

## Chapter 2

# Adolescence: A Sociocultural Construction

**Abstract** Adolescence is a sociocultural construction that evolves within the culture-context-development framework. This chapter begins with a glimpse into the evolution of adolescence as a subject of scholarly interest. Next, the Western perspective of adolescence is described. The next section gives an overview of the cross-cultural variability in adolescence, illustrating different meanings and interpretations of this developmental stage across cultures. After this, a discussion of adolescent socialization focusing on parent–adolescent relationship to highlight key aspects of autonomy, authority, and interpersonal disagreements is presented. The next section depicts adolescents in the context of social change and globalization. How adolescence is constructed in the Indian-Hindu worldview and in the contemporary Indian context is then discussed, followed by a depiction of the urban middle class in Baroda (Vadodara), Gujarat.

**Keywords** Adolescence • Sociocultural construction • Cross-cultural variability • Globalization • Indian • Hindu • Middle class • Baroda • Vadodara

### A Glimpse into Adolescence as a Subject of Scholarly Interest

The term adolescence is derived from the Latin term *adolescere* which means to grow into maturity (Muss and Porton 1990). The scientific study of adolescence in the West can be traced back to a century when G. Stanley Hall published his two-volume work “Adolescence,” its powerful and lingering take away being the epithet “*storm and stress*.” For several decades, Western scholarship on adolescence has anchored on to this premise, with classic theories of human development such as Freud’s psychoanalytic theory and Erikson’s psychosocial theory lending support to this construction. The idea of adolescence as a period of crisis hence sustained, highlighting issues such as emotional turmoil, striving for autonomy, and search for identity. In consonance with the predominance of Western perspectives in much of social science and the lack of adequate culturally relevant scholarly

resources related to non-Western or Indian perspectives, this view of adolescence was regarded as uniform and universal, applicable to adolescents all over the world. The notion of culture as the source or even a crucial mediator in the interpretation and lived realities of adolescence was largely absent.

The genesis of the engagement of culture in the study of adolescence lies in the discipline of cultural anthropology. Margaret Mead's book *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) focused on adolescence and raised significant challenges to the "received" perspectives on this developmental period, for example, continuous rather than abrupt growth pattern and little differentiation between the worlds of child and adult, which were in sharp contrast to the Western societies. Since Mead's work, there was only intermittent anthropological interest in adolescence (Schlegel 2011). Nevertheless, it contributed toward the inclusion of culture in understanding adolescence. The advent of cross-cultural psychology gave further impetus to cultural differences and universalities in adolescence, whereas cultural psychology honed in to accord culture a central place in the study of human development and behavior. The notion of adolescence as a cultural construction thus came to be accepted. In accordance with the present-day scientific imperative of understanding human development as embedded in the interaction between culture and context, adolescence too is increasingly studied within a contextual perspective. In general, a contextual framework, focusing on continuity and plasticity in human development, for example, Lerner's developmental-contextual framework is highlighted, along with focus on mini theories and an applied developmental science perspective (Steinberg and Morris 2001). In a departure from the deficit or problem-oriented perspective, which considers young people as problems to be managed, the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework views young people as resources to be developed (Roth and Brooks-Gunn 2003). The approach focuses on indicators of optimal functioning and thriving, and emphasizes the concept and role of agency to highlight adolescent capacity to influence one's own development. Youth are considered as conscious agents who are developing knowledge, skills, and values to deal with the complexities of the changing world (Lerner 2006; Larson and Tran 2014). The study of diversity and ethnic groups has also received considerable attention in the last decade (Lerner and Steinberg 2004).

In India, interest in scientific study of adolescence ran somewhat parallel to the indigenization movement in psychology, which took cognizance of the Western dominance, questioned the "received" perspectives, and made conscious attempts to unravel culturally rooted understanding of human development (Sinha 1986). Seminal research such as socialization of children in a weavers' community in Varanasi (Anandalakshmy and Bajaj 1981) and socialization of children in rural and urban poverty contexts in Gujarat (Saraswathi and Dutta 1988) set the stage for understanding childhood and adolescence in the ecological and cultural contexts. The studies represent a significant contribution to the understanding of adolescent development in the ecological context and highlight the cultural variations in the socialization goals and practices, including gender differences. Subsequently, research and writings on adolescence focused on the myth versus reality of adolescence in India (Saraswathi 1999) and offered indigenous descriptions of how this

phase is understood and lived, including the intracultural variability, especially with reference to social class and gender (Verma and Saraswathi 2002; Larson et al. 2001). Saraswathi (1999) raised relevant questions regarding the existence of adolescence as a distinct stage in India, highlighting the need to take cognizance of social class and gender differences, and concluded that the distinctness of the stage is more readily observed in upper social class contexts. Factors such as increasing interaction with modern ways of living, exposure to alternative lifestyles, extended years in formal education, delay in choice and entry into a job or career, and delayed age at marriage are leading to the emergence of adolescence as a discrete developmental period.

Notwithstanding the valuable contributions of these works, understanding adolescence or for that matter, understanding any phase or domain of human development remains a challenging endeavor in a vastly diverse society such as India. Whereas much is now known about this interesting developmental period, more is yet to be unraveled, many perspectives yet to be shared.

Setting aside the issue of the existence of adolescence as a distinct stage in India or in other societies, the fact is that almost all societies distinguish between young people and adults. However, the “cultural structuring” of the adolescent period differs across societies, for example, the developmental milestones and the social roles, settings, and activities that shape the “content” of adolescence (Crockett 1997, p. 24). For instance, in Western societies adolescence is viewed as a period of prolonged preparation for adulthood, involving institutional segregations from adult worlds. It has a distinctive character, and although this conception is being questioned, the general perception is that adolescence is a stage fraught with upheaval. The next sections present the conception of adolescence in Western societies, followed by a discussion of the cross-cultural variability in the meaning and interpretation of this developmental period.

## **The Western Perspective on Adolescence**

As described in the previous chapter, societies across the world operate along two idealized cultural-developmental pathways, independent and interdependent. Conceptions of self and socialization goals across societies, experiences, and practices are conceptualized along these two orientations. The two pathways endorse different sets of values. “The two value systems are merely ideal paradigms that get instantiated in a multiplicity of concrete and historically differentiated cultural contexts” (Greenfield et al. 2003, p. 468). Personal choice and individual rights are emphasized in the independent developmental pathway, with much value placed on independence and autonomy. Whereas in societies characterized by the interdependent pathway, social obligations and responsibilities rather than individual choice are highlighted, with preference given to relatedness (Greenfield et al. 2003).

For long years, Western Euro-American societies that follow the independent developmental pathway have endorsed the notion that during adolescence the individual must begin the process of separation from parents, also involving institutional segregation from adult worlds. Adolescence has a distinctive character and the general perception is that this stage is fraught with upheaval. The primary developmental task of the Western adolescent has been the achievement of autonomy, individuation, and disengagement from parents with tension between autonomy and dependence as its expected corollary. G. Stanley Hall's well-known axiom "*sturm und drang*" or storm and stress is partly rooted in this idea, as also in the frequency of mood disruptions and propensity for reckless and anti-social behavior among adolescents. According to this depiction adolescents, universally and inevitably, experience some emotional and behavioral upheaval on the way to adulthood (Arnett 2006).

Arnett (1999) has discussed the interpretation of the notion of adolescence as a difficult period. The difficulty is interpreted along three elements: (1) Conflicts with parents arising from resistance to adult authority: Parent-adolescent conflict is accepted as a normal event during adolescence and is also posed as facilitating the development of individuation and autonomy. High conflict, however, is likely to have disruptive effects on adolescent development. (2) Mood disruptions: More than other periods of development, mood swings are observed to occur more during adolescence. (3) Risk behavior including reckless, norm-breaking behavior is common among majority of adolescents. These difficulties not only affect adolescents themselves, but equally those around them, parents in particular. Hence, the overall perception of this stage being fraught with difficulties appears to bear credence. At the same time, the positive feature of this period as bearing the potential for immense growth needs to be acknowledged, as also the individual differences within culture and variability across cultures.

According to Valsiner (2000), it is pertinent to note that this conception of adolescence is a nineteenth century cultural-historical construction put forth to represent European and North American societies essentially focusing on school discipline and obedience of young workers in factories. The focus on social control during this stage was advanced in relation to bringing about behavioral conformity in boys by inculcating a school spirit and loyalty. Further, the psychology textbook portrayal of adolescence as troublesome and idealistic is a "socioideological" perspective of adults who portray adolescents as "difficult" and hence focus on how they (teachers or parents) may cope with adolescents rather than how adolescents could cope with their lives. Adolescence is thus primarily interpreted as a crisis period. Even though the rapid biological maturation is likely to create turmoil in the adolescent, it may not reflect in the social realm. Parents and adults, rather than the adolescents themselves, highlight the crisis of adolescence. The period is a developmental transition not only for adolescents, but also for parents who are called upon to deal with the event or process of their child turning into an adult, which presents the risk of parental loss of control over the child. The issue of parental control comes to the fore in societies where "successful parenting" is a (self-centered) cultural task that is important for the self-identity of an adult. In

societies where parental control is a natural part of everyday life, however, the transition to adulthood may be of little special concern. Also relevant is the observation that Western psychology has assumed the guise of a “worried parent” (what is wrong with the adolescent attitude) and meted out a stigmatizing view of adolescence as “troublesome,” “naïve,” and “idealistic” (p. 272). This outlook has served to support and reinforce the stance on how to cope with adolescents.

It is little known that G. Stanley Hall acknowledged the influence of culture in adolescents’ expression and experience of storm and stress and contended that this upheaval was more likely to occur in the USA than in societies with more conservative traditions (Arnett 1999). Although the universality and predictability of the storm and stress assertion have been increasingly questioned, its influence on the study of adolescence lingers even today, especially in the Western world. This is perhaps because the developmental task of individuation and separation is embedded in the ideal of the independent “self” and the need to establish a distinct identity. The importance of the stage of adolescence for establishing autonomy and identity is well recognized in the West and adolescence is considered as the period when relationships with parents are redefined and renegotiated, and conflict is inevitable. The ideal parent–adolescent relationship is deemed less hierarchical and deemphasizes parental authority. Peer influences are considered the strongest during this stage. Autonomy, a cherished developmental task needs to be constantly negotiated and is a contentious issue (Arnett 2002). The predominant Western view thus projects adolescents as striving for autonomy and independence from parents and desiring more relatedness with peers (Albert et al. 2004).

For people in non-Western societies, this depiction would appear largely at odds with their lived realities. The next section offers an overview of adolescence in a cross-cultural context.

## Cross-Cultural Variability in Adolescence

Adolescence is a cultural universal in that the onset of puberty is a biological marker of transition from childhood to adulthood. Social adolescence, however, is a product of cultural beliefs and expectations, thereby introducing variability in the meaning and interpretation of the phase across cultures. “Culture is not just another variable in the mix: The formal and informal socialization practices that transmit culture to adolescents are essential factors in making them what they are” (Schlegel and Barry 1991, p. 287). The unequivocal recognition of the cultural intricacies of human development and the recent cross-cultural project on World of Youth (Brown et al. 2002) have drawn renewed attention to the need to study and understand adolescence as a culturally shaped phase of human development.

Historically, anthropology, a field with culture at its core, has contributed significantly to the study of adolescence highlighting the cultural influences. Margaret Mead’s project in Samoa (Mead 1928) was a forerunner followed by seminal works such as the Harvard Adolescent Project and the Adolescent Socialization Project in

the mid-to late 1970s (Schlegel and Hewlett 2011). Such projects have illuminated the cultural influences on adolescence, deliberate and informal, transacted through family, school, religious bodies, as well as neighborhoods, peers, and the media. The Adolescent Socialization Project revealed the universality of the stage in terms of a socially demarcated period across the 186 non-Western societies compared. It addressed aspects such as the adolescent's sense of self, relationships with parents and with peers, and the ways in which different cultures prepare adolescents for sex, marriage, and adult work. Sex differences were highlighted in that across societies the adolescence of boys is different and usually longer than that of girls (Schlegel and Barry 1991). In general, ethnographical accounts of adolescence have revealed that across cultures there are some common issues of adolescence, for example, looking forward to adulthood while still dependent; unmated sexual responsiveness; and greater involvement with peers. Cultural differences, however, occur in the interpretation and experience of these issues. Developmental transition from childhood to adulthood is a universal phenomenon, which is marked by culture-specific differences in the structure and content. Cultural structuring shapes adolescence in terms of the developmental milestones, practices that render distinctness to the period, and social roles and activities. Menarche is a significant developmental marker in agrarian societies where large numbers of children are desired and hence fertility is much valued. In an industrialized society, however, rather than puberty the emphasis may be on completion of schooling, which is seen as necessary to develop social and technical competence. In many societies, marriage is considered as a developmental marker in the sense that it signifies the end of adolescence and beginning of adulthood. The distinctness of adolescence as a stage of development also differs across cultures (Crockett 1997).

To define and explain adolescence as a cultural construct, a simple exercise to start would be to look at some of the terms used to refer to an adolescent in different societies and the connotations of such terms. The word "*teenager*" in America brings to mind images of "...recklessness, rebellion, irresponsibility, and conflict..." (Brown and Larson 2002, p. 6). In Africa, adolescence is viewed as a "way station" between childhood social apprenticeship and integration into adult social life. The formal Arabic term "*murahaqa*" signifies puberty and hence has sexual overtones. It means "to reach" or "to overtake," or in human development terms "to grow to the age of sexual maturity" (p. 210). Other terms used in common Arabic parlance are "*fata*" and "*fatar*" (14–17 years) for boys and girls, respectively, which denote the status of being unmarried and on the way to adulthood. The terms "*shabb/shabba*" (13 years-late 20s) are used to define a growing person and signify a sense of responsibility and obligation toward significant others (Booth 2002). In Japan, the period between childhood and adulthood has been given different names and meanings. The terms "*seishonen*" and "*seinen*," typically describe the younger generation; whereas the terms "*seinenki*" or "*jyudai*" are used to describe the period of adolescence. Similar ambiguities in definition are also observed in the Chinese society. The terms commonly used in these countries represent the youth at large, stage of puberty, generational status within family or the legal rights and responsibilities of the person. Hence, there is no single term that offers an unambiguous

description of adolescence. As a result of the diffused terminology, the general practice is to refer to an individual as “middle school student” or “high school student” (Stevenson and Zusho 2002), thereby indicating the importance accorded to academics in Japan and China.

Many societies have rites of passage comprising rituals and ceremonies that may be small and private or community based, to mark puberty and entry into adolescence. Rituals and ceremonies occur in traditional, less complex societies compared to more complex modern societies, and if there are any in the latter, these are mostly for boys. In many cultures, sexuality and fertility are important themes of initiation ceremonies, primarily for girls. For boys, the ceremonies symbolize responsibility, whereas for girls the themes represent both responsibility and fertility. As a rule, gender is a major organizing principle of rituals and across societies ceremonies are gender differentiated in that there are separate rituals for boys and girls (Schlegel and Barry 2015). Some examples of traditional rituals are conducting a pseudo marriage ceremony when girls reach puberty in Kerala, South India (Verma 2000), wearing half sari in Andhra Pradesh, South India after a girl attains puberty (Dube 1998), and circumcision of 10–12 year old boys in Kaguru tribe in Eastern Africa (Gardiner et al. 1998). The harsh nature of some rituals represents adult supervision and authority as the adolescent begins to contribute to the family. Boys need to learn to be men and girls women, hence adolescents in these societies are observed to spend more time with adults. Whether or not rituals are performed, adolescents in traditional societies transition into a new life stage in which responsibilities increase and serious preparation for adult roles begins. In modern societies, such as the US, for example, rituals and ceremonies are absent. The transition from childhood to adulthood is gradual and marked by various events such as wearing particular clothing or taking ballroom dancing, depending upon individual choice (Schlegel and Barry 2015).

The cross-cultural differences in adolescence are dealt in considerable detail in projects such as *The World's Youth* (Brown et al. 2002). Presented here are some random broad strokes from the book, especially pertaining to family. The African society projects an adolescent that is the product of the indigenous as well as the exogenous. The indigenous conception views the stage as a distinct period of development during which there is definitive preparation for adult status. Parental expectations (in accordance with gender and age of the adolescent) are the cornerstone of family relationships. Parental authority is viewed as being in adolescents' own interest and hence as a parental right (Nsamenang 2002). In China and Japan, the traditional perspective considers family as most significant. Youth engage in regular communication with parents and have a favorable perception of the relationship. Yet, with the changes that the two societies are undergoing, for example, the effects of the one-child policy in China and decrease in family size in Japan, adolescents are becoming more self-centered. The social interdependence is thus giving way to greater emphasis on individualism (Stevenson and Zusho 2002). Southeast Asian societies (e.g., Indonesia, Philippines) place great value on family solidarity and social relationships, which has sustained despite social change. Family ties, sacrifices for the family, and dependence on the family are accepted,



and work to reduce stress that may accompany the growth process (Maria 2002). In Arab societies, adolescence is viewed as a process of learning responsibility and agency in a web of relationships. Family connectivity and group primacy are upheld, and children are socialized to bear lifelong responsibility for the family; the self is experienced in connection with others. Gender roles are firmly in place. Males are assigned the task of control and responsibility for their female kin, and the female members in turn accept male kin as their protectors and perform tasks in their service. The patriarchal system is resilient, sons are more valued than daughters, and family structure is strongly hierarchical (in Saudi Arabia) (Booth 2002). Latin American countries have witnessed significant social and economic changes in the last two decades. Important markers that denote the end of adolescence and entry into adulthood include leaving home, living with partner, and forming a family. Adolescents continue to live with their parents, often for economic reasons, and do not really become independent until they are married (Welti 2002).

The diverse terms used to denote the phase of adolescence, the different rites of passage across different cultures, and the different priorities and tasks emphasized thus give us an indication of the indigenous meanings attached to adolescence in different cultural contexts. Adolescence is thus lived and experienced differently in Western and non-Western societies. Cultural variability in adolescence is indisputable, presenting a tapestry of varied hues that comprise diverse patterns across the world, not only between, but also within cultures. The cultural outlooks are interwoven and reflected in socialization in the family and mediate the parent–adolescent relationship.

## **Adolescent Socialization in Cross-Cultural Context**

Socialization precepts and practices evolve from and reflect the cultural worldview and are also responsive to changes in the sociodemographic context. Adolescent socialization involves conscious focus on inculcating culturally appropriate behaviors, beliefs, values, and attitudes, with the goal of preparing adolescents for adult roles. The adolescent is trying to meet the changing demands of adult socialization, and simultaneously experiencing rapid developmental changes in physical, psychological, and socioemotional domains. Developmental changes during adolescence are associated with the idea of decreasing dependence on parents and increasing adoption of adult-like roles, albeit in harmony with cultural models of human development. Cultural outlooks permeate family interactions and relationships. The following section discusses the key elements of the parent–adolescent relationship in a cross-cultural context.



### ***Parent–Adolescent Relationship in Cross-Cultural Context: Authority, Autonomy, and Differences***

The socialization process unfolds in the context of parent–adolescent relationship, which is embedded in the cultural and socioeconomic contexts. Western, Euro-American societies adopt the independent developmental model, emphasizing an individualistic orientation and the need to establish a unique identity, distinct from parents. In concurrence with this perspective, autonomy in terms of separation from parents is the key developmental task during adolescence. Research with parent–adolescent dyads in Western societies has shown that parents are more concerned about authority and adolescents are preoccupied with seeking autonomy from parents (Jensen and Dost-Gozkan 2015). The achievement of autonomy is regarded as a crucial psychosocial developmental issue, and appropriate parental support for autonomy is associated with positive developmental outcomes (Zimmer-Gembeck and Collins 2003). A more recent perspective, however, departs from the long prevalent predominant view in Western societies that adolescents are preoccupied with seeking independence from family, and instead contends that complete autonomy from parents has adverse effect on adolescent development. What is advocated instead is a judicious balance between autonomy and relatedness such that adolescents develop independence within a supportive family context (Greenfield et al. 2003). Autonomy development is increasingly conceptualized less in terms of distancing from parental influence and more in terms of parents' input in encouraging age-appropriate autonomy within a warm and supportive family climate, with close ties with parents (Soenens et al. 2007). This notion is endorsed by several developmental researchers who have emphasized that development of autonomy does not necessitate severing ties with parents (e.g., Grotevant and Cooper 1986; McElhaney and Allen in press; Steinberg and Silverberg 1986; Yeh et al. 2009; Zimmer-Gembeck and Collins 2003). A balance between separation and connectedness contributes to psychological maturity in adolescents in terms of self-awareness, sensitivity to others, and capacity for managing new situations (Bekker and Van Assen 2006).

In East Asian societies (China, Japan), interdependence is predominant and parent–child relationship is characterized by connectedness. Parents are perceived as authority figures symbolizing wisdom. Parent–child relationship is built around the elements of duty, respect, obligation, obedience, and compliance with parents' wish (Trommsdorf and Kornadt 2003). Evidently, relatedness rather than autonomy is much valued in non-Western societies. The relevance of autonomy as a key developmental task during adolescence has thus been questioned in the context of non-Western societies. At the same time, it is acknowledged that preparation for adult roles entails developing some degree of autonomy, and hence it is a period when relationships with parents may need to be redefined. Both autonomy and relatedness are basic human needs across societies. The combination of these two needs manifests as the autonomous-related self that is described in Chap. 1. This

self-construal offers the possibility to satisfy both basic needs and is hence considered optimal for development (Kagitcibasi 1996, 2013).

In this same vein, cross-cultural research has highlighted the relevance of autonomy in non-Western societies, albeit in different forms and with different timelines. Globalization is likely to create greater discrepancy in parents' and adolescents' views on cultural values of autonomy and authority, and hence these issues acquire prominence (Jensen et al. 2011). In association with cultural values and norms, variations, both within and between cultures are prevalent in notions pertaining to the particular form of autonomy that may be regarded as appropriate and how much autonomy is considered optimal (Zimmer-Gembeck and Collins 2003). In interdependent societies comprising hierarchical social structures and respect to authority, the notion of autonomy is likely to be interpreted differently from Western contexts. Empirical research has consistently demonstrated the differentials in adolescent autonomy between Euro-American and non-Western populations. For example, in comparison with Euro-American adolescents, non-Western adolescents (Filipino and Mexican) tend to de-emphasize autonomy, show greater deference to parental authority, and are reluctant to openly disagree with parents. They also have later expectations for autonomy than their European counterparts (Fuligni 1998).

Cross-cultural research has explored and put forth different models of autonomy that may be more congruent in interdependent cultures. Accordingly, distinctions are made with reference to the nature of autonomy that may be encouraged in different cultures. For instance, Soenens et al. (2007) have presented the concepts of parental promotion of independence (PI) and parental promotion of volitional functioning (PVF). PI emphasizes an individualized view of how adolescents relate to their own parents and to other adults. The concept involves encouragement of self-reliance in decision making regarding behaviors and values, and the development of independence at the expense of connection with parents. PVF refers to behaviors that support adolescents to rely increasingly on their own decision making and that encourage the internalization of culturally important values. Zimmer-Gembeck et al. (2011) have put forth yet another dimension of autonomy termed as "voice." Based on the premise that autonomy thrives in positive social relationships, the authors consider the capacity to articulate one's opinions, needs, and feelings in interactions with others (parents or partners in intimate relationships) as one component of autonomy. Yet another model of autonomy advanced in the context of non-western societies (e.g., Taiwan, China) is the dual representation of autonomy as individuating autonomy (IA) and relating autonomy (RA), with the possibility of co-existence of both within an individual. The model views autonomy as constituting cognitive, functional, and emotional capacities that contribute to volitional capacity, a key constituent of autonomy. Individuating autonomy involves volitional capacity to act against social constraints and to achieve a distinct identity, whereas relating autonomy refers to volitional capacity that is expressed in favor of harmony of self-in-relation to others, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and self-transcendence. IA focuses on volitional achievement of personal goals and individuality; RA involves reflection and consideration of opinions of

significant others into one's own self-identity, however, it is different from conformity and compliance. The two forms are posited as intertwined capacities and an individual may use both, thereby satisfying needs of individuality and connectedness (Yeh et al. 2007). Along similar lines, Miller (2003) has argued for a distinction between personal and social autonomy. Personal agency is linked with acting in a self-directed manner, whereas social agency is related to acting on the basis of social requirements and expectations and is likely to be more prevalent in interdependent cultures.

An issue closely related to the cultural meaning and significance of autonomy is that of parental support in this regard. Given the primacy of autonomy in Western contexts, parental support for autonomy development has been associated with positive developmental outcomes for adolescents (e.g., Soenens et al. 2007). In non-Western contexts, however, the notion and domains of support for autonomy are likely to be different. Marbell (2014) discusses four components of autonomy support for adolescents that may be applicable in non-Western contexts. These are as follows: (1) Perspective taking, which refers to taking children's point of view and empathizing with their thoughts and feelings, thereby promoting children's feelings of being heard and hence more likely to agree with the parents' views. (2) Provision of choice, involves providing children with choice, and hence reducing feelings of being coerced, and instead promotes a sense of agency. (3) Allowance of decision making refers to including children's inputs in the decision-making process, as opposed to a unilateral decision by parents, although this may run counter to values such as deference to parental authority. (4) Allowance of open exchange, involve parents allowing children to express their views, thereby facilitating the feeling of being heard. It is relevant to note, however, that some of these components may not be effective in interdependent cultures if these are viewed as promoting independence (rather than volitional functioning) as the former is likely to conflict with the cultural values of respect for hierarchy and connectedness.

Along with the sociocultural context, socioeconomic background also bears upon the extent to which autonomy and relatedness are emphasized and encouraged, and what form of autonomy is dominant. Variations in socialization goals and practices are likely to occur within a society, for example, among different socioeconomic groups and on account of social change (Greenfield et al. 2003). For example, cross-cultural research across different sociocultural and socioeconomic contexts (Germany, USA, Cameroon, and India) has revealed that mothers from urban middle class contexts consider autonomous goals as more significant than do mothers in rural settings. It is likely that autonomy may be perceived as a more useful competence in an urban educated middle class setting, and hence its value as a socialization goal (Kärtner et al. 2007). Similarly, Chinese parents are observed to modify their socialization goals and practices related to socioemotional development to achieve success in the rapidly changing economic and social contexts. Shyness has been a traditionally valued quality in the Chinese society, which is rather incompatible with a market-oriented society that lays emphasis on individual initiative and competitiveness. Consequently, parents are encouraged to expand

their childrearing goals to include development of autonomy and independence (e.g., expression of personal opinion, self-confidence) which will bring success in an increasingly competitive environment (Chen and Chen 2010).

Intricately related to adolescent autonomy is the notion of parental authority. Parenting and parent–child relationship may be viewed along the continuum of authority-autonomy. Cultural values influence the meaning of authority and introduce variation in the ways in which parents and adolescents perceive it. Cultures that value interdependence tend to place greater emphasis on parental authority and control than cultures that value independence. Asian-American parents are likely to use authoritarian parenting focusing on obedience and conformity more than Euro-American parents. For example, in keeping with the Confucian ideology in the Chinese society, childrearing practices are based on indigenous concepts that denote “to train” and “to govern and to love”. Parents are highly involved in their children’s lives and show much care and concern. Parental authority and control are thus interpreted as reflecting parents’ care, concern, and involvement in children, with such practices viewed as instrumental in preventing child misbehavior (Chao 1994, 2000). A similar pattern was revealed in a study comparing maternal and adolescent attachment in India and Germany, wherein Indian mothers manifested a balance of acceptance and control in their parenting styles. Further, Indian adolescents interpreted parental control and care as care and protection, which was contrary to German adolescents who viewed it as overprotection and constraint. Hence, unlike in Western societies, parental control and warmth are seen to be related, with authority and control bearing a positive connotation (Albert et al. 2004).

Besides cultural values, socioeconomic background also influences the interpretation of parental authority and control. High-risk settings such as dangerous neighborhoods are characterized by stricter control and lesser autonomy, which is not viewed as psychologically controlling; whereas strictness in low-risk settings is viewed as psychologically controlling (McElhaney and Allen in press). Implementation and legitimization of parental authority require active participation of the child and involves mutual acknowledgement of expectations (Kuhar and Reiter 2013). Further, as discussed in Chap. 1, authority is enacted in an interactional, bidirectional context. Hence, the perspective of the child is necessary to understand the dynamics of parenting and parent–child relationship.

The phenomena of adolescent autonomy and parental authority, and the cultural differentials therein come to the fore especially in the context of interpersonal disagreements. For example, adolescents with higher individuating autonomy are found to be more inclined to express disagreements with parents, thereby leading to greater frequency of interpersonal conflict (Yeh et al. 2007). The next section discusses cultural variability in the interpretation and resolution styles of interpersonal disagreements.

### ***Interpersonal Disagreements: An Inevitable Phenomenon***

The tension between the adolescent's demand for autonomy and the parent's assertion of authority resulting in heightened parent–adolescent disagreements in Western contexts is well documented (e.g., Goossens 2006; Smetana 1988). The Western perspective contends that such events are instrumental in the adolescent's achievement of the developmental task of autonomy and individuation through disengagement from parents and family. In Western societies, parent–adolescent conflict is regarded as a precursor to individuation and separation which is a salient goal during adolescence. Cross-cultural research has nevertheless demonstrated the ubiquity of adolescent-parent disagreements (e.g., Schlegel and Barry 1991). Further, the ways in which conflicts are resolved reveals parents' approach to adolescent autonomy. Direct expression of conflict is more common in cultures that value individual autonomy, while in cultures that value relational harmony, conflict is avoided through strategies such as compliance, negotiation, or withdrawal (Markus and Lin 1999). In non-Western collectivist societies that emphasize connection and subordination, adolescent-parent conflicts are likely to occur as the autonomy that is expected during adulthood conflicts with the cultural orientation of connection and subordination (Schlegel 2011). Conflicts are also likely to arise from adolescents' greater inclination toward futuristic global norms and values as sources of identity, which may run counter to traditional parental identities and expectations (Nsamenang 2011). Cross-cultural research has reported similarities in the themes of parent–adolescent disagreements. Disagreements occur on everyday mundane and petty issues (Fuligni 1998; Yau and Smetana 1996, 2003) such as daily home chores, physical appearance, schoolwork, interactions with friends, siblings, and other family members (Kapadia and Miller 2005).

Although disagreements with parents characterize adolescents' lives in all societies with much commonality in the topics of disagreements, cultural differences are observed in the interpretation and resolution of the same. According to Markus and Lin (1999) cultures stressing individual autonomy accept open contradiction and expression of one's point of view to understand disagreements better. In non-Western societies where the period of adolescence is short and youth are given adult responsibilities or privileges sooner, conflict may not be relevant in the same way (Schlegel and Barry 1991). In most non-Western societies, the ideal of human development is oriented more toward interdependence and connection, and the socialization goals are shaped correspondingly. For example, Latin and Chinese societies emphasize family solidarity and parental authority and value traits such as obedience and respect for elders (Fuligni and Zhang 2004; Harkness and Super 2002; Markus and Lin 1999; Phinney et al. 2000). In such contexts, adolescents are found to emphasize negotiation with parents rather than self-assertion in situations of conflict.

Much research has compared differences and similarities in parent–adolescent relationships, disagreements and their subsequent resolution on the basis of the individualist versus collectivist orientation. For example, Phinney et al. (2005)

analyzed the influence of cultural values in the resolution of hypothetical parent–adolescent disagreements among European-American, Mexican-American, Armenian-American and Korean-American families. Although the reasoning of young individuals across all groups indicated both autonomy and relatedness, the European-Americans were more self-oriented and assertive, whereas adolescents from the ethnic minority groups were more other-oriented and made reference to family respect and closeness. Similarly, a study that investigated the beliefs, expectations, and relationships with parents in the context of autonomy granting by parents among adolescents from Mexican, Chinese, Filipino, and European backgrounds residing in America revealed that adolescents from non-European backgrounds did not openly contradict parents in case of a disagreement (Fuligni 1998).

It is known that cultures with collectivist orientations apply cooperative and harmonious styles of resolving disagreements, and focus on reducing any arising tension, whereas cultures with individualist orientation resolve disagreements through open expression of views. The process of resolution reveals how adolescent autonomy is interpreted and dealt with (Collins and Steinberg 2006). Along with sociocultural outlook, the socioeconomic context also intervenes in the process of resolution of disagreements and perhaps the outcome as well. For instance, in the family model of psychological interdependence that may generally prevail in cultures that privilege relatedness, and in which material dependencies may weaken but psychological interdependencies are sustained, the socialization goals and approaches are likely to be directed toward either reducing conflict or render the process less disruptive and more in the interest of maintaining relationship harmony (Kagitcibasi 1996).

In accordance with the changing sociodemographic context, families are required to adapt their socialization goals and practices. The functional or adaptive bases of socialization are significant in understanding why certain patterns prevail in certain contexts, and how these may change to adapt to the fluctuating context. Along these lines, a large cross-cultural 30-nation study on family values, roles, and networks revealed that socioeconomic development rendered family roles and values less traditional, increased autonomy, and diluted hierarchy. This was especially observed in the context of nuclear families. Young respondents in particular rejected the authoritarian model of the father, signifying emerging autonomy in more developed educated settings in less affluent countries (Georgas et al. 2006). A macro contextual perspective is thus essential to understand adolescence, especially in the present context of rapid change. Traditionally valued goals may need to be reviewed and revised in consonance with changing contexts. Models of social change discussed in the previous chapter have considered the interactive influence of culture and context on family socialization (Greenfield et al. 2003; Kagitcibasi 1996). The social structural changes result in changing lifestyles, which in turn impact family relationships. Thus, both parents and adolescents are required to form new attitudes and behaviors that will be most conducive to meet the changing contextual demands (Kagitcibasi and Yalin 2015). Shades of such a model are

observed in the Indian society, which, like other societies in the Majority World (a term coined by Kagitcibasi to refer to the non-Western societies that make up the majority of the world's population) (Kagitcibasi 2002), is urbanizing at a rapid rate.

### **Adolescence in the Context of Globalization: “*Times Are a Changing*”**

In the present context of globalization and social change, societies are undergoing varying degrees and forms of transformations, and adolescents cannot remain insulated from this phenomenon. Present day adolescents are known as the *Millennial Generation* or the Generation Y, to indicate that they follow the Gen X (individuals born between the early 1960s and the 1980s). Although no definite dates are specified, the term *millennial* refers to individuals born between early 1980s and early 2000s. The *millennials* share three key features: living in an ultra-connected technologically advanced digital world with disappearing time and space constraints, being born into a post-communist world, and enveloped in uncertainty from shifting geopolitical balance (Havas Worldwide 2011). Stereotypes about this generation abound, and the general perception is that of a “me generation,” one that is essentially focused on self-interests.

Today, Heraclitus's famous epithet “Change is the only constant,” perhaps needs to be revised as, “Rapid change is the only constant.” The vigorous and even fleeting character of change is best witnessed in the development of new technology. Examples are as follows: the flurry in the production of different cell phone models, with I Phone and Samsung for instance vying with each other to produce even more advanced models promising novel apps (applications), computer brands competing with each other in claiming the slimmest and slickest design in laptops or tablets, the television introducing a new channel almost every other day, and the Internet producing innumerable bytes of news and views every minute. Caught in the middle of this explosion and embracing it every which way, sometimes willingly and at other times grudgingly, are our adolescents and their parents.

Developmentally adolescence is the period during which individuals are more open to diverse beliefs and values (Arnett 2002). The openness to new beliefs and values brings both opportunities and risks (Jensen 2011). Globalization and increasing modernity are also likely to create cultural gaps and conflicts between young people and their parents, especially with respect to views on parental authority and adolescent autonomy. This has been demonstrated in the immigrant contexts wherein adolescents acculturate better than adults have. Further, a gap in parent-adolescent beliefs predicted less family cohesion and more conflict in Asian Indian families (Jensen and Dost-Gozkan 2015). Present day adolescents are more vulnerable to globalization as they are experiencing a double-layered transition, one that is developmental, and the other through intersection with a world in transition



(Arnett 2006). As stated in the World Youth Report (2003), “Globalization is ultimately as complex as young people’s lives are multidimensional. The combination of the two inevitably creates an explosive and heady mix. Young people’s transitions are to varying degrees becoming increasingly open-ended, but that open-endedness is introducing an enormous assortment of complications that are making young people’s lives more difficult than ever” (p. 305).

According to Mortimer and Larson (2002), a significant developmental consequence of globalization is the lengthening of adolescent transition, especially in urban middle and upper social class contexts. Across societies, adolescents spend a greater number of years in formal education, to not only get a basic graduate degree but also postgraduate degrees or value added specializations in order to prepare for desired jobs that will bring adequate economic returns. Entry into full-time work, age at marriage, and child bearing are also delayed. These changes have led to the creation of “emerging adulthood” defined as a period of exploration and experimentation with relationships and worldviews, but also instability (Arnett 2000). “In sum, (therefore) the dawn of the twenty-first century may be considered both the best of times and the worst of times for youth, a time of ominous trends as well as new opportunities” (Mortimer and Larson 2002, p. 14).

“Growing up” in the present times is thus a unique experience as the world that young individuals inhabit today is vastly different from the previous generations. The key points of departure are globalization, technological advances and economic development (Nugent 2006), and above all the vigorous pace of change. Adolescents’ daily life increasingly comprises multiple worlds (e.g., cultural, digital, generational) with distinct codes, assumptions, goals, and meanings, which multiplies the complexities and challenges that they encounter (Larson et al. 2012).

Three trends of social change affect adolescents in particular. First is the globalization of economy, advancement of communication technology as evidenced by the growing expansion of the Internet, and territorial mobility within and between countries that is sweeping all societies of the world. Consequently, preparation for future jobs is considerably uncertain and the school to work transition is rendered more difficult. Growing individualization and pluralization of life paths and the corollary flexibility in social scripts regarding developmental goals is the second manifestation. As a result, there is lack of clear guidelines for future roles and life decisions. The third trend is the demographic changes such as decline in fertility rates and patterns of immigration or emigration (Pinquart and Silbereisen 2005). Globalization is also impacting gender equality, in turn affecting available opportunities. First, since the global economy is based on information, technology, and services, families across the world including India are increasingly beginning to believe that it is in their best economic interest to educate girls so that they may benefit from the global economy. Second, there is growing international pressure on the countries of the world to address gender discrimination and enhance gender equality (Jensen and Arnett 2012). The latter is influencing government policies and programs of education, and new prospects are progressively more available to adolescent girls.

Globalization entails both economic and cultural change (Scholte 2002). Global consumerism and global media are most associated with young people, and although they may create their own versions based on their local circumstances, they are equally influenced by it. For instance, in a recent study on attitudes toward romantic relationships in Baroda, India, young boys and girls reported being influenced by American TV shows (Athavale et al. 2016). Global brands (read Western) are attractive and consumer markets target young people in selling global brands in clothes, music, and movies. Global influences may thus outweigh local influences. The term “global youth culture,” a transdisciplinary category, is frequently used to describe and make sense of the hybrid culture and identity that is becoming characteristic of youth all over the world. New media technologies in particular are creating a context in which local and global influences interact and are reflected in young people’s lifestyles (Kahn and Kellner 2006).

Globalization is bringing about changes across the board in all life domains. Jensen (2011) discusses three aspects that are most relevant to the cultural identity of adolescents—language, diet, and media, and the global changes therein. In the present times, the popularity of English is at its peak the world over, including India. Given the colonial history, English has always been valued in India, often acting as a divide between the progressive and “*desi*” (traditional, local). Speaking in English signifies modernity, and young individuals are especially conscious of this. The tremendous need for English is observed in the proliferation of English speaking classes as also parents’ keenness to enroll their children in English medium schools. The fallout is a loss in one’s own language and the parallel adoption of a hybrid language that is amply evident in the Indian context. Food is another major domain. McDonaldization is being experienced the world over, to a greater or lesser extent. At the same time, there is a bidirectional movement of cuisine, for example, the growing popularity of Indian curry or *samosas* in many parts of the world. Adolescents thus have the opportunity to learn about all kinds of cuisine, which may have positive or harmful effects on their health. The media explosion is yet another powerful domain that is thriving under global impact. The pervasiveness of communication technology in India is impressive. Internet accessibility is growing, and cell phone use spans urban, rural, and even some tribal areas. Social networking sites such as Facebook and WhatsApp are immensely popular with adolescents (and in fact across all age groups in India), and the question, “*Hey, are you on WhatsApp??*” or the comment, “*WhatsApp me*” are commonly heard in young people’s conversations.

Adolescents are thus routinely acquainted with global cultures, which are likely to impact their everyday lives. As Jensen (2011) states, developing a cultural identity in the present times “...involves navigating both local and global cultures” (p. 65).

Arnett (2002) has discussed the possible psychological consequences of globalization on young individuals in terms of the development of a bicultural or hybrid identity, identity confusion, and self-selected cultures. Globalization has

implications on cultural identity, which involves adopting beliefs and practices of a cultural community. The diluting cultural boundaries, increasing contact (real or virtual) with other cultures, and exchange and spread of ideas across cultures render the process of acquiring cultural identity a complex one, with many pathways to choose from. The situation may result in the formation of a bicultural identity, which means that in addition to one's culture-specific local identity, individuals develop a global identity and are able to relate to information, events, and practices that occur at the global level. Further, the beliefs and practices of local cultures are themselves changing, thereby creating a multicultural world and the likelihood of a hybrid identity. Instances of a bicultural identity are evident in the Indian society wherein on the one hand Indian youth are at the forefront of the country's technological revolution, and on the other hand, they continue to prefer arranged marriages. Identity confusion may arise from difficulty in adapting to the rapid changes in one's own culture, which may seem inadequate, and simultaneously the relative alienation that one may experience in relation to the global culture, thereby creating acculturative stress leading to identity confusion (Arnett 2002; Jensen and Arnett 2012). Research with Indian adolescents has not only confirmed the development of a bicultural identity in girls and boys, but has also demonstrated its relationship with well-being (Rao et al. 2013).

As much as young people are vulnerable to global change, they are just as adaptable and hence in the best position to take advantage of the myriad opportunities that the global world is presenting. For instance, young individuals are best informed and skilled in using new information and communication technology. Globalization has brought about considerable positive change in adolescents' living conditions, especially in the urban economically well-off middle class populations. Today's global world is providing adolescents ample opportunity to know multiple cultures, either personally or through communication technology such as the Internet or TV (Jensen and Arnett 2012).

In the growing competitive world, access to resources is important and determines options and constraints, for example, in relation to factors such as gender and family socioeconomic status (Mortimer and Larson 2002). Across the world, and especially in developing societies, there are young people who do not have the economic resources to experience the many advantages of the globalizing world, yet their cultural identity and local traditions are threatened. Social class is an important mediator of young people's experience with globalization. Globalization reinforces divides, for example, in education and wealth as the availability of resources varies greatly, especially in developing countries such as India. The relationship between young people and the globalizing world is thus ambiguous (World Youth Report 2003, 2005).

Changes are also observed in adolescents' experiences of interpersonal interactions in the community and family, including the parent-adolescent relationship. Parents are making greater economic investments in adolescents, especially for education as it is perceived as an essential aspect of socialization.

There is a growing tendency to have smaller families so that the best can be offered to children. Parents are getting more involved in their adolescents’ everyday lives and are increasingly acquainted with their activities. In terms of disciplining, there is a trend toward decreasing parental authority and control, and increase in responsiveness to the needs of the adolescent, with more democratic and open communication. At the same time, generational discrepancy in parent–adolescent perspectives is evident, and brings with it misunderstandings and interpersonal conflict (Larson et al. 2002).

In general, social change has multiple, complex influences on institutions and individuals. This is especially true of the Indian society with its variegated, multilayered social structure. A single depiction of the Indian adolescent is difficult to derive, instead what emerges are “kaleidoscopic images” that represent different regions and socioeconomic contexts (Verma and Saraswathi 2002, p. 105). The next section discusses how adolescence has been interpreted in the traditional Indian-Hindu model of development and in the contemporary context.

## **Adolescence in the Indian Cultural Milieu**

This section depicts how adolescence was construed in traditional India, followed by a description of adolescence in contemporary Indian context.

### ***Adolescence in the Indian-Hindu Model of Development***

In the Hindu model of human development, a child begins to be regarded as a person only when he or she is able to study and understand the scriptures. Hence, early adolescence is considered as the first stage in the developmental life cycle. Although there are specific stages and rituals to signify the period of childhood, according to the Hindu worldview, a young child is not considered a person before one is able to study and understand the scriptures. This process is initiated during *Brahmacharya* with the onset of a period of learning, when a child enters school and continues until he or she has finished all schooling. “*Brahmacharya*” is considered important for apprenticeship and acquiring knowledge of the tasks of adult life (Kakar 1981). The stage also included the practice of celibacy connoting chastity which is necessary for the purpose of learning from a *guru* (teacher), and during later stages of life for the purposes of attaining spiritual liberation (*moksha*). For example, in traditional India, boys (in rare cases, girls) in the “*brahmacharya*” stage were sent to a “*gurukul*” (home of the teacher) to acquire knowledge of “*shastras* and *vedas*” (Hindu religious scriptures) and also to groom themselves in other required tasks such as warfare. In contemporary India, this may be compared to the present day education system that readies the adolescent to achieve career

goals successfully in order to gain adult identity. The term *Kishorawastha* is used to refer to the pubescent child and *Yuvawastha* refers to youth. The goal of *Kishorawastha* is to acquire knowledge, build character, and to learn to shoulder responsibilities. This period of life is considered significant for moral development and a time to set and pursue one's personal goals (Chakkarath 2005).

In consonance with the Hindu developmental model of “individual-in-social-world” discussed in the previous chapter (Saraswathi et al. 2011), the developmental task of the Indian adolescent is not to separate but to strengthen emotional bonds (Larson et al. 2003), and develop a relational, familial self (Roland 1988). As discussed in Chap. 1, the Indian self evolves in a complex context, changing its form across the life span. The relational dimension is valued until the stage of householder or *Grahasthya Ashrama*, whereas the spiritual self is emphasized in later life. The dominant developmental framework is one of interdependencies, within which autonomy is conceptualized and performed. In the present times, the dynamic and consistent interactions between culture and context are influencing the traditional outlook.

### *Adolescence in Contemporary Indian Society*

In the Indian society, the terms “young people” or “youth” refer to adolescents and young adults. In recent years, youth as a phase of life has received considerable attention in India because of three main reasons. First, according to the 2011 census youth 13–35 years form 65% of the Indian population; second, the view that youth are most vulnerable to the HIV-AIDS pandemic, and third the recognition that youth are a valuable human resource and potential contributors to the development of the nation (Census of India 2011; Kapadia and Bhangaokar 2013). The significance of this developmental period is well recognized and accepted, not only by academicians but also, or especially, by policy-makers, particularly because of the instrumental value of this segment in contributing to national development (Saraswathi and Oke 2013). The present government is making every effort to take the youth in its fold to contribute to their own development and in turn that of the country. The age group of 15–29 years comprises 27.5% of the total youth population (National Youth Policy 2014). Adolescence is characterized by immense diversity because of wide-ranging disparities in social and economic class, caste, education level, gender, and geographical location—rural, urban, or tribal. Such diversity renders any attempts to generalize about Indian adolescence a difficult task.

Adolescence as a distinct stage of development involving preparation for adulthood characterized by a world segregated apart from adults is largely a cultural construction of technological and industrial societies in the twentieth century (Arnett 2002). In contrast to this, many non-Western societies such as India are characterized by child-adult continuity, in turn leading to the absence of adolescence as a distinct phase or stage, the latter mainly because of greater similarity in life course and continuity in expectations from childhood to adulthood.

Saraswathi's (1999) discussion on the question of the existence of adolescence as a distinct stage in the Indian society highlights relevant aspects. She contends that notwithstanding some observable markers of the social transition to adulthood, the existence of a distinct stage of adolescence similar to Western societies is a recent development, essentially observable in upper social classes. In the same vein, Kaur et al. (2001) have observed that "...childhood for majority of the Indian children is truncated and adolescence is seldom experienced" (p. 206).

According to Saraswathi (1999), child-adult continuity in the Indian society occurs differentially depending upon social class and gender, with greater continuity evident in lower social classes and among girls. From a young age, girls are socialized to be "good" mothers and "good" wives, and assigned tasks of sibling care. In the midst of this continuity, however, there is a short phase of transition before marriage, when the girl is specially trained to assume greater responsibility for household tasks with a view to prepare her to meet well the requirements of the conjugal family. Verma (2000) has also highlighted the continuity in transition for boys in families engaged in traditional occupations. In case of boys, although they enjoy the privilege of being a male child in a patriarchal society with its advantages such as more freedom, more leisure time and little involvement in household tasks, they bear the burden of beginning to earn at an early age to support the family, which causes not only a diminished possibility of adolescence, but also curtails childhood.

In middle and upper social classes in urban India, child-adult continuity is diluted and the distinctness of the adolescent phase becomes evident. The facilitating factors include parental encouragement for education and career, increased opportunity for interactions with peers, increased mobility, and access to consumer goods (Saraswathi 1999). Although the dominant developmental framework is one of interdependencies, the dynamic and consistent interactions between culture and context are influencing traditional outlooks, including notions of autonomy and authority.

The gender factor continues to play a role with greater emphasis on traditional gender role training and performance for girls. Although both boys and girls are encouraged for education, there is greater emphasis on career building for boys (Saraswathi 1999). In general, across social classes more freedom and authority are accorded to boys than girls. In matters of romantic relationships, boys are provided more flexibility, whereas for girls the boundaries are firmly etched. Both boys and girls in urban middle class families have more leisure time, however, girls are more occupied with home-based interests and hobbies and boys are observed to engage in outdoor activities, which in turn provides more opportunities for autonomy (Verma and Sharma 2006). In nuclear families where mothers were educated, girls' experience in the family was more favorable. In general, social change is bringing about greater democratization in urban middle class families in India (Larson et al. 2003).

Social class is a relevant factor to consider in the conceptualization and interpretation of adolescence in the Indian society. The complexities and opportunities of global influences are best observed in urban upper middle class populations in India, a segment that is growing at a rapid rate. An overview of the urban Indian

middle class has been presented in Chap. 1. The following section profiles the middle class in Baroda, Gujarat, defining the specific context in which the adolescents' lives are situated.

## The Urban Middle Class in Baroda, Gujarat

The adolescents in this book represent the urban upper middle class context in Baroda, Gujarat. One of the fastest growing states, Gujarat is a microcosm of India in terms of rapid economic growth, increasing consumerism and aspirations for upward mobility. Considered a part of the “golden corridor” of Gujarat, Vadodara or Baroda is the third largest city in Gujarat and mirrors the state in its economic and industrial growth, resulting in growing prosperity of the middle class. The city has a population of 1,670,806 (Census of India 2011).

Known as the *sanskari nagari*—cultured city, Baroda is viewed as the cultural capital of Gujarat and as an educational hub, with many activities centered on The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, which was set up in 1947 by the erstwhile ruler of Baroda Shri Sayajirao Gaekwad. Historically the city has been home to renowned scholars and artists, which has resulted in a rich cultural and educational legacy. In the early 1960s, Baroda experienced a fillip in industrial growth, which has strengthened over the years and continues to draw entrepreneurs from all over India. The recent years have also seen growing numbers of multinationals and expatriates in the city. Overall, the economic, educational, and cultural opportunities and experiences that the city offers continue to attract people from all over the world, thereby sustaining its cosmopolitan character. Visitors and newcomers to Baroda view the average Barodian as being open-minded and hospitable. Although Gujarati is the official language, Hindi, Marathi, and English are also widely used. Hinduism is the majority religion in Baroda city with 85.39% followers. Baroda has high average literacy of 90.36% (Census of India 2011). Education is valued and most middle class individuals are likely to have a graduate degree. As a rule, an overwhelming majority of young people from upper middle class families study in reputed English medium schools. Later these students prefer to be enrolled into The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, although there are other recently established private universities that are also gaining popularity. Baroda enjoys a reputation of being a safe city. This image is validated by the recent report of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) Crime in India 2015 which has designated Baroda as the third safest city for women in India (National Crime Records Bureau 2016).

The city's links with Western countries, mostly the USA and the UK, are vibrant, with every third family in Baroda having relatives in either of these or even other Western countries. Non-resident Indians (NRIs) or Non-resident Gujaratis (NRGs) are an integral segment of the city's population, and much economic and social activity around the winter season, known as the “NRI season” in popular parlance, is centered on visiting NRI relatives and friends. Along with globalization



and the significance attached to education, this is perhaps another factor that inspires and drives many young individuals to go abroad for higher education, with families encouraging and supporting this aspiration.

Most upper middle class families in Baroda live in what is known as “societies” or “colonies” that comprise a set of houses or apartment buildings within a designated geographical territory. A typical middle class household is well furnished with all amenities including a refrigerator, television, music player, and an air-cooler, and more recently, even an air-conditioner to deal with intense summer months. It is increasingly common for young people to have their own room, sometimes shared with a sibling. Ownership of at least two vehicles, a two-wheeler and a car (sometimes even two cars), is common. Family outings to restaurants and movies are regular, especially on weekends and holidays. Van Wessel (2011) explains how modernity is understood in Baroda middle class. In discussing social and cultural change, people indicate a divide of “people of old thinking” and “people of new thinking” (p. 104). People of old thinking are projected as those who follow tradition without thinking, and English terms such as “orthodox,” or “narrow minded” are used to describe them. For young Barodians modern outlook signifies gender and caste ideals that depart from “outdated” tradition. It represents flexibility, practicability, and living life in tune with the changing times. The adolescents and families portrayed in this book represent such middle class families.

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