

CHAPTER - I

THE PROBLEM

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Every human being is obliged to adapt and learn ceaselessly in order to survive and evolve as he is born 'prematurely'. When one enters the world as a human being, one enters with abundant potentialities which take their shape later on under circumstances - favourable and adverse as well, as and when he encounters different situations or confronts with individuals with equally varied potentialities and idiosyncrasies. His individuality gets evolved amidst these varied experiences.

This formation of individuality is a continuous process wherein a host of factors and agencies along with the individual himself play a significant role. Whether as an end product he comes out in a shape predecided by the larger social system is a separate issue, but there is a constant struggle by the different subsystems of society in this direction. Education happens to be one of them as the physical, intellectual, emotional and ethical integration of the individual into a complete man is a broad definition of the fundamental aim of education.

Every child that enters the portals of education, enters with a cultural heritage, with particular psychological traits bearing within him the effects of his family environment and social surroundings. Education strives to mould an adult of him, who should be considered sensitive, responsible and committed to the prevalent social norms.

1.1.1 Socialization and Education

To be human is to be social as the word "human" stands for conforming to expected norms of existing society. The statement by Robert E. Park (1915) can express it in a more appropriate form : "Man is not born human. It is only slowly and laboriously in fruitful contact, co-operation and conflict with his fellows, that he attains the distinctive qualities of human nature". But society although is nothing but an amalgamation of individuals, it has its own entity and it precedes human. According to symbolic Interactionists also society is a network of interacting individuals with its own culture, symbolic meanings and values by means of which individuals interact, precedes any existing individuals. In their view all men are born into an on-going society and are socialized to some significant degree which meets the expectations of culture of that particular society. Thus socialization is as old as human race. The process of socialization of the individual child is the major mechanism of society.

In its broadest sense, the meaning of education is in many ways similar to the meaning of socialization. Both are continuous life long processes. To be specific, education is society's formal mechanism for helping the process of socialization.

Due to its comprehensive nature, both education and socialization occur in individual's life formally as well as informally, overtly as well as covertly. Of course as an informal and covert process sometimes it proceeds with little conscious awareness on the part of the individual.

As a major mechanism of the society, socialization has both active and constructive aspects. On one hand, it produces growth and infinite variety of desires and strivings in the individual : on the other hand, it encourages, stimulates and motivates for achieving those. Perhaps the greatest contribution of society is its nature of accumulation, otherwise the products of one generation do not exist for the next generation. The soil of civilization is thus covered with a rich deposit that continues to grow constantly. Education is to play a remarkable role here. For the society, the schools preserve the cultural heritage; for the individual, the schools transmit information, knowledge and skills to the younger generation. Along with these, the schools also develop commitment towards implementation of societal values.

Brim (1966) defines socialization as "the process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, skills and dispositions that make them more or less able members of their society". Thus it is concerned with preparation for participation in group life. As a member of the society, the individuals are constantly entering into new interactional systems, taking on new roles and acquiring new knowledge, skills, values and attitudes as they participate in new social groups. This is an on-going process throughout the life time. Although the content of socialization covers a wide area, the analysis of social roles, the process and the means by which individuals develop and acquire the interpersonal skills necessary for social interaction is considered by many as the essence of socialization theory. Regarding the development of interpersonal competence, Weinstein (1969) points out rightly that "Most of an individual's social life is concerned with the achievement of personal goals in a succession of encounters with other individuals having similar or dissimilar goals".

From different definitions of socialization it is obvious that these focus on processes leading to conformity with group norms and standards. But it is interesting to note that characteristics of individual adaptations to such norms and deviations from them are of equal relevance and importance. To speak further, there exist two equally valid but completely opposite views of human life. If 'No man is an island entire to itself' is true; its opposite view that 'Every one lives on the separate islands of one's own consciousness' is also equally correct.

It is true that no one can ever intrude into another's life. They are impenetrable but not completely isolated. Again unbearable loneliness or inborn gregariousness may impel man to reach out to his fellows for companionship and security. The crux of this dilemma naturally rests on education. The task of education is therefore to enable man to live a life of his own along with others too. This dual role of education evolves due to the complementary nature of man as stated by John Dewey : man is essentially an active problem solving creature; ideally he is a developing, growing, socially conscious creature. All these views imply for a type of education which helps in optimal development of child's capabilities to live adequately and that must be done in such a way which makes him competent social being. In other words education should be child centred and make use of man's social resources to encourage individual growth.

In the individual-society nexus one side needs the other. Thus the full personal development of a human being involves the cultivation of individuality as well as development of social aspects. Education commission (1964-66) also has pointed out that in a democracy the

individual is an end in himself and the primary purpose to education is to provide him with the widest opportunity to develop his potentialities to the full. But the path to this goal lies through social organisation and emphasis on social perspectives. In short, education should be something socially creative.

1.1.2 School Peer Group : Educational Context of Socialization

The study of socialization has attracted the attention of an increasing number of scholars in sociology, psychology and social psychology since several decades. From the time of classical theorists - Freud, Piaget, Mead, Erikson etc., to the contemporary students of socialization like Brim, Becker, Riley etc., the assumption that socialization is a continuing, life long process has been sustained.

This is not to ignore its continuous nature, but it would be more appropriate to consider the role of some of the major agencies of socialization of which school has its own unique importance. In the words of Wheeler (1966) it is expressed as "just as individuals may become differently socialized because of differences in past experiences, motivations and capacities, so may they become differently socialized because of differences in the structure of the social settings in which they interact".

As the society is moving towards rapid changes, parents have become inadequate model for children and the agency of formal education has come into existence. Like the family, the school is an institution whose explicit mandate is to socialize. Along with that, as commitment

to the implementation of societal values, the school is primarily concerned with the formal instruction and development of cognitive skills to the children.

Parsons (1964) rightly pointed out that school is the first socializing agency in the child's experience that institutionalizes a differentiation of status based on achievement.

From the functional point of view also, the school can be treated as an agency of socialization through which individual personalities are trained to be motivationally and technically adequate to the performance of adult roles. Its second function is to allocate these human resources within the role structure of the adult society. Naturally both are interrelated. With the general culture changing process, the education system has to play an increasingly vital role in the society. School can be termed as a specialised agency for that.

There would be no contradiction in the statement that socialization in every society is the function not only of institutionalised authorities but also of coevals. Mannheim (1952), while discussing 'generation gap' in the society, pointed out clearly the impact of cohorts upon socialization. A cohort may be defined as the aggregate individuals who experience the same event within the same time interval. Due to the rapid advancements in modern society, changes also occur in the agencies of socialization, which establish a context favourable to the concept 'cohort'. Furthermore, as individuals are embedded for a long time in the school system, that also gives the cohort to identify as a historical entity. The school is a cohort creator therefore.

The peergroup is a subset of one's cohort. A child's 'peer' has been defined by Hartup (1978) as another who is at an equal level in many respects but not necessarily every respect. He pointed out that they do differ in specific age, size, skills, values and so forth. But generally peergroup implies a group of people of the same age with whom one has attitude forming relationship. Although mixed age peergroup could be traced back in primitive societies also, but same age peergroups are relatively recent occurrences in human history. The role of school in the process of socialization has been already discussed. The school is expected to help the child to bridge the gap between his child's world and the adult world.

But the most significant point in the role of school, in the process of socialization, is that it deals with children as groups and not as individuals. Consequently the influence of the school upon the individual child is always mediated in the setting of the peergroup. From this point of view it can be stated that the school and the peergroup are closely knitted together in influencing the child. For which, the importance of school peergroup as a socializing agency can not be ignored.

Again in the school context the classroom group is another unique social system. Stated by Getzels & Thelen, it is as under :

"There is nothing that goes on in the classroom that is not of ultimate consequence for the social order; and there is not much that is of immediate consequence for the social order that is not reflected in some way in the class room".

The same tune has also been reflected in the report of Education Commission (1964-66) that future society is being shaped in the present classrooms.

A classroom group is a formally organised social group where differentiation of role exists. Responsibility regarding the aims, tasks and goals of the group also varies like the role differentiation.

The psychological aspect of the classroom group is due to expectancies developed in the interrelationships of individuals to one another. "Because of its social and psychological characteristics a classroom group has been referred as a 'socio-psychological' structure' (Dynamics of Instructional Groups, 1960).

1.2 A THEORETICAL BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The role of theory in the field of research is undoubtedly a crucial issue. Any research endeavour based on well-grounded theory not only helps the researcher to proceed in a more systematic manner but also provides ample scope for examination and verification of existing knowledge.

The relevant theoretical background attuned to the present study has been discussed in the coming part.

1.2.1 Study of Individual in Social Context and the Role of Group

Study of the individual in social context is the main theme of social psychology. Social psychology as a special discipline is developed when the separation of individuals from society becomes problematic (Asplund, Drier and March, 1975). It studies individual's behaviour

in social context and it tries to analyse and explain social phenomena in terms of psychological conditions. Consequently, the study of the groups is the focal point in social psychology.

Allport's influential definition of social psychology as the study of how the feelings, thoughts and behaviours of the individual are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of others, has helped to enshrine the principle that social psychology is the study of the individual's behaviour as it is affected by others (Allport, 1924).

The same idea is also reflected in another definition of social psychology as :

"The study of the primary relations of individuals to one another, or to groups, collectivities or institutions, and also the study of intra individual processes in so far as they substantially influence, or are influenced by social forces". (Social psychology Quarterly, 1979).

It is therefore clear that social psychology is concerned with how people affect one another's thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Equally obvious is the fact that the great bulk of human civilization does not occur in social isolation. Even acts performed alone eg., reading, thinking, walking, etc., are influenced to a large degree by significant other persons in the individual's life space. As study of individual's behaviour in social context is the sole scope of social psychology; studies conducted in this area can give us a better perspective about human - the paragon of life.

Although the traditional model of social psychology was predominantly laboratory and experimental, the present notion stands for any approach that yields useful and replicable data. Later social psychologist like Berkowitz (1975) simply states that social psychology is a study of individual's reaction to social stimuli.

This change in notion is due to the growing awareness of sociological research and theories as well as significant contributions made by linguistic, structuralistic and anthropological thought in the social field.

From the methodological point of view, two approaches to social psychology can be considered in this context - sociological and psychological. Sociologically oriented social psychology seeks to understand how external societal forces come to influence social behaviour, whereas according to psychological tradition emphasis is on the individuals as the foci of analysis. Basically, the two approaches are two sides of the same coin.

An integrated socio-psychological perspective on social behaviour incorporating both individual and situational variables and considering both psychological and sociological traditions would appear to be the most promising strategy in this area. The dynamics of total behaviour, person and environment as enunciated by Lewin (1936) can be best understood if the social environment in which the individual is a constant interactor is taken into account. For a clear understanding of the "dynamic relation between person and situation", a systematic analysis of the relations existing between persons and their environmental milieu is necessary.

Role of group : It is an established fact that groups constitute the essential and desired social environment and without studying group it is not possible to analyse the social environment. Although definition varies from one social psychologist to another, there lies a common feature central to every definitions. i.e., the recurring reciprocal interactions among individuals in a set of individuals is the essential element, for forming a group.

Homans (1950) views the group as a social system, which is not as an aggregate of persons but as the integration of mutually dependent actions of associated individuals. The elements Homans selects as basic to all social systems are : activity, interaction, sentiment, norm and rank. The first two elements viz., activity and interaction are present from the moment of origin of the group but others are also equally important for the continuation of the same.

Sherif & Sherif (1969) have tried to put forward a representative definition of a group as :

"A group is a social unit consisting of a number of individuals who stand in role and status relationships to one another, stabilized in some degree at the time, and who possess a set of values or norms of their own regulating their behaviour, at least in matters of consequence to the group".

Three factors are crystal clear from the above definition that -

- (i) group, as a subset of individuals in the set — of societal unit,
- (ii) stabilised role and status relationships among the members and

- (iii) the existence of a set of values or norms for regulating the behaviour of the members.

From an analysis of the last two factors viz., role and status relationships, as well as values and norms of the group it is possible to visualise the nature of this subset of the society.

"A group" is defined by Shaw (1971) "as two or more persons who are interacting with one another in such a manner that each person influences and is influenced by other person".

That interaction is the major theme of a group is evident from the aforementioned definitions. Groups can be classified either structurally or functionally and thus we find different types of group like primary, secondary and tertiary group; membership and reference group. One point better to remember in this connection is that groups are dynamic in relation both to the individual and to the group. There lies the probability of easy transformation from one type of group to another type.

The concept 'reference group' deserves considerable attention from social psychologists as it was formally originated in the field of social psychology and it focussed on the structure and functions of the social environment in which individuals were located.

In contrast to membership group which denotes only the belongingness towards a group, reference group serves as a reference point to the individual. A reference group may be defined as (Kemper, 1968) :

"A group, collectivity or person which the actor takes into account in some manner in the course of selecting a behaviour from among a set of alternatives, or in making a judgement about a problematic issue. A reference group helps to orient the actor in a certain course, whether of action or attitude".

The basic idea underlying the use of this concept is that people's psychological relationships (e.g., of identification, comparison) to others are crucial to understanding their activities. Sherif (1964) characterized reference groups as "those groups to which the individual relates himself as a part or to which he aspires to relate himself psychologically".

1.2.2 Reference Group Theory

Reference group theory, now associated with Merton's name has got an elaborate treatment in his book. 'Social theory and Social structure' in 1957. In collaboration with Alice S. Rossi, the theory of reference group behaviour was discussed and justified.

The term 'reference group' was first used by Hyman (1942), who elaborated the concept and determined the effects of particular reference groups on self appraisal by experimental manipulations. Newcomb (1943), explored the process of attitude change among college students taking into account the institution context. These two studies by social psychologists were the first systematic investigations of reference group processes.

In general, reference group theory aims to systematize the determinants and consequences of the process of evaluation and self appraisal in which the individual takes the values or standards of other individuals and groups as a comparative frame of reference. Both membership and nonmembership group have been taken as assumed social frames of reference for developing a theory of reference group behaviour but Merton himself warns that in fact people are probably more influenced by the groups of which they are members.

Mead (1934) was an important forerunner in the history of reference group theory and his central conception was captured in his statement :

"The individual experiences himself as such not directly, but only indirectly from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs".

He also advanced the hypothesis that it is the groups of which the individual is a member that yield the significant frame of reference for self evaluation.

Kelley (1952), another initiator, stated two functions of reference group : normative and comparative.

The normative function of reference groups entails the role which they play in enforcing the standards for action and belief in the person. To perform this function, the person must have face to face contact with the group or its representative, and the group must have the power to sanction the person deviation. The person is motivated to abide by normative pressure because of his desire to secure or maintain membership in the group. The second function

defined as comparative by Kelley involves the person's use of the group as a comparative index of the 'objective correctness' of his attitudes, opinions and behaviours. This function can operate without interaction and without concerns about group membership.

But it is Merton (1957), who provides an excellent theoretical analysis of significant aspect of group life in his treatment of reference group behaviour. Of course he related the concept "relative deprivation" to reference group. According to Merton & Rossi, reference group are of three kinds : those with whom the men are in actual association, those with whom they share the same status or social category, and those who have a different status or category. An example of the first type would be the man who compares himself with friends and acquaintances; of the second type a teacher who compares himself with other teachers; and of the third type office personnels comparing themselves with officers.

Merton also enlisted and discussed as many as twenty six properties of group. He suggested that some of the group properties like degree of social cohesion, degree of stability of the group and extent of social interaction are to be treated as variables. For those properties indices can be devised which provide standardized measures of their variability. Merton's contribution to the study of reference group behaviour and to its structural-functional analysis is highly commendable in an endeavour to build up a theory.

The normative and comparative functions of reference group encourage different areas of research for students of reference group behaviour. As Hyman (1968) has put it :

"If the reference groups of individuals are empirically determined, knowledge and prediction of attitude, self evaluation and conduct will be enhanced; the cherished principles about group influences can be protected; and an understanding of the complex processes by which men relate themselves to groups can be enriched. Such is the hope of reference group theory and research and the basis of attractiveness to social scientists".

Although two decades are almost over after Hyman's statement, still the scope of reference group is not so well-grounded like other theories. Of course as suggested by Merton (1968) himself 'reference groups' can be treated as middle range theory. Menzies (1982) has suggested that three basic steps should be followed in researches undertaken, taking middle range theory as base.

- 1) Define the variables to be used.
- 2) Specify the relationships among the variables defined.
- 3) Determine whether the relationship among the variables specified can be made into tendency statements.

Then only some causal explanation can be put forward for those specified relationship although for selection and placement of variables some a priori-ground is needed.

Different functions of reference group are explicit from the different types of reference groups. These different functions can bring a time dimension into the analysis of reference group behaviour. Three main types of reference groups are presented by Kemper (1968).

(a) Normative - a group, collective or person whose norms the person takes seriously into account in determining his actions and attitudes. Normative standards are a result of one's past.

(b) Comparative - these reference groups provide a standard of comparison in terms of which the actor can judge the equity of his fate, the legitimacy of his actions, the quality of his performance or how far he should accommodate his actions to the wishes of others. Turner (1955) suggests that people tend to choose comparative reference groups in relation to which they can see themselves as a success. These comparisons are usually in the present time of an individual.

(c) Audience - The term audience is useful in suggesting that there is a group that the person takes into account in determining how to display or present himself. One's audience group may well be a future one.

Considering the different connotations and functions of reference group the following steps should be followed when the concept is used for research purpose:

1. State the behaviour or attitude expected of the person on the basis of his formal group membership or role.
2. Identify the person's reference groups.
3. Discuss the different ways in which the person relates to his reference group.
4. Given the person's reference groups and how they function, state how they change or modify the action or attitude of the person. (Menzies, 1982).

1.2.2 (A) The Comparative Function of Reference Group

The comparative function of reference group is to serve as a standard of comparison for an appraisal of self or of others. The selection of 'comparison with others' has emphasized primarily on motivational determinants though structural and normative factors of the group cannot be ignored.

The theory of social comparison processes by Leon Festinger (1954) attempts to stipulate why comparison is used, with whom comparisons are made and what effects comparison has. The two basic assumptions of social comparison theory are :

- (1) Persons have a drive to evaluate their opinions and abilities.
- (2) Persons prefer objective criteria (physical reality) as standards for self evaluation.

In absence of adequate physical reality, persons will seek out other persons (social reality) as a source of information. This search for information from social reality is the process of social comparison.

The need for this realistic self appraisal leads to a "similarity principle" of comparative reference group selection. People have a tendency to compare themselves or evaluate themselves taking some similar ones as a frame of reference.

Hyman (1942), found that both similarity and contrast served as principles of selection of the frame of reference. He pointed out that under certain circumstances, individuals may compare themselves with

others who are worse off and in other circumstances select others as a point of reference, who are better off. Such comparisons can enhance their satisfaction or results in dissatisfaction which ultimately lead to change in the object of comparison.

But in naturally occurring situations, selection of comparison with others may be largely determined by the structure of the situation or the norms operative in it, rather than being a matter of individual choice. That is why family or school peer group as a point of reference should be analysed in terms of the structure and norms prevailing in that situations.

Another implication of the researches done on comparative reference group process is spontaneous comparisons. This spontaneous comparison tends to be made with persons or groups 'close' to the respondent in some way. 'Closeness' refers either similarity or propinquity and often these two factors go together. Thus in classroom group students have a tendency to compare themselves with them who are involved together in activities or who are similar in capabilities. These two facets of closeness are sometimes of course difficult to differentiate.

The theory of social comparison holds the view of two functions; self evaluation and self-enhancement. The selection of comparison persons satisfies both the functions. But as mentioned already, in the process of selection a single motive does not predominate. Situational as well as personality variables also influence in that selection process.

1.2.2 (B) Level of Aspiration and Selection of Comparison Person

The concept level of aspiration was originally introduced by Tamara Dembo (1944) one of Kurt Lewin's students and the conceptualization was evolved on the following presuppositional ideas :

- " 1. Human beings have certain capabilities.
2. Capabilities can be expressed in certain performance.
3. The performance can vary in quality and in degree of achievement.
4. Actual performance depends on the goal set by the individual.
5. This goal setting expresses one's level of aspiration."

Frank (1935) stated that "The level of aspiration is the level of future performance in a familiar task, which an individual knowing his level of past performance in that task explicitly undertakes to reach."

The theory of level of aspiration is concerned with identifying factors that influence goal setting and determining how actual performance influences goal setting. Empirical evidence suggests that for goal setting in certain situations, individuals use scales of reference developed by group to which they belong.

Sherif (1939) had drawn the attention that judgemental activities like setting up level of aspiration took place in a referential framework within which

it was executed. This frame of reference is the paradigm for the individual in the interiorization of norms, values and standards of his culture. The social environment of which the individual is a part, thus impels him to determine his level of aspiration.

Further to say, level of aspiration estimated in advance is neither at random nor without any reference to the ability to perform. Herriott (1963) presented a theory of aspiration based on propositions and assumptions from Merton (1957) and Cross (1958). The theory used both comparison function and normative function of reference group. "It is maintained that the level of aspiration of the incumbent of a given focal position may be viewed in part as a function of :

- (1) The level of self-assessment relative to others which he has gained through comparing himself with relevant reference groups.
- (2) The level of the expectations that he perceives significant incumbents of relevant counter positions hold for his behaviour".

This theoretical model specifies two factors — self-assessment and expectation. Differential self-assessment of relevant characteristics that is of intelligence or financial ability and perception of differential expectations from incumbents of relevant counter positions, that is, father, mother or friend, can be explained as the reason of differential levels of aspiration.

According to social comparison theory also the aspiration behaviour can be interpreted in the following manner. Humans make self evaluation on two major

attributes : the opinions they hold and the abilities they possess. A drive to determine the correctness of their opinions and the goodness of their abilities is also assumed. At first glance, abilities and opinions seem to be different, but there is a close functional tie between them. A person's evaluation of his abilities and the opinions about the situation in which he exists, will together have bearing on his behaviour.

In most of the instances, opinions and abilities are determined by reference to some physical or objective means. Whenever an objective or physical basis for the evaluation of one's ability or opinion is not readily available, persons will evaluate by comparison with others. This can be called as comparison with social referents.

This continual drive for self-evaluation leads to pressures toward comparability. Thus it becomes an important point to consider with whom an individual tends to compare himself. If the abilities of group members are too different from one's own, the tendency is there to regard as incomparable. The members of a classroom group constitute the group, which can satisfy a wider variety of the member's needs, naturally can serve the purpose of a comparable comparison group.

In consideration of any group as a comparative reference group, the general trend of the competitiveness of the society should also be considered. Due to rapid technological development, the society is entering into a competitive era which is reflected through its different organisations. Therefore in any process of comparison the existing societal condition should also be considered.

1.2.3 Classroom Adolescent Group as Reference Group

As stated by Merton & Rossi (1957) "Reference Groups are, in principle, almost innumerable; any of the groups of which one is a member, and these are, of course, legion, can become points of reference for shaping one's attitudes, evaluations and behaviour". The role of classroom group as a socializing agency has been discussed earlier in this chapter. Now the query is; - "How much is the possibility of considering classroom group as a frame of reference for the students?" To state short, whether classroom group can serve the purpose of comparison with others or not?

Singer (1981) pointed out that for developing a comprehensive framework for this selection process, three influential factors should be taken into consideration :

- (1) The object of comparison: either an attribute or a characteristic.
- (2) The motive for comparison :- accurate appraisal, self-validation or impetus for change.
- (3) The structure and normative constraints on choice :- The number of 'similar' others present in the immediate environment.

Taking it as a paradigm, an attempt is made to explore the possibilities of considering classroom group as a frame of reference for comparison purposes.

The classroom peer group which has been highlighted in the forthcoming chapters can claim its own uniqueness. By its nature, it is composed of members more similar than dissimilar to each other by virtue of their age, developmental level and interests. The very compulsory element in classroom group membership on the one hand distinguishes it from other types of groups, while on the other side it tends to making it a reference group for most of the adolescents. Thus it conduces to harmonize both reference and membership group functions for most of the adolescents.

Although parameters happen to be similar a classroom group differs from other groups broadly in three different aspects. First, it has a different purpose; second, the methods necessary to achieve its goals are quite distinctive; third, its membership is dissimilar from most other groups. It is needless to say that the homogeneous age composition of the class is an especially consequential feature of classroom structure. It provides the student with a standard of comparison for his competencies. The process of social comparison is ubiquitous in the classroom. Due to age homogeneity and lack of differentiation of formal status among classroom peers, social comparison process operates through means of social differentiation. Each student of the class knows his position with respect to his classmates regarding achievement and perceived ability. Thus differentiation automatically occurs in the classroom situation. The classroom group therefore serves as a reference group for the students mostly in comparative sense, although it is also a source of norms and values.

Richer (1976) suggests that reference group processes viz., comparison processes are more likely to operate in the classroom under conditions of greater subgroup differentiation and visibility. Again Rosenberg (1975) makes a strong case for the negative consequences of minority status 'within the immediate interaction context'. This is because social comparison processes operate more forcefully at this face-to-face level in the classroom than when society at large is the frame of reference.

Although influence of peer group is evident in all the stages of development, adolescence is the most susceptible period for that. The majority of adolescents identify themselves with a membership group with whom they share common patterns of action and with a reference group from which they obtain their ideals, goals and aspiration. If the membership group is of sufficient attraction and strength, it may also function as individual's reference group. From that point of view a classroom adolescent group can serve the functions of reference group, as well as membership group.

Another important feature of adolescent peer group is the segregation of sex. Intensive association with same-sex peers and involvement in sex-typed activities strongly reinforces identification and belongingness with other members of the same sex (Parsons, 1964). Completely contradictory views are found on adolescence regarding this influence process. Coleman (1961) postulated in his book "The Adolescent Society" that the period of adolescence is becoming more clearly differentiated from childhood and adulthood. The school and through the school, peer group, has obtained increasingly more

autonomy. He showed that peers constituted an important reference group for the child, both in normative as well as in comparative sense. He also found that aspirations of high school students were mainly determined by the 'leading crowd' in school, rather than by their parents or teachers.

It is therefore observed that the important, consequence of a fairly-large, age-homogeneous group, having same formal status and experiencing similar circumstances may be the reason for emergence of a subculture of adolescence in the gamut of culture.

Interestingly in a different context, Friedenberg (1962) assumed that society was manipulating the adolescents into a pattern of mass conformity and deprived him of the important experience of establishing his own identity and thus minimized adolescence as a social, developmental phenomenon.

These two contradictory views naturally leads to the dilemma whether adolescence will vanish as Friedenberg assumes or will become a clearly differentiated subculture or contra-culture as postulated by Coleman.

Equally interesting to note the conflicting hypotheses about age changes in conformity to peers among different psychologists. Piaget (1965) assumed that peer conformity declined from middle childhood through adolescence. In contrast, Bronfenbrenner and Devereux (1970) argued that conformity to peers increases from middle childhood to adolescence, because the social pressure of the peer group increases. However, Devereux suggested that conformity to peers may decline in late adolescence due to the growth in autonomy.

Although peer groups are considered as a point of reference for most of the adolescents, yet the impact of parents is also equally important. A common assertion exists that parental and peer group values are mutually incompatible but actually it is not true in the case of most of the adolescents. The considerable overlapping between the values of parents as well as peers may be the reason. Moreover, the inclination towards rigid conformity to either parents or peers is not uniform to all adolescents. It varies according to situational and cultural norms.

Both Piaget and Bronfenbrenner expected a decline with age in conformity to parents. Of course, Piaget assumed that decreasing conformity to both parents and peers reflected a rise in mutual respect. But Bronfenbrenner's assumption was that children turned from parents as they turned towards peers and less parent conformity was associated with more peer conformity. This may be due to the supportive setting that permits adolescents to establish increased autonomy from parents and older siblings.

Some pertinent questions arising from the above discussions are :

1. Whether adolescent sub-culture is quite distinct from the adult culture or just a reflection of the later?
2. Whether the adolescent subculture can influence aspirations, values and attitudes of the adolescents?
3. Whether in educational setup it can be used as a supplementary strategy?

It is not easy to answer how and why adolescents enter into certain types of peer associations and how these groups influence and operate to evaluate the meaning of adolescent subculture. But it is sure that in answering all these questions will open the way to an understanding that the peer group is really a variable entity in the life of an individual and in the role it plays in a social structure. Especially, during adolescence, the peer group takes a certain precedence in many ways over any other group that influences the individual. As already mentioned, the influence of the school upon the individual child is always mediated through the setting of the peer-group, sufficient justification is there in considering it as a supportive strategy.

1.3 CONTEXT OF THE PRESENT STUDY

In order to have a clear understanding and satisfactory answers to the questions emerged in the aforementioned part, the recent trend of social psychology of education can enlighten in finding a solution. As a branch of learning it defines its scope in accordance with a problem which is located in the ambit of education, but the conceptual level and methodological tool to analyse it are distinctly socio-psychological. For illustration, how far the effectiveness of education system is dependent on different socio-psychological factors in an academic setting is an issue in the field of social psychology of education. Therefore to examine the role of peer influence and educational aspiration in the field of education propels the investigator to present the context of this study.

1.3.1 Peer Influence and Academic Achievement

Previous discussion shows evidence that peer groups dominate the adolescent's social world. But whether it can be utilised as a supportive structure in educational set up or not, requires probing of some socio-psychological issues in terms of educational processes.

Generally, in order to measure the effectiveness of formal education i.e., of school system, focal interest is located on academic achievement. Thus academic achievement is the measuring rod to serve the purpose of evaluation in education. Different socio-psychological factors concerned with the student, tend to occupy a pertinent place in that measurement process. Basically education is a social process, a group related activity. Therefore, it is necessary to find out the proper placement of group related factors along with its relative impact on academic achievement.

Traditionally, educators and psychologists have viewed the interaction between the teacher and the student as the most important relationship for achieving the goal of education. The goal is multifaceted of course : socialization, subject matter mastery and above all the wholesome development of the students. As a result more importance is given on teacher-student interaction ignoring the impact of student-student interaction in the class-room situation.

Due to the prevalence of such views, relatively few studies are found during the period 1930 to 1970, to examining the impact of peer group on academic

achievement of the students. Of course the trend has started changing afterwards and in 1980, Walberg classified the peer group as one of the primary factors that influences school achievement.

All classroom experiences contain two elements of problem solving : process problem and achievement problem. While process problem is pertaining to the finding of security in the group; achievement problem is directed at achieving the objectives of learning. Thus classroom group experience contains the interpersonal and membership problem as well as the achievement problem.

It is evident that the school environment comprises of social interactions of individuals in a particular situation, reacting to and being influenced by others. Viewed in this way, education is clearly a socio-psychological phenomenon. It is the study of how the social environment interacts with the individuals in order to modify the behaviours of those individuals. In this context classroom group is also a group and it is assumed that a classroom group helps the students in both cognitive and social development. Not only the teacher-student relationship, but also student-student relationship provides the environment conducive to that development.

In general, the degree to which a student applies his abilities to academic achievement is strongly related to his positions in the peer structure and to the effectiveness of his relationship with his peers (Fox, 1965). The development of personality, cognitive development, academic achievement are all functions of the environment. Proper functioning is therefore dependent on the quality of the environment. An appropriate analysis of the social

environment in which the students are interacting can provide a better understanding of that functioning process naturally.

1.3.2. Educational Aspiration and Academic Achievement

Educational aspiration is the educational level which an individual wishes to reach. Its role is important in the field of education as an individual's achievement cannot be viewed as 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' unless a statement of his level of aspiration is obtained.

Academic achievement is sine qua non in school context. School as a functionary of formal education tends to emphasize achievement which facilitates the process of role allocation for the social system. The school performs the function of selection and differentiation among students on the basis of their educational attainments and opens out avenues for advancement again in terms of achievement.

But success or failure in education is always relative to one's aspiration. Three important aspects are related with aspiration :

- 1) What kind of performance the individual himself considers desirable and important and what he wants to do,
- 2) How well he expects to perform, and
- 3) How important the performance is to him either as a whole or in its different parts.

In addition, an individual sets his level of aspiration knowing his past performance. It is assumed that the relation of the level of aspiration to the level of past performance at any time depends primarily on the relative strength of the following three needs (Lewin, 1926) :

- 1) The need to keep the level of aspiration as high as possible, regardless of the level of performance.
- 2) The need to make the level of aspiration approximate to the level of future performance as close as possible.
- 3) The need to avoid failure, where failure is defined as a level of performance below the level of aspiration regardless of its absolute goodness.

Particularly the third need tends to drive the level of aspiration below the level of past performance.

A cautious individual would tend as a rule to keep his level of aspiration below his past performance while on ambitious one would set his level of aspiration high and persists until he has raised his level of performance to meet it. Thus not only educational aspiration and academic achievement are intertwined topics, it is also assumed that certain 'personality traits are connected with one's level of aspiration.

Past researches have shown that educational aspiration is one of the important non-intellectual traits for academic achievement. It also documents aspiration as one of the 'most significant determinants of eventual educational attainment.'

Naturally all these discussions provide the scope to employ the level of aspiration paradigm in predicting academic achievement. It is therefore felt the need to have a more enriched understanding about aspirations and its relationship with cognitive performance. Then only we can expect better utilisation of human talent. It is desirable to think in the line of thinking of the president of the American Council on Education -

"Human talent is our greatest natural resource. Its conservation and development should be therefore, a primary concern of everyone. When human talent is wasted everyone is deprived; when it is rightly developed, everyone benefits".

1.3.3 Peer Influence and Educational Aspiration

The study of the factors related to educational aspiration of adolescents has been an important and significant problem area in educational research from a long time. But it appears that the determination of one's level of aspiration is neither a random process nor an operation done in a vacuum. There should be a frame of reference which can be used as a point of comparison. From that theoretical point of view, adolescent's level of aspiration for education seems positively related to his peer group membership. To elaborate, when the peer group values high academic performance, many adolescents set unrealistically high levels of aspiration in the hope of winning peer approval. Reverse is the case when grades do not matter to the group, many bright adolescents set unrealistically low levels of aspiration. Thus peer group influence is one of the important factors in determining the level of aspiration particularly during adolescence.

A sociologically appealing explanation holds the view that student subcultures developed in the high schools affect the motivation of the students to plan further education. Of course, whether this influence by the peer group is in terms of short range values or long range values is a matter of investigation and discussion.

In a pioneer study, Chapman & Volkman (1939) reasoned that "one way in which the social environment might determine the level of aspiration of a given individual would be through his knowledge of the achievement of groups whose status or ability, relative to his own, he could assess". They conceptualized it as a frame of reference. Merton and his associate, Hyman and others have developed the reference group concept by emphasizing that in making self assessment an individual compares himself with others.

Past researches suggested that significant others in an adolescent's environment could have considerable influence over his educational plans. Comparative assessment of parental influence vis-à-vis peer influence in the aspiration formation process has also been done. Although it was suggested that parental influence was stronger than peer influence. Herriott (1963) classified significant others in terms of 'models' and 'definers' in his study on determinants of educational aspiration. He established that peer-definer influence was actually greater than parental-definer influence for the formation of educational aspiration.

Numerous inquiries have documented the influential role of peer group associations for the attitudes and behaviours of youth in both rural as well as urban

settings. Theoretically, Newcomb (1969) has delineated four structural conditions which facilitate peer group influence on students' attitudes : size of the group, homogeneity of group members, isolation and importance of the individual or attitudes that are group supported.

The structural conditions outlined already suggested that peer-groups which are relatively small, homogenous in make up and isolated from other reference groups would have a significant impact on the formation of aspirations of students.

The existence of a sex cleavage in structure and functions of peer-group is another significant theoretical consideration. Coleman (1961) pointed out that the structure of girls' peer network was found to be more elaborate and complex than that of boys. Studies also documented the fact that males are more susceptible to peer influences.

The role of classroom peer group especially during the period of adolescence in the aspiration formation process is a matter of worthwhile consideration no doubt. The possibility of utilizing an aspiring peer reference group cannot be ruled out therefore.

1.4 NEED FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

Whatever may be the views and contradictory ideas regarding the developmental process during adolescence in any social context, it is obvious that to understand the adolescents fully, one needs to consider the cultural context, where they have been brought up and the social institutions where they are constant interactors. Adolescent culture may not be a reflection of adult culture, but it cannot be an alienated one also.

A known fact is that western culture having its own uniqueness differs distinctly from our Indian culture. This is easily observable in behaviours, attitudes and orientations towards life in most of the adolescents. The prolonging economic dependence of Indian adolescents on parents, conservative social attitude especially on hetero-sexual development etc., naturally give us the scope to doubt whether Indian adolescents are having any distinctive culture either supportive or distractive. At the end of this twentieth century, an accelerating change is felt in every aspect of life. It is therefore necessary to know more about the trend of development of future generations of the coming century.

Studies done outside India gives ample evidence to believe that peer groups and friends provide the adolescent with an arena for much of the learning that occurs in early adolescence. But the direct approaches used in most of the studies, provide the concept of peer group as a problem instead of an asset. Experimentation with an indirect approach is therefore justified which can offer the possibilities

of conscious and constructive direction of the peer group. This possibility is more intense in early adolescent classroom peer group, which leads to a worth probing issue viz., 'whether adolescent peer group in educational setting can be used as a supplementary structure.'

The role of classroom peer group as membership group and reference group has already been discussed. But how far adolescents use it as a referential framework?

Undoubtedly, peer group provides motivation for achievement. But to what extent can it exert influence in the field of education?

Success in education or achievement cannot be evaluated properly without knowing one's educational aspiration. In the process of aspiration formation, the influence of significant others is an issue supported by social psychologists. But whether classroom peer group can be attributed as significant in aspiration formation process of Indian adolescents is a field to explore.

Although is of recent origin, a significant trend has been observed amongst the researchers to explore possible relationship between social aspect and cognitive domain of the individual. No doubt they are not mutually exclusive, as empirical evidence supports for partial over-lapping between the two. The scope is therefore promising that a fuller sampling of the child's social behaviour, both in and out of school might yield greater evidence for the distinctive influence of social functioning on cognitive development.

1.5 TITLE OF THE PROBLEM

In the light of the preceding discussion, a study is undertaken and the problem has been stated as under :

PEER INFLUENCE AND EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATION
OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS : A STUDY IN
RELATION TO THEIR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT.

1.6 VARIABLES

The two variables emerge from the title of the thesis are :

- 1) Peer Influence
- 2) Educational Aspiration

The theoretical background has suggested for inclusion of some other independent variables and these are;

- 3) Intelligences
- 4) Socio-economic status
- 5) Area of institution (rural/urban)
- 6) Nature of institution (boys/girls/coeducational)

The major dependent variable for the study is :

- 7) Academic Achievement.

1.7 OBJECTIVES

- 1) To study the effects of Intelligence, Socio-economic status, Area of institution, Nature of institution and their interactions on Peer Influence.
- 2) To study the effects of Intelligence, Socio-economic status, Area of institution, Nature of institutions and their interactions on Educational Aspiration.
- 3) To establish the regression equation for Academic Achievement in relation to Intelligence, Socio-economic status, Peer Influence and Educational Aspiration for total sample; for rural and urban groups; for boys, girls and co-educational school groups.

School peer-group as discussed earlier is an important agency of socialization, which can at the same time operate the comparative function of reference group also. The possibility of using school peer group especially during adolescence as a supplementary structure in the field of education leads to the context and need of the investigation undertaken. Educational aspiration as an enhancing agent in the arena of education is another issue which also needs serious consideration.

A review of the researches pertaining to this study is presented in the next chapter.