing social-economic changes. This is more evident in adolescents in higher social classes, specifically because of two leading factors: (i) they have better opportunity to experience new lifestyle and avenues while seeking higher education, and (ii) more adaptation to youth culture due to greater influence of mass media (Saraswathi, 1999; Verma & Saraswathi, 2002) This has significant relevance for the emerging adulthood phase in modern India.
The Indian psycho-social orientation.

Importance of family.

Family is of paramount significance in the Indian culture and is considered to influence the psycho-social experiences of the children (Verma, 2000). Family is considered and referred as an ideal homogenous unit, which acts as a primary source of socialization for a child. It is expected to inculcate values, understanding of rituals and norms in children, such as respecting and obeying their elders, and most importantly differentiate between right and wrong to enable one to fit into the society (Kapadia, 2008; Sonawat, 2001). Great emphasis is laid on adoption of certain distinguishable features of the Indian family system such as family integrity, family loyalty, and family unity (Sachdeva & Misra, 2008; Chadha, n.d.).

The relationship between the child and parents captures the most central position in the hierarchy of family relationships, as parents are considered to be the primary source of all the perceptions and behaviours of a child. In the Hindu-Indian culture, a child is considered to be a gift of God and is highly welcomed; parenting undertakes deep moral and religious duties of steering the life of a child in the "right" direction. Parents are expected to take responsibility for all problems of a child in his/her nascent stages, and they are expected to resolve all issues related to the child (Kapadia & Shah, 1998; Kapadia, Karnik & Ali, 2005).

In traditional India, both parenthood and family lineage played a significant role in deciding one’s career and employment. Within this pre-defined set up, children used to try and master the same professional skills as pursued by parents / family. This limited choice of careers used to constraint individualism and self-realization. Beyond
profession, parents, and family also had a significant influence on personal decisions, in particular the decision to select a life partner. Family and parents used to take decisions with respect to the life partner based on criteria set by the caste system. Here again, individualism was curtailed, as parents’ decision with respect to marriage was followed, as they had the responsibility of maintaining the institutional norms of family structure and practices (Saraswathi, 1999; Singh, 2004).

Traditionally, India has been a male-dominated society. Even in modern India, while educated families are promoting independence for women including educational opportunities as well as career, however the social norms related to marriage even now provide men with a privileged position. Such dynamics have promoted favouritism towards a boy child. There was a clear division of roles for men and women in traditional India whereby men were the bread earners and women were the home makers. There have also been instances of oppression of women within families, which can potentially negatively influence young minds, who are susceptible to following similar discrimination against women in their adulthood (Saraswathi, 1999; Mane, 1991). Overall the family collective is upheld and has a significant influence on socialization of children also affecting their self.

**Interdependent self.**

According to Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni and Maynard (2003) the course that a person takes for development could be either interdependent or independent. In the former, social obligations, duties and social responsibilities are given a priority over individual choices, while the latter is diametrically opposite; in that priority is given to individualistic self and choices over others, and focus is on own internal attributes (Kitayama & Markus, 1995).
Roland (1988) has put forth a conceptualization of self in India as spiritual self and familial self which encompasses interdependence, high level of empathy and receptivity to others and denotes experimental sense of self as “we-self” that is in line with traditional culture of defining self in India. In this context of the interdependent self in the Indian society, Ramanujam also observed in his work (cited in Mishra, Akoijam & Mishra, 2009), that individuals in the Hindu society endeavour to fit into the social norms and the culture where one represents self as secondary to the society. The individual constantly seeks the approval of the society which in turn hampers individualistic identity or the independent self of the individual/ an adult.

Furthermore, he also states that the interdependence of an individual should not be construed a complete merger of the independent self. However, to achieve interests of the society, the individual needs to diminish one’s individual or independent self and prioritise the interdependent self.

A research on interpreting moral discourses in India revealed that the concept of self is greatly influenced by gender and individual’s position in the hierarchy, as most respondents both men and women, understood their self, primarily through their positions / hierarchy, and in context of the roles they played in family and society (Bhangaokar & Kapadia, 2009).

*Co-existence of collectivistic and individualistic self.*

The Indian society is predominately associated with collectivism where people are interconnected and possess collectivistic values and behaviour. Therefore, as discussed earlier, it emphasizes on the interdependent self where the independent self is diminished in order to seek acceptance from the society (Triandis, 1995).
However, Sinha and Tripathi (1994) observe that “both individualistic and collectivistic orientations can co-exist within individuals and culture” (p.193). They supported their belief by mentioning the co-existence of both elements since ancient India. For example, in Hindu ethic, *moksha* (salvation) and *dharma* (duty) along with *artha* (wealth) and *kama* (sexual pleasure) are considered important values for a person and determined their self. This means both duties of a person, as well as pleasure can go together, which signifies co-existence of both individualism and collectivisms. Yet another example is of *Karma* (one’s action) which is associated with individual deeds both in present and past life. Thus an individual is solely responsible for his fortune and any distress caused by his actions in present or even past life. Thus *Karma* of an individual signifies individualistic orientations. Further, the results of their studies prove that Indian culture and psyche did not clearly favour collectivism or individualism but rather a mix of both orientations. For example, when respondents were asked if they will give importance to their own happiness versus others’, most of the respondents gave preference to happiness of both/all.

In another study by Sinha, Sinha, Verma and Sinha (2001) the co-existence of collectivism and individualism were also observed in the Indian psyche and found that the Indians being culturally sensitive use individualistic behaviour with a collectivistic intention most, followed by a purely collectivistic response. For example, a person wants to fulfil his ambitions, in order to provide good support to his parents and family. Gender, place of residence (urban-rural) and level of education were crucial factors which determined the person’s orientation (C/I) for any given situation.

Mascolo, Misra and Rapisardi (2004) also examined self in India. They observed that Indians' perception of self is multi-dimensional and complex, because it comprises
both individual experiences and relationships with other. They have put forth the concept of *encompassing self* for Indians, where self is rooted in relationship - this can be observed in hierarchical relationships with active participation of each person like parent-child, husband-wife, and boss-subordinate. Both, the subordinate and the superior have moral obligations in relation to one another; the superior is responsible for protecting the subordinate and the latter plays a role in actively respecting, obeying and acknowledging the care provided by the other.

**Contemporary Indian Context**

The Indian society is in a transformation phase. Globalisation has been a key driver of certain socio-economic changes in the country including a booming globalised economy, increasing focus on education in general and particularly for women and youth from lower castes, increasing awareness of public events through free media and exodus of young generation to urban cities (Verma, 2000). Nevertheless, the role of family in nurturing the youth remains intact. The trends of individuation and disengagement with family that are commonly observed in the west are not yet observed in India, despite ongoing social changes (Verma, 2000; Larson, Verma & Dworkin, 2003). While it is increasingly common for youth including girls to leave parental household in search of quality education, they still are affiliated to the parental home and it is not common for youth to move out of the parental home.

Recently, a growing trend of nuclearisation of families has been observed, primarily driven by urbanisation of Indian population and availability of better job opportunities in certain parts of the country (Singh, 2004, 2010). Moreover, nuclear families enable mobility and are therefore suitable for people who intend to seek opportunities
irrespective of geography to enhance career prospects or where a person’s job involves a requirement for mobility. This has been one of the primary reasons for the diminishing importance of extended families. Other reasons include: global cultural influences, rural to urban migration, difficulties in child rearing and bearing due to formal sector employment. Nevertheless, there are still many Indian families who live in marginal joint family system, if not a proper one, that is, choosing to live in neighbouring area and continuing to have common bank account for their family (Singh, 2004, 2010; Pias, 2006). This nuclearisation of the Indian family also provided a chance for husband and wife to get closer and have more intimate relationship, consequently empowering women within families (Singh 2002). However, certain key features of joint family system such as patriarchal hierarchy and respect toward elders still remain prevalent (Singh 2004, 2010).

These changes in the structure of the families due to modernisation are relevant to a larger extent to urban middle and upper middle classes. Such changes have driven changes in the lifestyles including parenting, and have created an atmosphere wherein members of the family share more equal status than was prevalent in the joint family system (Verma, 2000). Therefore, youth belonging to such sub-sections of the society that have more options and resources make their transition to adulthood relatively more easily versus other sub-sections of the society. It is becoming prevalent for youth to pursue specialized education, with the aim of achieving lucrative jobs and satisfying careers, and in the process youth have been observed to purposely delay marriage and parenthood (Saraswathi, 1999).

Modernisation in India has particularly influenced the age of getting married, especially for girls. Also lately the age gap between marriage partners has been
observed to be decreasing. Such changes are influenced by the increasing importance of education and professional training for the youth of the country (Chattopadhyay & Ganguly, 2004). Young people today select life-partners on the basis of their intellectual and emotional compatibilities, rather than on the basis of qualities of conventional ‘homely’ housewives (Chattopadhyay & Ganguly, 2004). However, these changes have not yet materially affected the arranged marriage system in contemporary India, as it is still the predominant form of finding a mate (Sarswathi, 1999). There have been a few variations in the process of arranged marriages, particularly as youth have significantly higher say and involvement in the selection of life partner which was less so in earlier times (Singh, 2004; Kashyap, 1996; Shukla, 1994).

This transition has been observed in a study done on transition in marriage partner selection where matrimonial advertisements have emerged as a new way of partner selection, indicating an alteration in the mode of partner search. However, the process of partner selection follows the same traditional arranged marriage pattern of taking into account caste, horoscope, family background, and organising “face to face” meetings of the prospective partner, it reflects a blending of individual related characteristics with efforts to incorporate the “say” of the family, with greater emphasis on the former. This portrays the new emerging pattern of the psychological constructs- individualism and interrelatedness/collectivism (Shukla & Kapadia, 2007).

While globalisation is impacting India, the extent of impact may vary depending upon the type of city and region. In addition, the context such as social class and region along with culture plays a significant role in the development of an individual. For example in a metro city like Delhi which is the capital of India, the impact of
globalisation is expected to be much stronger because people are in greater proximity to global influences compared to a mid-sized city like Vadodara. For example, the annual growth rates of different states between 1999 and 2008, reveals strong economic disparities in the country as per the data, as Gujarat (8.8%) is ahead of Delhi (7.4%) (“Economic disparities,” 2012). But if per capita income (PCI) is considered then Delhi is among the top three States/Union Territories in terms of per capita income (Rs. 1,16,886 in 2009-10) compared to Gujarat’s per capita income (Rs. 63,961 in 2009-10). However, Gujarat’s per capita income (PCI) is second highest among the major states of India (“Gujarat per captia,” 2011).

With regard to literacy and sex ratio, according to census 2011, Delhi’s literacy rate is 86.34% of total population and sex ratio is 866 females per 1000 males that is below national average of 940 as per census 2011 (Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, 2011). On the other hand, Vadodara’s literacy rate is 81.21% of total population and sex ratio is 934 females per 1000 males (Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, 2011). The average age of marriage according to census 2001, for Delhi, it is 23 years for boys and 19 years for girls and for Gujarat, it is 22 years for boys and 19 years for girls (Cited in Unicef, n.d.). The differences in the two cities in terms of per capita income, socio-economic development, population, literacy and sex ratio, are likely to have a major influence on psychosocial orientations.

Globalisation is causing significant alteration in the Indian society in terms of changes in life style and perceptions of people. Another important psychological consequence of globalisation is the change in one’s identity. This is discussed in the next section which also focuses on the relevance of emerging adulthood in India.
**Why Emerging Adulthood is Relevant in the Indian Context**

Arnett (2002) stated that the transformation of one’s identity is caused as a significant psychological consequence of globalisation in terms of how people think about themselves in a societal context. There are four major issues in relation to identity which are influenced by globalisation. The first issue is development of bi-cultural identity in people across the world, whereby part of one’s identity is rooted in their local culture while another part is highly influenced by awareness of one’s relationship with the global world. This means in addition to their local culture, young people develop a sense of world culture by developing a global identity. A good example of this can be seen among the educated youth in India who typically follow deep rooted traditional Indian values, such as preference for an arranged marriage and caring for parents in their old age, despite being integrated into the global fast paced technological world (Verma & Saraswathi, 2002).

The second issue is that of identity confusion, which is mostly prevalent among youth in non-western cultures. Youth in these cultures find it difficult to adapt to these rapid changes that is growing bi-cultural identity and global culture which on the other hand is weakening their own cultural values and systems. Therefore, they start thinking that they do not fit into either of the two cultures and feel isolated and excluded (Arnett, 2002). Identity confusion among young people may be reflected in problems such as depression, suicide, and substance use. These problems have been seen in a variety of cultures including India because of the rapid move towards joining the global culture. In a study on suicide mortality in India: A nationally representative survey by Patel, Ramasundarahettige, Vijayakumar, Thakur, Gajalakshmi, Gururaj, Suraweera, and Jha (2012), it was found that a large proportion of adult suicide deaths were found to occur between the ages of 15 years and 29 years, especially in women.
The third change driven by globalisation is a growing prevalence of self-selected culture. Some individuals, who do not like to be part of a global culture, tend to see more meaning and structure in their own culture. Values of global culture including individualism and consumerism attract most people worldwide (e.g., attraction to pop music, fast food, exotic vacations and blue jeans). However, some people refuse to join the crowd and make their own group with like-minded people in order to have an identity that is not affected by the global culture and its values (Arnett 2002). There may be several instances of self-selected cultures in India among various communities who typically promote people not to get affected by the global culture and its implications. For example, people in various communities today also prevent girls from wearing jeans and keeping mobile phones (Siddiqui, 2012).

Finally, the fourth effect of globalisation is the spread of emerging adulthood, whereby significant delays in the timing of adulthood through postponement of adult roles such as employment, marriage and parenthood have been observed in most parts of the world. In developing countries, emerging adulthood is more prevalent within wealthier segments of society, mainly in urban areas (Arnett, 2000a). In the economically less developed and rural parts of the developing societies, there is typically a continuity between childhood and adulthood and the emerging adulthood phase or even adolescence phase is less prevalent in such societies (Sarawathi, 1999). This is also observed by Saraswathi and Larson (2002) in that the lives of middle class youth in India, South East Asia, and Europe have more similarities with each other than with poor youth of their own countries.

Globalisation is affecting India in many ways, resulting in diverse changes in socio-economic structure which may lead to the spread of emerging adulthood in the India
society. The next section focuses on the application of features of emerging adulthood in the Indian context.

**Features of emerging adulthood in the Indian context.**

As previously discussed, the traditional Indian culture is highly influenced by cultural paradigms such as significance of family, parent-child relationship, marked gender difference and the collectivistic nature of the society. However, due to globalisation, similar to other developing societies, there have been considerable socio-economic changes in the last two decades. A few examples of such socio-economic changes include: higher incomes, enhanced focus on education and particularly focus on education for girls and lower socio-economic strata people, reduction in gender gap and increasing employment opportunities for women (Verma, 2000). Therefore, it is fair to assume that the effects of these cultural paradigms are likely to play a crucial role in defining emerging adulthood in India.

**Feeling in-between.**

The effect of globalisation as discussed earlier is also seen in India which is causing change in educational aspirations. The possible reason is that in today's environment, education provides individuals with a better chance of employment, which in turn leads to a better lifestyle, power and status (Chinnammai, 2005). Therefore, today young people focus more on their education and tend to study until their mid-twenties. This in turn may make them feel that they are not prepared to take adult roles therefore it is possible that they may feel in-between, similar to youth in the western contexts such as United States.


*Criteria for adulthood.*

The collectivistic nature of society and the Hindu model in India are likely to have an influence on the criteria deemed important for adulthood in India. In traditional India, *grhasthasrama* stage of development marked the adulthood stage, signifying a strong correlation between role transitions (e.g., marriage and parenthood) and adulthood (Saraswathi & Ganapathy, 2002). The delay in such role transitions due to higher education (becoming increasingly prevalent today), could lead to a feeling of being in-between.

*Individualistic / collectivistic preferences.*

As an effect of the traditional Indian model, it is likely that Indian youth endorse collectivistic criteria for adulthood, whereby one has to adopt all cultural and social rules and responsibilities within the family (Saraswathi & Ganapathy, 2002; Mascolo et al., 2004). While there has been a growing trend of nuclearisation of families in modern India, yet there is prevalence of hierarchical structure so youth need to discuss their major decisions with parents and they are inclined to support their parents in old age (Singh, 2004). This may result into Indian youth endorsing more collectivistic criteria for adulthood (e.g., “become less self-oriented” and “become financially capable to provide for parents”). However, at the same time India is going through myriad changes leading to high prevalence of bi-cultural identity (Verma & Saraswathi, 2002) which may influence the perceptions of youth, especially the ones belonging to the wealthier segment of society. This is likely to lead to an endorsement of individualistic criteria (e.g., "accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions", "financially independent from parents", and “decide on personal beliefs and values independently of parents or other influences”).
Gender.

Traditionally gender bias has been a predominant social issue in the country. Historically, there has been a significant distinction between ascribed roles of men and women. Birth of a son traditionally and even today is celebrated as birth of a future earning member as well as someone who could carry the family name forward, while a daughter is considered a burden because of the prevalence of “dowry”: a social paradigm wherein parents of the bride need to pay significant money and assets to the family of the groom at time of marriage (Mane, 1991; Saraswathi, 1999). Women’s only importance was for their ability to bear a male-child (Singh, 2004). Men were expected to take responsibility of providing financial resources to cover the needs of the family, and women’s role was typically restricted to the household chores. However, in the globalised India significant on-going changes are observed with increasing trend of women attaining education and seeking professional roles at par with men. So it would be interesting to observe the impact that the globalisation has on the way young men and women view the traditional criteria necessary for adulthood.

Age.

According to Hindu life stages, as mentioned earlier, brahmacharya is a stage for youth development where individual attained formal education and prepared for future professional life, as well as for the family, social and religious life. On the hand grhasthasrama is a stage, where individual attained full adulthood as one gets married, has children and undertake responsibilities of a householder. Therefore young people who are between 18-20 years will be those preparing themselves for
professional life and attaining formal education and young people between 21-25 years will be those who would get married and attain full adulthood according to Hindu life stages. To know the extent to which of these criteria continue, the present study has included two age group 18-20 years and 21-25 years.

**Highlights of the Review**

- Emerging adulthood is a subjectively distinct period which is marked by postponed adulthood.
- Emerging adulthood is not a universal phase of human development, but a stage that has become more prevalent in recent times under certain social and economic conditions.
- Emerging adulthood tends to exist more prominently in countries where the median age of entering marriage and parenthood is relatively high, typically in late twenties or early thirties.
- Emerging adulthood has five unique features: identity exploration, period of instability, being self-focused, feeling in between, and period of possibilities in life.
- European countries have highlighted the presence of emerging adulthood in their culture and the emerging adults have given preference to individualistic criteria.
- Some non-western cultures have also endorsed this stage, but both individualistic and collectivistic criteria are given importance.
• Contemporary India is in a transitional phase where globalisation has a significant impact on Indian culture resulting in modernization of society as well as changes in the outlook of young people.

• Globalisation has been a key driver of certain socio-economic changes in the country including booming economy, increasing focus of education in general including woman and exodus of young generation to urban cities.

• The trend of nuclearisation of families has been observed, primarily driven by urbanisation of Indian population. This has changed in structure of families and it has also driven to changes in the lifestyles of young people.

• This transition in Indian society has also delayed the age of marriage and criteria for partner selection wherein selection is not done on the basis of one’s conventional roles but on the basis of one’s intellectual and emotional compatibility with the person. However, arranged marriage system is still a major form of finding a partner in contemporary India with youth have being more actively involved in the process.

• Nevertheless, certain key features of joint family such as togetherness, respect towards elders and patriarchal hierarchy are still prevalent. Also the significant role of family and parent-child relationship in nurturing the youth remains intact. Though young people leave parental house for better education, yet they remain closely connected with their parents.
• Gender difference in India is still predominant today also as birth of a son is celebrated and is highly welcomed while a daughter is considered as a burden for the family.

• The relevance of emerging adulthood can be seen in India due to influence of globalisation and rapid changes in the Indian society.

**Rationale of the Study**

The area of emerging adulthood is well-researched in the western context, however not much research has been done in the Indian context. There exists a significant opportunity to learn more about the perceptions of Indian youth, particularly in light of India being one of the largest and fast developing nations in the world, with significant recent socio-economic changes in the era of globalisation.

The Indian society is changing at a rapid rate, leading to the occurrence of discontinuity between childhood and adulthood, giving rise to the stage of adolescence, at least in urban context (Verma & Saraswathi, 2002). Along similar lines it would be interesting to know whether the societal changes are resulting in the emergence of the stage of “emerging adulthood” in urban India. Importantly, the changing context with its changing demands may influence the way young individuals define adulthood and also the criteria they endorse as important marker of adulthood. Are individuals inclined more towards collectivistic criteria in line with the India psychosocial orientation or there is a change in terms of adopting individualistic criteria?
Arnett’s research has concluded that youth in non-western cultures tend to place greater emphasis on traditional practices that lead to an earlier transition to adulthood implying shortened period of emerging adulthood or no emerging adulthood at all (Arnett, 2000). This study aimed at understanding if such trends are evident among Indian youth.

The Indian society has wide regional diversity. For example, Delhi is located in the northern region of India which tends to be more tradition bound, and yet being the country’s capital and a metro city, it is in the midst of global influences. On the other hand, Vadodara is a fast-growing mid-sized city, with a more open-minded attitude and a character of close social relationships among people. Both backdrops will impact the likelihood of the emergence of emerging adulthood and the interpretation of adulthood. The inclusion of the two different cities would lead to enhanced understanding of the effect of regional variations in young individuals’ perception about transition to adulthood in multi-cultural India.

Studies related to emerging adulthood have been conducted in various non-western cultures. The findings from such studies have indicated that along with criteria similar to those highlighted in the western context, participants also expressed culture specific criteria, for example, participants endorsed norm abiding behaviour to a higher extent versus western countries. Such findings have contributed to expansion of the understanding of adulthood and importantly the cultural meaning attached to this phase of life. At a broader level, the present study will also contribute to the understanding of culture as it influences human development.
Conceptual Framework

**Independent variables**

- Age
- Gender
- Region / state

**Dependent variables**

- Self-adult status
- Markers of adulthood
  
  *Preference to collectivistic / individualistic criteria*

*Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study*

The study was conceptualised to understand the impact of independent variables such as age (sub-categories within the 18-25 years categories), gender (women versus men, especially to understand the potential impact of gender in light of the Indian context outlined in Figure 1) and region/state on perception of self-adult status and markers of adulthood. Notably, one of the core objectives is to understand if the markers of adulthood are more individualistic as observed in the west or collectivistic as influenced by the Hindu family system and societal norms.
Broad Research Questions

- Does the phase of emerging adulthood exist in the Indian context?
- What are the perceptions of young people regarding adulthood?
- What according to them are the markers of adulthood?

Specific Research Questions

- How do Indian youth define adulthood (i.e., what criteria are deemed important for an individual to be classified an adult)?
- What is the relationship between the criteria deemed important for adulthood and individuals’ own self-adult status?
- What are the different markers of emerging adulthood in the contemporary Indian context?
- To what extent do the young people endorse collectivistic versus individualistic criteria for adulthood?
- To what extent is Indian youth’s perception of adulthood influenced by age and gender?
- How do the perceptions of youth in northern Indian city of Delhi (national capital) vary from the perceptions of youth in western Indian city of Vadodara (mid-sized city, close to commercial capital Mumbai)?