

CHAPTER II

CONCEPT OF INTEREST

With the advent of measurement of interests some of the mysteries around motivational factors have been unfolded and much light has been thrown on the nature of interest. Popular concepts of interest prevailed for a long time until modern definitions crystallized as a result of intensive researches. In the words of Monroe (1), "Interest is essential as the starting point of the educative process, effort is essential as its outcome". The interest of a child may explain the entire mechanism of human behaviour in relation to the environment. Arnold (2) summarized the work of early writers and concluded that interest was a dynamic force determining human behaviour. The German psychologist Stumpf in 1883 defined interest as a desire to observe. Although this definition was not scientific, he has laid down the foundation of future work. With stout, the English psychologist, interest and "condition" are the same thing. Interest is motivation or mental striving towards an

1 Monroe, P.: op. cit., p. 566.

2 Arnold, Felix: "The Psychology of Interest", Psychol. Rev., 1906, XIII, pp. 221-238; 291-315.

end-state. Woodworth (3) presented a more convincing concept of interest as a motivating force. To him interest was a motive or drive toward activity. Thorndike (4) considered interest to be a pleasurable feeling which aids learning. In his opinion, interest is the result of past experience. James (5) described interest as a selective force in our experience.

Drever (6) emphasised the element of satisfyingness in interest. To him, interest is a feeling of worthwhileness passing into satisfyingness.

Dewey (7) points out, "Interest is first active, projective or propulsive..... Interest projects itself towards an object, which has conceptual existence outside the limits of the sphere of the interest itself."

Mangion (8) has attempted a comprehensive

3 Woodworth, R.S.: Dynamic Psychology, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1918, p. 211).

4 Thorndike, E.L.: op. cit.,

5 James William: op. cit.,

6 Drever, J., Instincts in Man, (Cambridge University Press, 1921).

7 Dewey, John: op. cit., p.16.

8 Mangion, G.: "An Enquiry into the Relation Between Attitude and Interest", M.A.Thesis, London University, p.1950.

definition of interest in relation to the structural and functional aspects of personality. In the words of Mangion, "Interest is a feeling of worthwhileness, dynamic, positive, selective and specific, which has the nature of a relationship, functioning here and now towards a psychological object in view of an end, which on being attained gives satisfaction to the individual's needs". It is seen that interest has a reference to needs, desires, and motivation. It is a set of disposition towards a particular object or idea. Interest is thus a word with different shades of meanings.

The earlier concepts of interest emphasised the role of experience in interest formation. As expressed by Bingham (9), interest is a tendency to become absorbed in an experience and continue it. The psychological nature of interest remained shrouded in mystery until the concept was used in terms of measurements. In the measurement sense according to Fryer (10), "Subjective interests are likes or dislikes which are estimated experiences, characterized by feeling of pleasantness or unpleasantness."

9 Bingham, W.V.D.: Aptitude and Aptitude Testing, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937, p. 61).

10 Fryer, D.: op. cit., p. 15.

The feeling aspect is thus dominant in the psychological analysis of interest attempted earlier. The introspective study of interest experience has been made from various angles. One approach analyses this experience into the elemental psychological factors which compose it. It has been regarded as a complex experience dominated by feelings. This is a structural approach to the study of interest while the second point of view is that of functional psychology. According to the functional point of view, the motivation of the interest experience is very important. Thus, the dynamic aspect of interest has received greater attention of this school. In the opinion of Gestalt psychology, however, interest is to be considered an experience as a whole.

Historical survey indicates the complexity of interest and points out the need for objective definitions, while the earlier conceptions of interest brought out the feeling aspects involved in interest. More clearly, McDougall (11) emphasised the conative aspects. According to him, interest being essentially conative, is a matter of enduring setting of our conative tendencies or impulses. Interest is, therefore, determined by our instincts and sentiments.

11 McDougall, W.: An Outline of Psychology, (London: Methuen, 7th Edition, 1936).

The operational concept of interest has been provided by Fryer who points out a clearcut demarcation between subjective and objective interest.

The Subjective and Objective Interest

The subjective interest in the opinion of Fryer, can be regarded as a cognitive experience influenced by the apperceptive mass in question and the intensity of stimulus arousing it. On the other hand, objective interests have been interpreted in a measurement sense as positive or negative reactions to stimulating objects and activities in the environment.

The Hormic school of Psychology has emphasised the conative aspect and described interest to be active and projective. Thus, both the cognitive and conative factors appear to comprise interest as a complex whole.

Baldwin (12) has asserted that emotion or a feeling tone is no less important in the field of interest. He has defined the term as the intellectual feeling which is the result of consciousness, which accompanies the direction of mental tendencies. Thus, an advance has been made in the elaboration of the concept of interest by

12 Baldwin, J.W.: Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology,

including a new dimension viz. the affective one.

It appears that interest has a number of aspects and as such it is a complex concept as that of attitude. According to Barlyne (13) "Interests are very much same as attitude though the definition is a matter of controversy". In spite of the various investigations in the field of interest, there are certain pertinent questions deserving special mention:

- (1) What are the psychological elements involved in interest?
- (2) Is interest dynamic? In other words, does the interest of a person take shape according to the influence of environmental factors?

These questions are fundamental and the advance so far made in this field of research is not sufficient to offer any conclusive evidence. As regards the stability of interest or permanence of interest Strong (14) says, "The evidence is fairly conclusive that occupational interest patterns are well established in many children by fifteen years of age". He has also said that feeling, interest, want and attitude all involved a

13 Berlyne, D.E.: "Interest" as a Psychological Concept' Brit. J. Psychol., 1949, 39, 184-195.

14 Strong, E.K.: "Vocational Interests of Men and Women", Stanford University Press, p. 12.

physiological mechanism. Interest is an aspect of behaviour, not an entity in itself. He has presented three conceptions of interest viz. interest as a single expression, interest as a general tendency toward a constellation of items and interest as a total score on an interest inventory..

These concepts of interest have been put in different forms viz. expressed interests, manifest interests, tested interests etc. The question remains whether there is something like potential interests and if so, what is its relation to manifest interest? It has been pointed out that interest has a reference to needs, wants or desires. The basic pattern of interests emerge out of the interactions of these in relation to total personality. Evidence is accumulating that there is definite relations between interests, attitudes and personality factors pertaining to the adjustments of every day life. Thus, there is an indirect admission of the fact that interests are mostly learned.

As regards the relationship between interest and personality, Darley and Hegenah (15) point out that measured interests and actual occupational involvement reflect personality and provide opportunities for the

15 John G. Darley and Theda Hegenah: Vocational Interest Measurement: Theory and Practice, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955, p. 133)..

fulfilment of the personal needs and drives.

Interest as a psychological concept has thus been recognized increasingly in recent years. It is a unit of behaviour, according to many. It is associated with the values which a person develops in course of his experience. On an analysis of the various concepts so far presented, it appears that interest is not only potential, it may also develop gradually with reference to a number of determinants. Basically, it appears to be a conative experience leading to the formation of some interest patterns which may be reinforced by affective sets of dispositions and expressed through behaviour. It is also possible that there is a hierarchy in the process of development of interests and much research is awaited in this area. Similarly, interests may have a number of dimensions still to be explored. Thus, as a concept, it requires further exploration and consolidation. This is however, a formidable task and is not within the purview of the present research.

For practical purposes, an operational concept of interest has been accepted for studying its relationship to environmental factors. It has been assumed on the basis of previous studies that interest is a complex amalgam of subjective feeling and objective behaviour

tendencies as defined by Vernon (16). It implies that all the three elements of cognition, affection and conation underlie the 'construct' of interest and its development. This point of view has been taken into account while preparing the tests of interests for the present investigation.

Another problem lies in the classification of the interest because of its complex nature. This is why, there are various classifications besides the fundamental ones. It would be observed that Thurstone (17) has classified interest under four categories viz. Science, People, Language and Business, while Allport and Vernon (18) have emphasised six areas of interest viz. Theoretical, Social, Economic, Political, Aesthetic and Religious. It is also interesting to see a difference in the classifications by Strong (19) and Kuder (20). According to

16 Vernon, P.E., op. cit.

17 Thurstone, L.L.: "A Multiple-Factor Study of Vocational Interest", Personnel Journal, 10, 1931, pp. 198-205.

18 Vernon, P.E. and Allport, G.W.: "A Test for Personal Values", J. Abnorm. Soc. Psychol., 26 (1931), 231-248.

19 Strong, E.K.: op. cit.,

20 Kuder, G.F.: Examiner Manual for the Kuder Preference Record - Vocational Form 'C', (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1951).

Strong, interest has got mainly six areas viz. Science, People, Language, Things, System and Contracts while Kuder has classified interest under Outdoor, Scientific, Literary, Mechanical, Clerical, Computational, Artistic, Musical, Persuasive and Social Service. There are various other classifications which might confuse a researcher to a considerable extent. Kuder's classification has, however, prompted the investigator to take a common core of interests and the following areas of interests have been covered:

- (a) Fine Arts
- (b) Agriculture
- (c) Technical
- (d) Humanities
- (e) Commerce
- (f) Science

The investigator also felt like including Agriculture as one of the interest - areas because of its dominance in Indian socio-economic contexts. This is supported by a number of studies indicating the possibility of independent pattern of agricultural interest. The findings of Hooper, Sahota, Sran and Grewal referred to by Sinha and Singh (21) strongly suggests the

21 Sinha, P.R.R. and Singh P.: "Choice of Agriculture subject by Higher Secondary Students of Punjab", Indian Education, Vol.VII, August 1968, No. 9-14, p. 4.

dominance of agricultural interest among the students belonging to a rural community.

In all these studies it was admitted that the choice of agriculture as a course has been governed by many factors like physical environment, father's occupation and the traditional contexts.

A Review of the Concept

A critical study of literature available in the area of interest and motivation indicates an ambiguity in the concept of interest. It is quite natural to get confusion emerging from the diverse tendencies of the research workers to overlook certain aspects of this important variable. There are those who have failed to consider the unitary concept of personality by ignoring the global aspect of personality development in their theoretical frameworks. There are others who prefer molecular approach which is reflected through the categorization of their interest theories. In other words, there is a controversy on the basic theory of interest. Either aptitudes are considered as the fundamental factors in the origin of interest with reinforcement coming from other personal variables, or personality is variously defined as identification, values, needs etc. This basic difference in the

approaches has contributed very little towards a consistent interest theory. It appears that the position in the development of a clearcut theory of interest is still shaky as the key problem is the failure to consider the integrative aspect of personality variables. In the opinion of Carter (22) identification and a self-concept are contributory to interest formation and the importance of the interplay of personality characteristics is undeniable. According to him, the degree of interest and aptitude interaction will be reflected in the adjustment process of the individual. He goes further by saying that the relationship of the personality variables, interests and aptitude plays a crucial role in one's development or adjustment.

is

Another theory/put forward by Super (23) in his later writing where he has indicated the importance of interaction and integration of personality variables. He clearly indicated in another source that adjustment is influenced by the interaction of interest and aptitudes. Super's contribution lies in his attempt to synthesize knowledge in this field through his constant emphasis

22 Carter, H.D.: op, cit., pp. 185-191.

23 Super, D.E.: "Vocational Adjustment in Terms of Role Theory", Voc. Guidance Quarterly, 1957, 5, 139-141.

upon interaction of personality characteristics and in turn the effect of environmental variables upon this interaction. Both Carter and Super agree that the extent of congruency between what a person is motivated to do and what he is capable of doing is reflected in his adjustment process. Thus, the entire process of adjustment depends upon the degree of harmony of interest and aptitudes within the individual.

Fryer (24) indicated the role of ability as well in personality adjustment and pointed out that abilities when coupled with interest spell success.

Strong (25), another pioneer has shown some reluctance to take a position on interest development. He has no doubt, expressed his convictions that interaction and aptitudes plays an important role. A crucial contribution to interest theory has been made by Darley (26) when he emphasised the relationship of interest development to personality development. It was explicitly stated that integrative aspect of interest and aptitudes are very much present in occupational selection. The complexity of interest and aptitude relationship and the

24 Fryer, D.: op. cit., p. 89.

25 Strong, E.K., Jr.: Vocational Interests of Men and Women, (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1943, p.19).

26 Darley, J.G. and Theda Hegenah, op. cit., p. 65.

effect of interaction has received attention from Berdie (27).

Tyler (28) perceived an interest pattern as standing for a role, that a person has accepted. His theory would seem to include interaction between interest and personality variable including aptitudes.

Patterson (29) observes that overemphasis upon unconscious drives has caused other factors such as aptitudes to be ignored. He states that the emotional factors are not to be considered to the exclusion of all others but instead there is a different dimension which interweaves with and colours all others. Thus, it would appear that in the exploration for unifying trends the importance of the interaction of interests and aptitudes is basic to all theories.

The field of motivation and interest involves a number of complex interrelationships between a number of variables belonging to personality area. It is, therefore, quite likely that a number of theories have been developed

27 Berdie, R.F.: "A Femininity Adjective Check-list", J. Appl. Psychol., 1959, 43, pp. 327-333.

28 Tyler, Leona E., The Development of Interests - Proceedings of the Conference on Interest Measurement, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1955).

29 Patterson, C.H.: Counselling the Emotionally Disturbed, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958)

in various directions. The most striking contribution is that by Super (30) who relates interest and motivation to the process of personality adjustment. In short, the concept of interest and motivation has been brought forward in a more meaningful manner by Super and Carter. Instead of regarding interest or motivation as an isolated functioning, it has been aptly linked up with the entire process of adjustment going on in interaction with the culture context and environment.

In the words of Carter (31), "The individual in the process of adjustment to a complex culture, finds experiences which afford a basis for personality integration." In this sense, the relationship of the personality variables, interest and aptitude plays a crucial role in development and adjustment.

On the other hand, there are few like Strong who preferred to view interest as less amenable to environmental pressures, although acknowledging the interaction of interest and aptitude in the entire adjustment process. In other words, he emphasises the inherent forces like drives and needs contributing to the formation of interest. Thus, interest to him has been looked upon as

30 Super, D.E.: "Vocational Development: The Process of Compromise or Synthesis", J. Counsel.Psychol, 1956, 3, 249-253.

31 Carter, H.D.: op. cit., pp. 185-191.

as an independent factor which can be accounted for or measured separately. In the sphere of personality testing there is always a conflict between the two approaches viz. clinical or global and analytic or actuarial. The same has been reflected on the area of interest measurement as well and the concept has partly been influenced by these approaches to measurement.

In view of the controversies on the concept of interest, it has been considered necessary to formulate an operational definition of interest in the line of what Vernon (32) has stated.

Summary

The term "interest" is not so simple as it appears to be. In spite of the popular notion on interest the complexity of its nature has been gradually recognized. The earlier concepts of interest emphasise the role of experience in interest formation, while the recent trend is towards the emphasis on treating interest as a dynamic concept. Even the idea that interest is amenable to environmental pressure and can be changed or diverted has become tenable in modern times. There are still a few controversies on the development of interest. There

32 Vernon, P.E.: op. cit., p. 161.

is a tendency to regard interest in relation to total personality while a few psychologists advocate the interest as an independent variable to a certain extent. The global concept of interest is not very encouraging for the purposes of measurement and thus, an operational concept has been evolved by Strong and others who believe interest as a behaviour pattern identifiable and measurable on an objective basis. The present investigation has, however, accepted the definition put forward by Vernon for practical purposes.