

Indian Socio-Cultural Conception of Wisdom: Does it Follow Universal Understanding?

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Abstract

There is growing interest in the concept of wisdom as an ideal end point of development in psychological science. However, in its fourth decade still, the biggest concern is to reach the consensus about its definition and description. The present study focuses on wisdom descriptors from Indian adolescents and adults' perspective and comparing it with the global conception. Total 170 participants (87 adolescents and 83 adults) were asked to provide the names that they consider wise and characteristics of their wise nominees. For matching with global conception, twenty-five wisdom descriptors were taken from previous researches and participants were asked to identify them as of the wise person. Results suggested some of the convergence with the global understanding but some very intriguing findings were observed when age and education differences were taken into the consideration. Most importantly, adolescents stressed the value of success led personal growth and societal upliftment, whereas as adults gave more weight to the knowledge bearer and having a vision.

Keywords: Adolescent, wisdom, Eastern conception, Implicit approach, Indian nominees, Socio-cultural creation, wisdom-descriptors

Recent efforts to understand the concept of wisdom have brought better insight and attracted the attention of several researchers in psychological science in this concept. However, different ways of exploration and understanding have presented different opinions, most of them are, at least, in the consensus that wisdom deals with high level of insight in real life situations (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Sternberg, 1998) and may differ in their approaches according to culture to culture (Sanchez-Escobedo, Park, Hollingworth, Misiuniene, & Ivanova, 2014).

Two major approaches have been adopted to study this concept by researchers, however the first approach can be perceived as a ladder for second or complementary to each other. The first approach which is being called subjective or implicit approach (Staudinger & Glück, 2011, overview in Bluck & Glück, 2005) takes the perspectives and understanding on “what is the meaning of wise”, “who are the wise” and “what are descriptors of wise” from the laypersons' perspectives. This approach has very important implication in itself for understanding and defining the wisdom. Firstly, since wisdom has been widely discussed in almost all religious and philosophical literature (Baltes, 2004) it works as guiding lamp post in human conduct. Hence it is carried throughout generations in the different forms, such as fairy tale in childhood to the proverb in adult and old ages. Second, wisdom is so much everywhere that without taking layperson perspective it would be difficult to understand its real-life manifestation, and “...the notion of “wisdom” has such a rich ideational history and carries so many religious and philosophical associations that it almost seems to defy any attempt at empirical study”(Staudinger & Glück, 2011).

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Thirdly, the act of wisdom is not the objective rather consensual matter (Habermas, 1970); an act is being defined as wise is largely based on collective opinion. Getting its root from understanding through first approach second major approach, called the explicit or empirical study, aimed to objective identification and quantification of wisdom characteristics or wise acts when it is expressed (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000).

Implicit approach: Wise people (exemplar) and Wisdom Characteristics (prototype)

In 2011 review Staudinger and Glück wrote that the two approaches followed in implicit researches are a descriptor-rating method (prototype-based approach) and people's perceptions of actual instances of wisdom in themselves or others (exemplar approach). The descriptor-rating method has yielded a long list of characteristics, which are considered to be a component of wisdom. Similarly, many studies have reported common trends in wisdom nominations of people and instances. Jason et al. (2001) reported that most participants nominated persons as wise whom they knew personally such as teacher and relatives and most nominated persons were male (66%). Characteristics of wise nominees were categorized as 'drive/tenacity/leadership, insight/spiritual, smart and being loving, reliable/practical, creative/curious, open, light-hearted and with interpersonal skills. Similarly, Ardel (2008) found that nominated wise individuals by 39 students were largely (78%) male, independent of nominators' gender. In their description of wise person's characteristics, Ardel's students identified wise persons as having an understanding of life, deep knowledge rather than more knowledge, calmness when dealing with difficult life situations, giving advice through laying out all possibilities, gaining wisdom through experiences, the ability of self-reflection, and compassionate and empathetic. Nominations of wise people may differ on the basis of nominators' ethnocultural and professional backgrounds. In the Western culture Mahatma Gandhi, Benjamin Franklin, Gautam Buddha, Winston Churchill, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, Confucius, Jesus Christ, Abraham Lincoln, King Solomon, and Nelson Mandela are some prominently identifies as wise persons (Baltes, 2004; Paulhus, Wehr, Harms, & Strasser, 2002; Weststrate, Ferrari & Ardel, 2016).

Implicit approach and individual differences in conception of wisdom

Implicit studies have approached wisdom with various age, gender, education and occupations associations (Bluck & Glück, 2005). Most of the studies have reported no gender differences in their understanding of wisdom, consistently (Glück, Strasser, & Bluck, 2009). Recently Glück and Bluck (2011) reported the gender difference in the weight given to the affective component while defining the wisdom.

Age is always given more focus in studying wisdom, due to its intuitive relationship with old age. As previously mentioned that performance on wisdom task did not increase with age, further insight provided by findings from Pasupathi, Staudinger, and Baltes's (2001) research that seeds of wisdom emerge in early adolescent and increase with age till 20 years of age, though, no significant increase was found after the 20s. But it is also accepted that there is a developmental sequence in acquiring wisdom related to higher criteria which comes with the age by refining previous knowledge and experience (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). There may be variability also in which act would be called wise, such as, Glück, Bluck, Baron and McAdams (2005) found that adolescents (15-20 yrs) recalled those situations where empathy and support were provided to others as form of wisdom, early midlife adults (30-40yrs) recalled those situations where they had taken important life decisions, and older (60-70yrs) recalled those situations where they negotiated with life situations with knowledge as form of wisdom.

Age is given more weightage in wisdom nomination also. Peoples identified certain acts as wise when respondent was older (Knight & Parr, 1999) and nominated wise peoples mostly who had crossed 50 yrs of age (Ardel, 2008; Jason, Reichler, King, Madsen, Camacho et al., 2001; Weststrate et al., 2016; including top 15 nominees from Paulhus et al., 2002).

Implicit approach and cultural differences in conception of Wisdom

Differences in several levels have been pointed out in relation to wisdom concept, especially with culture (Yang, 2008a; see overview Yang, 2011a). Evolution, growth, and manifestation of wisdom occur within the cultural framework (Staudinger, 1996). In the West, reasoning ability, learning from ideas and environment, judgment, expeditious use of information, (North American concept, Sternberg, 1985), exceptional understanding along with interpersonal skills (Canadian concept, Holliday & Chandler, 1986) spirituality, acts of serving and caring and reasoning (Hispanic conception, Valdez, 1994) and in German conception wisdom reflected in the way of dealing with life events, especially in negative events (Bluck & Glück, 2004).

The emphasis on the East is on broad competency with the benevolent and empathetic attitude towards other (Taiwanese conception, Yang, 2001), knowledge, judgment, interpersonal skill and introspection (Japanese conception, Takahashi & Overton, 2005). In reviewing cultural differences, Takahashi and Overton (2005) distinguished an overall analytic “Western” definition emphasizing knowledge and cognitive complexity and a synthetic “Eastern” definition focusing on the integration of cognition and affect. Brezina and Oudenhoven (2012) explored another angle to the role of culture in shaping wisdom conception. While looking at the role of national culture and religion in shaping wisdom conception, national culture was found to exhibit significant difference on altruism and serenity factor and minor difference in determination factor. Authors also argued that every national culture with its language, socioeconomic status, gender role, legal norms etc., create a big difference in understanding and practices of universal values.

Implicit studies with Indian Population

To best of our knowledge, only four noted empirical work has been published on the Indian population. Levitt (1999) published analyses of interview related to the development of wisdom of 13 Tibetan monk, living in the Himalayan region of India. Takahashi and Bordia (2000) made the comparison of implicit definition among young adults from America, Australia, Japan, and India. Brezina and Oudenhoven (2012) explored the influence of national culture and religion in the conception of wisdom on three factors – determination, serenity, and altruism. Recently, Ferrari et al (2016) did a cross-cultural comparison of Mahatma Gandhi (the freedom fighter and named as Father of the nation of India) as an exemplar of wisdom. All of these studies are limited in scope from exemplar and prototype approach of implicit study; where earlier three studies followed prototype-based approach only and the recent study was the combination of exemplar and prototype study but only about one exemplar.

Therefore, in line with the above literature, present study aims to understand the socio-cultural conception of wisdom with consideration of developmental trajectory. The purpose of current study lays on the following objectives: a) To understand the conception of wisdom by combining wisdom nomination and descriptor-rating method for the cultural understanding in Indian sample, b) To match the culture-specific descriptions with the globally reported trend, and c) Most importantly, exploring both the above objective with the developmental consideration of age and education.

Methodology

Participant

Total 170 college students participated in the present study (Male: 136, Female: 34). The sample was taken from Indian Institute of Technology Jodhpur (Rajasthan, India). The sample was divided on the basis of age and education level for the analysis purpose. Age of 18 year was taken as cut-off point on the basis legal status to declare a person as adult and accordingly the sample was categorized as (Adolescence; n= 87, Age=16-18yr, Mean age± SD =17.56±0.56, Male =79, and Adult; n= 83, Age= 19-35yrs, Mean age± SD =23.19 ± 3.89, Male =57). Nomenclature of education was taken as per the completed degrees (HS- High School; n= 106, Male=97, UG-Under Graduate; n= 30, Male=16; PG- Post Graduate; n= 34, Male=23).

Measures

An interview schedule: was developed including information related to demographic variables and open-ended question to nominate people with instruction- “nominate minimum three globally or nationally well-known persons whom you consider as wise and write down their characteristics due to which these people are considered wise person”.

List of Globally accepted description: Different definitions and understanding of wisdom have been presented by scholars (see Baltes, 2004) and researchers (see for overview Staudinger & Glück, 2011; Glück, 2015). Characteristics listed in the broad review by Trowbridge (2005); few other characteristics from the ‘MORE life experience model’ by Glück and Buck (2013); and ten virtues of wise leaders given by Green and Gini (2013) were included to form a list of twenty-five descriptors which are globally accepted. Characteristics listed in Table-1 were given to participants with the instruction- "There are some personal characteristics given below. Chose by ticking (✓) most appropriate characteristic you think are of a wise person."

Table-1. Wisdom characteristics/descriptors described in literatura

S.N.	Wisdom Descriptors	Corresponding literatura
1.	Good judgment ^a	Bluck & Glück (2005); Holiday & Chandler (1986); Sternberg (1985)
2.	Sense of Mastery ^b	Glück & Bluck (2013)
3.	Reflectiveness ^{a,b}	Ardelt (2003); Bluck & Glück (2005); Webster(2003)
4.	Ability to deal with difficult and complex life problems (Dealing) ^a	Ardelt (2008); Bluck & Glück (2004); Baltes & Kunzmann (2004); Baltes & Staudinger (2000)
5.	Honesty ^c	
6.	Courage ^c	
7.	Vision ^c	
8.	Compassion and Care (Compassion) ^{b,c}	Ardelt (2008); Bluck & Glück (2004, 2005) Valdez (1994); Yang (2001)
9.	Fairness ^c	
10.	Creative Thinking ^c	Sternberg (1985, 1998)
11.	Aesthetic Sensitivity (Aesthetic) ^c	
12.	Good Timing ^c	
13.	Deep Selflessness (Selflessness) ^c	
14.	Open-Mindedness (Open) ^{a,b}	Webster (2003); Yang (2001)
15.	Relativistic Thinking (Relativistic) ^a	Baltes & Staudinger (2000); Kramer (2000)
16.	Self-knowledge ^a	Baltes & Smith (2008); Baltes & Staudinger (2000), Sternberg (2001)
17.	Knowledge of limits, humility (Humbleness) ^a	Baltes & Staudinger (2000)
18.	Comfort with uncertainty and ambiguity (Uncertainty Tolerance) ^a	Ardelt (2008); Baltes & Staudinger (2000)
19.	Self-control ^{a,b}	Bluck & Glück (2004); Webster (2003)
20.	Broad and deep knowledge and experience (Deep Knowledge) ^a	Baltes & Staudinger (2000); Montgomery, Barber, & McKee (2002); Webster (2003); Yang (2001)
21.	Social/Interpersonal skills (Social Skill) ^a	Bluck & Glück (2004, 2005)
22.	Autonomy ^a	
23.	Intuition ^a	
24.	Serenity ^a	Ardelt (2008)
25.	Intelligence ^{a,c}	Baltes, Glück, & Kunzmann (2002); Jason et al. (2001); Grossmann et al. (2013); Staudinger et al. (1997); Sternberg (1985, 1998)

^aTrowbridge (2005); ^bGlück and Buck (2013); ^cGreen and Gini (2014)

Procedure

All participants were contacted in the initial period of their attending degrees (graduation (HS); post graduation (UG); and Ph.D. (PG)). The terminology used to indicate education level relate to completed education degree. After taking informed consent, the first sheet of interview schedule was administered to gather information for demographic details and wisdom nomination and related characteristics. After the completion of the first sheet and the return of it, the second sheet including a list of Global Descriptors was administered. Separate instructions were given for both sheets.

Coding and Data Analysis

The sample of 170 gave total of 546 nominations out of which 147 were unique exemplars. Nomination frequencies were analyzed with respect to the age and education level. Adult age group had given the maximum nomination and therefore they were selected as an anchor group for the comparison purpose. Top 10 nominations from the anchor group were selected and the other group was compared with it. An additional comparison was done for the nominations which were not in anchor group but were part of the other group with the condition that they were in top five ranks and have ≥ 1 frequency. This gave the total of 18 nominations.

Total 197 characteristics were given by the participants for which frequencies were counted and they were arranged in descending order. All the characteristics given for wisdom were given to three experts and on the basis of consensus, finally they are categorized into 19 clusters and nomenclature was given to categories with the consensual decisions of experts. One cluster was formed to refer to all idiosyncratic characteristics as miscellaneous within the 19 categories. Frequency-percentages were calculated for nomination and identified characteristics categories and χ^2 -test was computed for the comparison between age groups and among different educational level. All statistical calculations were done on IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 21.0.

Results

Results are presented in four sections, I. Summary of top wisdom exemplars and descriptors, II. Wisdom nomination and individual differences; III. Wisdom characteristics and individual characteristics; and IV. Global descriptors and individual differences.

I. Summary of top wisdom exemplars

Total of 546 nominations were made out of which 147 were unique exemplars. These 147 exemplars could be categorized as political leaders (Narendra Modi, Barak Obama, Putin, Kejariwal etc), Social Activist (Malala Yusifai, Kailash Satyarthi etc), Spiritual and religious figure (Vivekanand, Dalai Lama, Baba Ramdev, Mother Teresa etc) Scientists (Einstein, Stephen Hawkins etc), Bussiness tycoons (Mark Zuckerberg, Bill Gates, Elon Musk etc), Sports persons (Sachin Tendulkar, Saina Nehwal, Rahul Dravid etc), and Artists (Amitabh Bachachan, JK Rowling, Leonardo Da Vinci, Marlin Monroe etc). Among 147 nominations 26 females (17%) and 121 male (82%) exemplars were nominated and the 11 highest frequency exemplars constituted 52.20% of all nominations.

Table-2. Top nominations and percent explained from total nomination

Sl. No.	Exemplars	Number of nominations	Percent of total nomination(f= 546)
1.	Narendra Modi (Prime Minister of India)	57	10.43
2.	APJ Abdul Kalam (Former President of India)	56	10.25
3.	Relatives	46	8.42
4.	Sachin R Tendulkar (Indian Cricket Player)	23	4.21
5.	MS Dhoni (Indian Cricket Player)	19	3.47
6.	Mark E Zuckerberg (Founder of <i>Facebook</i>)	18	3.29
7.	Albert Einstein (Scientist)	15	2.74
8.	Bill Gates (Founder of <i>Microsoft Corp</i>)	14	2.56
9.	Swami Vivekananda (Indian Monk)	13	2.38
10.	Steve Jobs (Founder of <i>Apple Inc</i>)	13	2.38
11.	Mahatma Gandhi (Indian freedom fighter)	11	2.01

In total 19 categories of descriptors, the top 5 descriptors – intelligence, sincerity, excellence, leadership and love and care accounted for total of 45.14%. Out of 19 categories, least importance was given to humor (1.81%) and social intelligence (2.32).

Table-3. Summary of frequency and percent explained in the use of global descriptors

Sl. No.	Prototype-descriptors	Frequency	Percent of total (f=773)
1.	Intelligence	90	11.64
2.	Sincerity	80	10.34
3.	Excellence	71	9.18
4.	Leadership	56	7.24
5.	Love n Care	52	6.72
6.	Courage	49	6.33
7.	Emotional Intelligence	45	5.82
8.	Decision Making	44	5.69
9.	Values	44	5.69
10.	Thinking Beyond	44	5.69
11.	Humility	43	5.56
12.	Optimism	27	3.49
13.	Fairness	26	3.36
14.	Communication	25	3.23
15.	Knowledge Bearer	25	3.23
16.	Self Actualization	20	2.58
17.	Humor	18	2.32
18.	Social Intelligence	14	1.81

II. Wisdom nomination and individual differences

Age Differences. In Table-4, it is reported that within these 18 nominations only 4 nominations showed a significant difference in their level of preference in both the age groups. In the adult group, former president of India (APJ Abdul Kalam) was chosen as wise by most of the participants (Rank-1) which was in third (Rank-3) in adolescent group suggesting a significant difference in preference (45.8% vs 20.7%, $\chi^2 = 12.11$, $p = .001$). Most of the adolescents nominated their relatives as a wise person (Rank-1) and differing significantly from the adult group in this regard (44.8% vs 8.4%, $\chi^2 = 28.51$, $p = .000$). Indian cricket maestro Rahul Dravid and former prime minister India Manmohan Singh were in among top wise man list for adults but not nominated by any of adolescents (6% vs 0%, $\chi^2 = 5.40$, $p = .026$).

Table-4. Top nominees according to Adult and Adolescent age groups

S.N.	Top Nominees	Adult (n= 83, nominations= 119)			Adolescent (n= 87, nominations=64)			χ^2	P
		Rank	Frequency	%	Rank	Frequency	%		
1.	APJ Abdul Kalam (Former President of India)	1	38	45.8	3	18	20.7	12.11***	.001
2.	Narendra Modi (Prime Minister of India)	2	30	36.1	2	27	31	.50	.481
3.	Albert Einstein (Scientist)	3	10	12	9	5	5.7	2.10	.148
4.	Mark E Zuckerberg (Founder of Facebook)	3	10	12	6	8	9.2	.37	.546
5.	MS Dhoni (Indian Cricket Player)	4	9	10.8	5	10	11.5	.02	.893
6.	Swami Vivekananda (Indian Monk)	5	8	9.6	9	5	5.7	.91	.340
7.	Sachin R Tendulkar (Indian Cricket Player)	6	7	8.4	4	16	18.4	3.60	.058
8.	Relatives	6	7	8.4	1	39	44.8	28.51***	.000
9.	Mother Teresa (Indian Saint)	7	6	7.2	NN	0	0	6.51*	.012#
10.	Steve Jobs (Founder of Apple Inc)	7	6	7.2	7	7	8	.04	.841
11.	Rahul Dravid (Indian Cricket Palyer)	8	5	6	NN	0	0	5.40*	.026#
12.	Amitabh Bachchan ((Indian Film Artist)	8	5	6	12	2	2.3	1.49	.269#
13.	Manmohan Singh (Former Prime Minister of India)	8	5	6	NN	0	0	5.40*	.026#
14.	Mahatma Gandhi (Indian freedom fighter)	8	5	6	8	6	6.9	.05	.817
15.	Bill Gates (Founder of Microsoft Corp)	9	4	4.8	5	10	11.5	2.50	.163
16.	Stephen W Hawking (Scientist)	10	3	3.6	9	5	5.7	.43	.721
17.	Elon Musk (Entrepreneur)	11	2	2.4	9	5	5.7	1.20	.444
18.	Virat Kohli (Indian Cricket Palyer)	12	1	1.2	9	5	5.7	2.57	.211

NN= Not nominated, # Fisher's Exact Test, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Education differences. Similar to the age differences, differences were also observed on the basis of participants' education levels (Table-5). Relatives were nominated in top rank (1) by participants with the education level of HS, however, no nomination of relatives was made by participants with UG and only one PG participant nominated them (42.5% vs 0% vs 2.9%, $\chi^2= 33.88$, $p=.000$). APJ Abdul Kalam was among top listed wise persons in all three groups and got the rank of 3rd, 1st and 1st in HS, UG, and PG groups respectively, but there was a significant difference in group nomination percentages (21.7% vs 50% vs 52.9%, $\chi^2= 16.17$, $p=.000$). Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft Corporation, was mostly preferred by participants with HS (Rank-5) but was not nominated by any PG participants (12.3% vs 3.3% vs 0%, $\chi^2= 6.28$, $p= .043$). Hindu monk Swami Vivekanand was ranked 3rd by PG students (17.6%), whereas, he was in 5th rank in participants with HS (4.7%) and 4th rank in participants with UG (6.7%) ($\chi^2= 6.14$, $p=.046$). Tenth prime minister of India Atal Bihari Vajpayee was named as a wise person by 8.8% participants with PG, but only 3.3 % participants with UG and no participant with HS nominated him ($\chi^2= 8.88$, $p=.012$).

Table-5. Top nominees according to participants Education Levels

SN	Top Nominees	HS (n=106, nominations=75)			UG (n=30, nominations=63)			PG (n=34, nominations=65)			χ^2	P
		Rank	f	%	Rank	f	%	Rank	f	%		
1.	Relatives	1	45	42.5	NN	0	0	7	1	2.9	33.88***	.000
2.	Narendra Modi	2	31	29.2	1	15	50	2	11	32.4	4.55	.103
3.	APJ Abdul Kalam	3	23	21.7	1	15	50	1	18	52.9	16.17***	.000
4.	Sachin R Tendulkar	4	17	16.0	3	3	10	5	3	8.8	1.53	.465
5.	Bill Gates	5	13	12.3	5	1	3.3	NN	0	0	6.28*	.043
6.	Mark E Zuckerberg	6	12	11.3	3	3	10	5	3	8.8	.18	.913
7.	MS Dhoni	6	12	11.3	2	5	16.7	6	2	5.9	1.87	.392
8.	Steve Jobs	7	11	10.4	NN	0	0	6	2	5.9	3.75	.153
9.	Mahatma Gandhi	8	7	6.6	4	2	6.6	6	2	5.9	.02	.988
10.	Elon Musk	8	7	6.6	NN	0	0	NN	0	0	4.48	.110
11.	Stephen W Hawking	8	7	6.6	5	1	3.3	NN	0	0	2.66	.265
12.	Albert Einstein	9	6	5.7	2	5	16.7	4	4	11.8	3.98	.137
13.	Swami Vivekanand	10	5	4.7	4	2	6.7	3	6	17.6	6.14*	.046
14.	Arvind Kejriwal (Chief Minister, Delhi)	10	5	4.7	5	1	3.3	NN	0	0	1.69	.430
15.	Barack Obama (President of USA)	10	5	4.7	5	1	3.3	NN	0	0	1.69	.430
16.	Virat Kohali	10	5	4.7	5	1	3.3	NN	0	0	1.69	.430
17.	Amitabh Bachchan	13	2	1.9	4	2	6.7	5	3	8.8	3.78	.154
18.	Mother Teresa	14	1	0.9	4	2	6.7	5	3	8.8	5.75	.056
19.	Atal Bihari Vajpayee (Former Prime Minister, India)	NN	0	0	5	1	3.3	5	3	8.8	8.88*	.012
20.	Rahul Dravid	14	1	0.9	5	1	3.3	5	3	8.8	5.62	.060

NN= Not nominated, * $p<.05$, *** $p<.001$

III. Wisdom Characteristics and individual differences

Age differences. Table-6 shows frequency-percentage and comparison analysis for the characteristics defining wisdom suggests that all participant share a similar notion. However, few significant differences were found among the characteristics categories of 'Excellence', 'humility', 'thinking beyond', 'values' and 'knowledge bearer'. As mentioned in Table-4, these categories were mentioned significantly more by adult age group than to the adolescent age groups.

Table- 6. Age differences in listed characteristics of nominated wise persons.

S.N.	Shortlisted Characteristics	Adolescent (n=87)		Adult (n=83)		χ^2	P
		F	%	f	%		
1.	Intelligence	47	54	43	51	.08	.773
2.	Emotional Intelligence	23	26.4	22	26.5	.00	.992
3.	Social Intelligence	8	9.2	6	7.2	.22	.641
4.	Decision Making	25	28.7	19	22.9	.76	.385
5.	Excellence	29	33.3	42	50.6	5.21*	.022
6.	Sincerity	35	40.2	45	54.2	3.34	.068
7.	Communication	12	13.8	13	15.7	.12	.731
8.	Humility	16	18.4	27	32.5	4.49*	.034
9.	Courage	20	23	29	34.9	2.96	.085
10.	Fairness	13	14.9	13	15.7	.02	.896
11.	Humor	12	13.8	6	7.2	1.93	.164
12.	Thinking Beyond	17	19.5	27	32.5	3.74*	.053
13.	Leadership	29	33.3	27	32.5	.01	.911
14.	Love & Care	27	31	25	30.1	.02	.897
15.	Values	15	17.2	29	34.9	6.94**	.008
16.	Optimism	12	13.8	15	18.1	.58	.445
17.	Knowledge Bearer	7	8	18	21.7	6.30*	.012
18.	Self Actualization	11	12.6	9	10.8	.13	.716
19.	Miscellaneous	4	4.6	3	3.6	.10	.747

*p<.05, **p<.01

Education differences. A similar trend as age differences were observed in education level also. Table-7 shows that significant differences were found for humility (UG: 40%, PG: 38.2%, HS: 12%; $\chi^2= 10.32$, $p=.01$), courage (UG: 46.7%, PG: 35.3%, HS: 21.7%; $\chi^2= 7.97$, $p=.019$) and values (UG: 46.7%, PG: 32.4%, HS: 17.9%; $\chi^2=11$, $p=.004$), which were listed more by UG group and Knowledge Bearer (PG: 32.4%, UG: 16.7%, HS: 8.5%; $\chi^2= 11.80$, $p=.003$) which were listed more by PG group.

Table-7. Differences on the basis of Education levels in listed characteristics of nominated wise persons.

S.N.	Shortlisted Characteristics	HS (n=106)		UG(n=30)		PG (n=34)		χ^2	P
		f	%	f	%	f	%		
1.	Intelligence	59	55.7	17	56.7	14	41.2	2.37	.306
2.	Emotional Intelligence	26	24.5	9	30	10	29.4	.55	.760
3.	Social Intelligence	8	7.5	5	16.7	1	2.9	4.15	.126
4.	Decision Making	29	27.4	6	20	9	26.6	.67	.716
5.	Excellence	40	37.7	16	53.3	15	44.1	2.44	.296
6.	Sincerity	45	42.5	16	53.3	19	55.9	2.44	.295
7.	Communication	15	14.2	5	16.7	5	14.7	.12	.943
8.	Humility	18	17	12	40	13	38.2	10.32**	.006
9.	Courage	23	21.7	14	46.7	12	35.3	7.97*	.019
10.	Fairness	16	15.1	7	23.3	3	8.8	2.60	.273
11.	Humor	14	13.2	4	13.3	0	0	5.03	.081
12.	Thinking Beyond	20	18.9	11	36.7	13	38.2	7.24*	.027
13.	Leadership	35	33	13	43.3	8	23.5	2.83	.243
14.	Love & Care	33	31.1	7	23.3	12	35.3	1.11	.573
15.	Values	19	17.9	14	46.7	11	32.4	11.00**	.004
16.	Optimism	15	14.2	6	20	6	22.2	.70	.705
17.	Knowledge Bearer	9	8.5	5	16.7	11	32.4	11.80**	.003
18.	Self Actualization	11	10.4	3	10	6	17.6	1.42	.492
19.	Miscellaneous	5	4.7	1	3.3	1	2.9	.26	.877

*p<.05, **p<.01

IV. Global descriptors and individual differences

Age and education differences. Frequency analysis suggested that some of the most important characteristics which define wisdom are good judgment, intelligence, self-control, dealing with difficult and complex life problems and so on, whereas, very few participants agreed upon the characteristics of autonomy, intuition, aesthetics sensitivity, reflectiveness and deep selflessness and so on.

We also found age and education level differences on some descriptors. As reported in Table-8, in the identification of 'good judgment' as a wise descriptor there was no age difference (total preference 81.2%), however, it was significantly preferred by HS educated participants (87.7% vs PG 70% vs UG 70.6%, $\chi^2= 7.93$, $p=.019$). 'Sense of mastery' (total preference 58.8%), was mostly preferred by adolescent (61%) (Adult 47%, $\chi^2=9.38$, $p=.002$) and HS (70.8%) participants (UG 43.3%, PG 35.3%, $\chi^2= 16.97$, $p=.000$). In Table-8 and Table-9, significant difference is observed on 'good timing' on both age and education level (total preference 63.5%); adolescents identified this in large number (74.7%) than adults (51.8%) ($\chi^2=9.62$, $p=.002$) and HS participants identified this in large number (72.6%) than UG (56.7) and PG (41.2%) ($\chi^2=11.74$, $p= .003$). Similarly 'openness' (total preference 50.6%) was significantly more preferred in adolescents (58.6%) than adult (42.2%) ($\chi^2=4.60$, $p=.032$), and HS participants (58.5%) than UG (40%) and PG (35.3%) ($\chi^2=7.18$, $p=.028$). There was difference in preference of 'Self-control' (total preference 70%) between adolescents (77%) and adults (62.7%) ($\chi^2= 4.17$, $p= .041$). HS participants also preferred more (64.2) to 'social skill (SS)' for wisdom characteristic (total preference 56.6%) than UG (40%) and PG (47.1%) ($\chi^2= 7.08$, $p=.029$). 'Serenity' preference (total 56.6%) deferred significantly on both age; adolescents (70.1%) vs adults (42.2%) ($\chi^2= 13.50$, $p.000$), and education levels (total 56.5% preference); HS (67%) vs UG (36.7%) vs PG (41.2%) ($\chi^2= 12.79$, $p=.002$).

Table-8. Percentage of participants identified with global descriptors and age group comparison.

S.N.	Descriptors	Total (%) N=170	Adolescence (n=87)		Adult (n=83)		χ^2	P
			f	%	f	%		
1.	Good Judgment	81.2	75	86.2	63	75.9	2.95	.086
2.	Intelligence	74.7	68	78.2	59	71.1	1.13	.289
3.	Vision	71.8	62	71.3	60	72.3	.02	.882
4.	Self-control	70	67	77	52	62.7	4.17*	.041
5.	Dealing with life problems	68.2	63	72.4	53	63.9	1.44	.231
6.	Good Timing	63.5	65	74.7	43	51.8	9.62**	.002
7.	Courage	62.9	56	64.4	51	61.4	.16	.693
8.	Honesty	61.8	52	59.8	53	63.9	.30	.584
9.	Creative Thinking	59.4	56	64.4	45	54.2	1.82	.178
10.	Sense of Mastery	58.8	61	70.1	39	47	9.38**	.002
11.	Social Skill	56.5	55	63.2	41	49.4	3.30	.069
12.	Serenity	56.5	61	70.1	35	42.2	13.50***	.000
13.	Self-knowledge	54.1	49	56.3	43	51.8	.35	.555
14.	Openness	50.6	51	58.6	35	42.2	4.60*	.032
15.	Humbleness	45.9	41	47.1	37	44.6	.11	.739
16.	Deep Knowledge	45.9	40	46	38	45.8	.00	.980
17.	Relativistic	41.2	36	41.4	34	41	.00	.956
18.	Compassion	40.7	36	41.4	33	39.8	.05	.830
19.	Uncertainty Tolerance	36.5	26	29.9	36	43.4	3.34	.068
20.	Fairness	33.5	30	34.5	27	32.5	.07	.787
21.	Aesthetic	31.2	28	32.2	25	30.1	.08	.772
22.	Selflessness	31.2	25	28.7	28	33.7	.50	.482
23.	Intuition	26.5	18	20.7	27	32.5	3.06	.080
24.	Autonomy	22.4	20	23	18	21.7	.04	.839
25.	Reflectiveness	18.8	13	14.9	19	22.9	1.76	.185

* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$

Table-9. Percentage of participants identified with global characteristics and comparison on education level.

S.N.	Descriptors	Total (%) N=170	HS (n=106)		UG (30)		PG (n=34)		χ^2	P
			F	%	F	%	f	%		
1.	Good Judgment	81.2	93	87.7	21	70	24	70.6	7.93*	.019
2.	Intelligence	74.7	82	77.4	23	76.7	22	64.7	2.26	.324
3.	Vision	71.8	77	72.6	21	70	24	70.6	.11	.947
4.	Self-control	70	79	74.5	21	70	19	55.9	4.26	.119
5.	Dealing	68.2	77	72.6	20	66.7	19	55.9	3.38	.185
6.	Good Timing	63.5	77	72.6	17	56.7	14	41.2	11.74**	.003
7.	Courage	62.9	71	67	16	53.3	20	58.8	2.18	.337
8.	Honesty	61.8	68	64.2	19	63.3	18	52.9	1.41	.495
9.	Creative Thinking	59.4	66	62.3	17	56.7	18	52.9	1.04	.594
10.	Sense of Mastery	58.8	75	70.8	13	43.3	12	35.3	16.97***	.000
11.	Social Skill	56.6	68	64.2	12	40	16	47.1	7.08*	.029
12.	Serenity	56.5	71	67	11	36.7	14	41.2	12.79**	.002
13.	Self-knowledge	54.1	62	58.5	16	53.3	14	41.2	3.12	.21
14.	Openness	50.6	62	58.5	12	40	12	35.3	7.18*	.028
15.	Humbleness	45.9	52	49.1	14	46.7	12	35.3	1.97	.373
16.	Deep Knowledge	45.9	52	49.1	9	30	17	50	3.71	.156
17.	Relativistic	41.2	44	41.5	11	36.7	15	44.1	.39	.828
18.	Compassion	40.7	46	43.4	12	40	11	32.4	1.31	.520
19.	Uncertainty Tolerance	36.5	38	35.8	10	33.3	14	41.2	.47	.792
20.	Fairness	33.5	40	37.7	7	23.3	10	29.4	2.50	.287
21.	Aesthetic	31.2	36	34	11	36.7	6	17.6	3.71	.157
22.	Selflessness	31.2	36	34	10	33.3	7	20.6	2.23	.329
23.	Intuition	26.5	24	22.6	10	33.3	11	32.4	2.13	.345
24.	Autonomy	22.4	25	23.6	9	30	4	11.8	3.30	.196
25.	Reflectiveness	18.8	17	16	6	20	9	26.5	1.87	.393

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Discussion

This exploratory work was carried out with the purpose of addition from Indian layperson's conception of wisdom in existing literature and to develop an understanding of developmental trajectory for this 'ideal end point' in Indian Youth. This purpose was tackled with a threefold objective: a) To understand the conception of wisdom by combining wisdom nomination and descriptor-rating method for the cultural understanding in Indian simple, b) To match the culture-specific descriptions with the globally reported trend, and c) Most importantly, exploring both the above objective with the developmental consideration of age and education.

Overall, 170 participants' nominated total 147 unique exemplars, where there were many overlaps. The top nominees were almost similar across all age and education groups and highest nominations accounted for fifty two percent of all the nominations. The nominations could be categorized to the public and vocational domain as adapted by Weststrate et al. (2016), however, two additional categories of sportsperson and artist also emerge from the present data. Similar to previous studies most of the nominees were males (Weststrate et al., 2016). But opposite to the trend in the previous literature, participant's in the present study showed preferences for people of relatively recent generation such as Sachin Tendulkar (cricketer), Elon Musk (entrepreneur), Arvind Kejriwal (politician) all are in their 40s, whereas MS Dhoni (cricketer) is in his 30s and Virat Kohli (cricketer) is in his 20s. The observation by Yang (2008b) that the Eastern believes in both action and its effect, the participants were influenced by the success of these nominees in their respective areas. Another difference from the existing literature we found in relation to age and education level. Ardel (2008) and Jason et al. (2001) reported that personally known people gain the most nomination, though in the present study it was found that only adolescent participant with HS education nominated their relatives as wise, very few participants from adult and UG and PG education nominated their relatives. Significant age and education differences were found for the nomination of Manmohan Singh, Atal Bihari Vajpayee (politicians) Rahul Dravid, (cricketer) and Vivekanand (monk) which were nominated by adult and PG education participants.

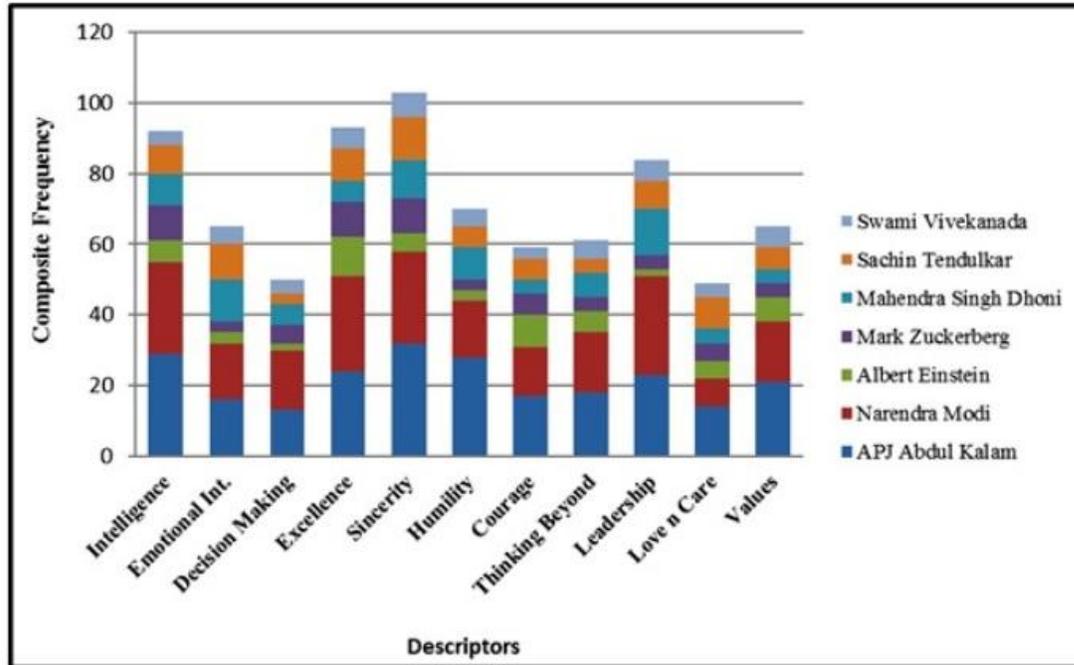
This difference of preference for wisdom nomination, where the adults with PG education nominate these politicians, monk, and adolescent with HS education favor relative and individuals like Bill Gates, indicate toward a different kind of worldview they may hold. Probably it suggests that both adult and adolescent preferred those persons whom they are much familiar, for example, Manmohan Singh and Rahul Dravid are not current performers but their performance have been seen by adults as these people were active in their respective fields then, whereas, relatives are closer to the participants and they can see and remember their performances more vividly with touch of attachment component. Again Bill Gates' (WINDOW) computer innovation might have fascinated, and thus inspire more, to adolescents.

Common to all participants was the nomination of the current prime minister of India, Narendra Modi and former president APJ Abdul Kalam. India Today, one of the leading magazines in India has declared Modi as the best prime minister India ever has and best suited to be next again on peoples' opinion (Mood of the Nation Opinion Poll, 2016a, 2016b). Similarly, Abdul Kalam called as people's president and 'missile man of India' is known for both his scientific and humanitarian contribution (Hindustan Time, Jul 27, 2016; Narasimha & Balakrishnan, 2015).

The significance of age and education level is clearly seen in employing different descriptors for defining wisdom. The responses from complete group clustered on five descriptor categories: intelligence, sincerity, excellence, leadership, love, and care but when the developmental trajectory is taken into account the weightage given to a descriptor changes. The responses given for descriptors of wisdom indicated toward another developmental trajectory of change in leniency of the decision rule. It was observed that adolescents gave relatively less number of characteristic than adult group (total 362 frequency in 87 adolescent compared to 418 frequency in 83 adults for 19 categories), but agreed more with the globally accepted descriptor list. It is possible that with development and exposure of new experiences the decision rule could change or it may be due to the observed superiority of adult groups for vocabulary and information (Ryan, Sattler, & Lopez, 2000). However, this point needs further exploration in future research. Intelligence and emotional intelligence is seen as a major descriptor of wisdom along with the capacity of decision making, thinking beyond and leadership. Additionally, sincerity in efforts and relationship and love and care for others were also given significant weightage. One distinct descriptor, 'excellence in their respective field' also came out very strongly and in the further analysis it was evident that it was mostly used by adolescents to nominate wisdom.

This related with the earlier mentioned finding from the present study which suggests that in the adolescent stage the success and excellence in the field are considered as an indicative of wisdom (nomination of Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Sachin etc.). In contrast, it was evident from the difference analysis that adult with PG education gave more weightage to the descriptors of humility, capacity to think beyond and being a knowledge bearer.

Graph-1 Showing descriptor profile of top five nominations of adolescents and adult participants



Combining results related to the characteristics given and individual differences in descriptor with the elementary analysis of top nominees and the characteristics given suggested that there are few descriptors which are commonly given more weightage. As shown in Figure-1, among top nominations for overall participants (APJ Abdul Kalam, Narendra Modi, Albert Einstein, Mark Zuckerberg, Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Sachin Tendulkar and Swami Vivekananda) the most weightage given descriptors were intelligence, sincerity, excellence, humility, values, and leadership. This seems to converge at success, personal growth, and societal upliftment.

The results from the present study seem to fit the global trend and agree with the existing descriptors. The findings from our study are along the line of conclusion given by cross-cultural study by Takahashi and Overton (2005) that eastern culture uses the synthetic definition of wisdom by focusing on the integration of cognition and affect. We found that the maximum preferences were given to good judgment and intelligence with emotional capacity of self-control along with the practical implication in dealing with difficult life problems. Continuing the similar trend of age and education difference, again it was found that within the globally accepted descriptors, adolescents with HS education gave significantly more weight to good timing, sense of mastery, good judgment, which are relate to the success of an individual in their life. Significant weightage was found for openness and serenity, suggesting that possibly the success is given value if it leads to the personal growth in terms of the development of humility, openness, sense of serenity and exhibit in the greater good.

Conclusion

It is obvious from findings that description of wise people matches significantly from one culture to other, however, emphasis on particular quality may change not only on the basis of cultural background but age and education wise as well. Where adolescents give more importance to success and resulting personal growth, adults focus more on values and dissemination of learning.

We recommend that as per the Indian conception found in our study, the 'eastern synthetic' definition given by Takahashi and Overton (2005), or the 'integrative conception' given by Glück and Bluck (2011) should add the life implication component also along with cognitive and affective component. As Yang (2008b) also concluded that whereas a Western understanding of wisdom focuses on the cognitive over practical application, Eastern believes in both action and its effect.

There were some limitations of the present study and we plan to address these issues in our future work. The most important one was the absence of direct comparison. Though we took a list of the descriptor from western researches there was no matched group for direct comparison and it brings methodological limitation. For developmental exploration, the age range in our study was very limited for the adolescent group; future study can focus to understand wisdom conception in the early adolescent group. Further, the gender difference was not addressed in this study due to less number of female participants. For addressing the cultural diversity of India, though participant students of our study come from different cultural-linguistic regions, their optimum ratio could not be captured in this study. On a methodological view, factor analysis could have been done on the basis of description rating. It would have given more clear understanding and would have been comparable to other developed wisdom scales. Manifestation and implication of wisdom in the context of leadership has been well discussed by several authors (Satudinger et al. 2011; Ekmeççi, Teraman, & Acar, 2014, Yang, 2011b) and we have taken 'Ten virtues of leadership' from Green and Gini (2014) in our present study as wisdom descriptors. The finding from the present study is an important addition to the implicit exploration of the conception of wisdom as it combined both the exemplar and prototype-based approach and compared it with the global conception also. The findings of the present study suggest a good scope for exploration in this area and we will focus on its implication in our future work.

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