CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In recent years there is general criticism by the educationalists, clinical psychologists and psychiatrists that the Indian educational system is overburdening the young students. A number of reports have appeared in the media, mainly the newspapers and magazines, which bring to light the alarming rise in the learning and behavioural problems of students due to excessive academic pressurisation inflicted by rigid curriculum and the demanding teachers and parents. These reports are based on a number of case studies of students from different parts of India with stress-related problems ranging from psychosomatic disorders to instances of running away from home or even committing suicide. Crystal et al. (1994) report that American media portray east Asian students (with reference to the Japanese and the Chinese) as nervous, depressed, and generally overburdened by academic pressures. Thus, it seems to be reasonable to assume that Asian students, in general, suffer from academic pressurisation.

In the contemporary Western society with authoritative parent-child relationships, absence of vocational prejudices, and wider options for children to take up vocations of their choice, parental pressurisation in
academic matters is not expected to arise. Contrary to this belief, results of current surveys in Ireland and Britain, as reported in the media, have found a large number of secondary school pupils suffering from severe examination stress mainly due to their parents' high expectations (Irish Independent (Dublin), 26 June 1995; BBC Breakfast News, 23 April 1996).

Thus, academic pressurisation by parents has emerged as a problem of global concern; this is especially true in the Indian context with the present educational system. For Indian students, academic pressurisation can arise from four main sources. They are: (1) concerning the curriculum; (2) from the school; (3) from the parents; and (4) from within oneself, which to some extent could be due to the former sources. The curriculum has become examination-oriented, opting for a 'rat-race' for marks and percentages, promoting unhealthy competition and rote learning. The schools deal with a large number of students, with no consideration for individual differences in children, with little freedom of expression and critical judgement promoting 'single-track' thinking. Schools force the children to learn the 'contents' as per the curriculum without empowering them with the 'processes' and 'skills' required to deal with the contents. However, there are very few alternative schools that have opted out of the chase for marks and which deal with only a
small number of students. Conterminous with the burdening educational philosophy is the problem of parental pressurisation.

Academic pressurisation from parents to a certain extent serves as a motivating factor facilitating better performance of children in schools. In the present Indian competitive scenario, many parents fail to keep up the 'golden mean' as regards academic pressurisation. They tend to show demanding and controlling behaviours that exert much pressure on their children. Excessive parental pressure on the children for achievement in school can be destructive to the 'Creativity' and 'Self-esteem' of the children. Parental pressurisation might adversely affect their 'Academic interest' and 'Academic achievement' in school, quite contrary to parental expectations. The present study aims at verifying these assumptions.

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Indian parents have now realised the potentialities of education as an instrument that not only unlocks the doors of modernisation, but also facilitates social mobility. They, irrespective of social class or status, tend to show prejudicial preference to vocations and professions requiring higher education, unlike their Western counterparts. Their obsession
seems to be that the child should either be an engineer or a doctor or any professional. This situation is especially true in Indian states with high literacy rates like Kerala.

In an article titled "The Hi-Pressure Generation" published in the Femina, 8 September 1994, Seshadri, a psychiatrist, reports: "Parents who are not achievers, or the ones who could not realise a few of their dreams for lack of opportunity are more prone to putting unrealistic pressure on their children." Okun and Rappaport (1980) while listing the myths about parenting, report: "Having a child gives the parents a second chance to achieve what they should have achieved." Thus, it is very likely that parents set up unrealistic aspirations for their children to achieve and tend to push their children in the academic race. This kind of parental over-concern has promoted the lucrative ancillary industry of private tutorials, and they compel their children to attend such tutorials at a very early age. Only a minority of elite parents show anxiety over the academic burdening of their children.

The term 'parental pressurisation' includes parental beliefs or expectations, dispositions, and behaviours causing both psychological and physical strain to the child. Parents pressurise by being over-anxious and ambitious, controlling and rigid, and forcing the child to study
beyond his capability. Too much of pressure from the parents for academic achievement in school occurs when they insist on a strict, regular, and tedious time schedule for studies, give punishments (need not be corporal) for not abiding the rules, and constantly nag for less than the expected performance in school. Thus, for children, learning has become an activity structured and controlled by the parents.

The children's activities other than their studies like leisure-time activities (including television viewing), hobbies, and other extracurricular activities also tend to become structured, which means, scheduled and regulated by a lot of control, evaluation and pressure by the parents. The children's lives tend to run like clock-work, particularly if both the parents are working, and the children do not get freedom to do things independently. Thus, today's children tend to be 'programmed' by the adults. Such a treatment from key figures like parents can lower the perceived autonomy and perceived competence of the children, which are very important motivational resources for developing academic interest, academic achievement, creativity, and self-esteem of children, especially the adolescents.

In the present investigation, the variables 'academic interest' and 'academic achievement' of children are studied in relation to academic
pressurisation from parents. The literature on parenting variables and academic achievement has indicated that parental involvement in the context of an authoritative home environment facilitates academic success by promoting motivational inner resources. Parental pressurisation for achieving excellence in studies and/or for pursuing studies in subjects where the student does not show any aptitude might result in total neglect of studies. Thus, excessive academic pressurisation from parents can be hypothesised to have an adverse influence on the academic interest and academic achievement of children.

'Creativity' is an important variable studied in relation to parental academic pressure. Rogers (1961) has pointed out that human beings require two conditions if they are to function creatively: psychological freedom and psychological safety. Further, according to Goleman et al. (1992) the main creativity killers are surveillance, evaluation, competition, over-control, and pressure. Thus, the road to creativity lies in providing children with generous amount of warmth, acceptance and approval and giving some amount of open-ended time, free from fixed routines, and avoiding evaluation and criticism. Too much emphasis on studies, limiting opportunities of self-exploration and expression, extinguishes the spark of creativity in children. Therefore, the influence of parental academic pressurisation on creativity poses as a problem for study.
Parents' academic pressurisation on children for keeping up to their unrealistic aspirations, with very little positive appraisals, can be destructive to their 'self-esteem'. Self-esteem, the sense of being worth and the confidence to face the world, has to be nurtured with positive reinforcement from significant adults in the child's life, mainly the parents. Many early theorists explaining the antecedents of self-esteem support the major role of parents in the development of self-esteem. From the review of related literature on parenting behaviour and self-esteem, it is seen that a number of researchers agree that parental nurturance, support, and participation have a positive effect on adolescent's self-esteem, whereas controlling behaviours have a reverse effect. Therefore, critical remarks and constant nagging and control from parents in matters of studies may produce poor general and academic self-esteem. Hence, in the present study, self-esteem is included as a study variable.

Thus, the present study arises out of a situation where the children are caught between a rigid educational system, and excessive parental pressure to achieve higher grades in studies; assuming that parental academic pressure will have adverse influence on children's academic interest, academic achievement, creativity and self-esteem.
1.2 NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The topic, academic pressurisation takes on greater significance in a teeming society, where education is a passage to affluence and the desire to edge out others and get ahead is keen. The pressurisation from parents is more significant than from any other source, because parents are the key figures in a child's life, and they are his immediate providers and protectors. They provide the child the sort of buffer he needs once in a while, for instance, the child needs his parent's support when he is under stress due to the burdening curriculum. Parent's criticism and condemnation affect him profoundly. It can make the child feel frustrated and less competent, and he may develop an aversion to studies.

There is an urgent need to study the problem, especially in the Indian context, because of its impact on the mental well-being of children. Many psychiatrists and educationalists agree that the rising psychosomatic, learning, and behaviour problems of children can be attributed to a number of factors, the most important one being the over-ambitious parents. Children suffer from depression and severe anxiety especially when the examination time approaches. Rao (1994) reports: "Fear and excitement tear at the nerve ends of high school students in the early
summer of every year." There are many cases of children running away from homes because they had not done well in their examination.

Clinical psychologists and counsellors, in general, report a number of cases of children with learning problems and psychiatric disturbances due to pressurisation from parents for higher percentages. Even in countries with liberal educational policies like Britain and Ireland, secondary school pupils are found to suffer from examination stress. A report from the children's charity 'Childline', in Britain found that the secondary school pupils worry more about work and examinations than anything else mainly due to the high expectations of parents and teachers (Sunday Independent (Dublin), 28 April 1996). A large survey carried out in Ireland by the Department of Education on Junior and Leaving Certificate students found intense examination stress and placed much of the blame on the high expectations of parents (Irish Independent (Dublin), 26 June 1995). Child-rearing practices in India which encourage self-control, inhibition of feelings and strict discipline, combined with limited outlets for non-academic socialising, suggest that the stress in students would be higher. This also necessitates a study on the topic of parental pressurisation in the Indian context.
The psyche of a child is vulnerable, but more vulnerable is that of the adolescent. In an article published in the Femina, 8 September 1994, Dua, a counsellor has reported that the average age of people coming for psychiatric help is between the ages of 13 and 16 years. Also, in the same article it was reported that a recent World Health Organisation (WHO) multicentre study, conducted in India reveals that, five to 15 percent of children today suffer from psychiatric problems, and nearly 41 percent of these fall in the five to 15 years age group.

The problem ages are from 11 to 14 years, the onset of adolescence. Adolescents’ push for autonomy can make them resent parental schedules for work and leisure and can even make them rebellious and loose academic interest, causing failure in school. According to Collins (1990) when parents see their adolescent changing from a compliant child to someone who is non-compliant, oppositional, and resistant to parental standards, parents tend to clamp down and put more pressure on them to conform to parental standards. Thus it becomes a vicious cycle, creating more pressure in the case of adolescents. In addition to this, pressures to achieve academic excellence mount up at standards IX and X, the latter being the class at which the high school students undergo the Secondary School Leaving Certificate examination. This happens to be the entry point into the adult world of competitions,
achievements and failures. Due to all the above reasons, the academic pressure mounts up at this stage of adolescence and the present study focuses on the influence of parental pressurisation on the early adolescents (the IX standard students).

It is important to study the relation of parental pressurisation for studies on adolescents’ creativity. Findings from a twenty-five year research project on creative thinking indicate that the development of creative capacity occurs primarily during the adolescent period (Rothenberg, 1990). The study assumes greater significance in the present competitive world, where the leisure time is limited, and has become a structured activity for children and not a time for fun. The study also aims to find the relation of creativity to self-esteem and academic interest. This is mostly an unexplored area in India and abroad. The association between creativity and academic achievement is also investigated since many researchers have tried to find this association without producing conclusive results. Creativity is studied in relation to variables like gender, socio-economic status, and type of school.

The inclusion of the variable self-esteem is important in the context of academic pressurisation because of the adverse influence of pressurisation on the self-esteem of adolescents, and also self-esteem is widely
A mediating variable that facilitates academic achievement. By adolescence a more integrated or global appraisal and understanding of self-characteristics emerge, which can be an important predictor of future success or failure in academic and other areas (Young and Bagley, 1982). The subject relating parenting behaviour and self-esteem is mostly an unexplored area of study in India. Hence, it is very relevant to study the influence of parental pressure as well as perceived parental pressure (PPP) on the adolescent's self-esteem. The study also explores self-esteem in relation to academic interest, academic achievement, creativity, gender, socio-economic status of the students, and type of school. Indian studies relating self-esteem and all the above variables are very few. Self-esteem of children in relation to gender is of great significance in the Indian society.

The present study assumes greater significance in the state of Kerala. Menon (1993) has reported that in Kerala, stress levels among students is generally higher than average. He reported that preliminary random surveys conducted by the Voluntary Organisation for Youth Counselling (VOYCE) in 1992, found that as many as 18 percent of students between the ages of 14 and 16 in several upmarket schools in Thiruvananthapuram district suffer from examination-related stress. Due to the alarming rise in the stress-related problems due to academic
pressurisation, some city schools are organising counselling sessions. The topic is new and much research is needed on the emerging problem of academic pressurisation in the competitive educational field of India, more particularly of Kerala, the state with the highest literacy rate.

Academic pressurisation of students are increasingly reported in the Indian media. Unfortunately, the media often focus on sensational and dramatic cases. As a consequence, media presentations of information tend to be different from actual clinical findings. In this context, the present study aims at bringing out scientific and systematic information on parental pressurisation of students and its association with children’s academic interest, actual academic achievement, self-esteem, and creativity.

The findings of the study will be of great use to all those concerned (parents, teachers, student-counsellors) in order to avoid rearing a generation that is beset with behavioural and learning problems, to make full use of children’s learning and creative potential, and to help the children live with high self-regard.
1.3. THE PROBLEM FOR INVESTIGATION

The problem for the present investigation has been identified as "PARENTAL PRESSURE FOR ACHIEVEMENT IN SCHOOL AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CHILDREN'S ACADEMIC INTEREST, ACTUAL ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, SELF-ESTEEM, AND CREATIVITY."

1.4. DEFINITION OF TERMS

The variables used in the study as well as the important concepts are explained below.

1.4.1. Overall Parental Pressure (OPP)

The variable, parental pressurisation is multidimensional because it is possible that there exists some amount of variation in the strategy adopted by the parents in pressurising the children. Hence the term is conceptualised as involving: (1) parental expectation for children's studies; (2) parental anxiety over children's studies; (3) parental attitude towards children's studies; (4) parental control over children's studies; and (5) parental control over children's extra-curricular activities. Thus, parents pressurise by keeping unrealistic expectations, by being over-anxious, by having attitudes favouring control over their children's
studies, by fixing rigid schedules of work, by showing directive, controlling, perfectionist and critical behaviour without positive appraisals, and by controlling the extra-curricular activities including the leisure-time activities.

The variable, OPP is the total sum of scores obtained by the child in the Parental Pressure Inventory (PPI) developed by the investigator for the present study.

1.4.2. Perceived Parental Pressure (PPP)

The term Perceived Parental Pressure means parental pressure as perceived by the children and includes children's perception of parental expectation, parental anxiety, parental control over studies, and parental control over extra-curricular activities.

The term PPP is the total sum of scores obtained by the child in the Perceived Parental Pressure Inventory (PPPI) developed by the investigator.
1.4.3. **Academic Interest (AInt)**

The variable academic interest is conceptualised as involving children's attitude towards education in general, the importance of their studies in particular, their interest in studies, and the stress (fear and anxiety) related to their studies and examinations.

The sum of scores obtained by the child in the Academic Interest Inventory (All) developed by the investigator serves as an index of the variable AInt.

1.4.4. **Actual Academic Achievement (AAch)**

The variable 'actual academic achievement' is the percentage of average marks obtained by the child for the first terminal, second terminal, and final examinations of IX standard.

1.4.5. **Self-esteem**

The variable indicates the general self-esteem of adolescents including the self-evaluation of subjects from a wide variety of domains including the academic, social, emotional, familial, and physical aspects.
The scores obtained by the child on the Self-esteem Inventory by Thomas and Sanandaraj (1985) is taken as the index of self-esteem in the present study.

1.4.6. Creativity

Creativity is a kind of thinking that involves four aspects, namely, fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration (Fisher, 1990). Creativity as used in the study, involves the measuring of traits, namely, originality and elaboration of verbal and non-verbal creativity, using Mehdi's Non-verbal Test of Creative Thinking (Mehdi, 1985).

1.4.6.1. Overall Creativity

Overall creativity includes both non-verbal and verbal creativity, measured in terms of the dimensions, namely, originality and elaboration. Originality is represented by novelty of a given response (figure or its title created) and elaboration as the student's ability to add pertinent details to the figure or its title that is created.

In the present study, the overall creativity is indicated by the total scores obtained by the student in the Non-verbal Test of Creative Thinking by Mehdi (1985).
1.4.6.2. Non-verbal Creativity (nvCr)

The sum of the scores obtained by the student for elaboration and originality, while dealing with the figural content of the test indicates the non-verbal creativity of the student.

1.4.6.3. Verbal Creativity (vCr)

The sum of the scores obtained by the student for elaboration and originality, while giving suitable titles for the figures that are created in the same test indicates the verbal creativity of the student.

1.4.7. Socio-economic Status (SES)

The socio-economic status variable is the sum of the scores awarded for father's and mother's education, father's and mother's occupation and average monthly income of the parents in the Personal Data Questionnaire developed by the investigator.

1.4.8. Type of school

Government schools are those schools under the management of Kerala government, following the Secondary School Leaving Certificate
(SSLC) syllabus. Private-aided schools are those under the private management functioning with government aid and following the SSLC syllabus. Private-unaided schools are those under private management, without government aid, and following the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) syllabus.

1.4.9. Children

In the study, the term 'children' refers to those boys and girls between the ages of 13 and 15 years, studying in the IX standard and who satisfies the following criteria: free from chronic illness and disabilities and hailing from nuclear families with both parents residing with them.

1.4.10. First-born and Later-born

In the present study all children born first in the family (including the only child) are defined as first-born and all children born after the first child are the later-born children.

1.4.11. Mother's employment

In the present study the term indicates whether the children’s mothers are working outside the family or not.
1.5. OBJECTIVES

The present study has set up several objectives and they are as follows:

1.5.1. The main objective of the study is to elucidate the relationship between the independent variable, OPP and the dependent variables, namely, PPP, AInt, AAch, self-esteem, overall creativity, and its dimensions (Orig nvCr, Elab nvCr, nvCr, Orig vCr, Elab vCr, and vCr).

1.5.2. To understand the relationship between the components of OPP, namely: (1) parental expectations on children's studies, (2) parental anxiety over children's studies, (3) parental attitude towards studies, (4) parental control over children's studies, and (5) parental control over children's extra-curricular activities and the dependent variables namely, PPP, AInt, AAch, self-esteem, overall creativity, and its dimensions.

1.5.3. To assess the relationship between OPP, its components and the overall SES and its variables, namely, (a) father's education, (b) father's occupation (c) mother's education, (d) mother's occupation, and (e) monthly income from all sources.
1.5.4. To investigate the interrelationship among the variables, namely, \( \text{PPP, AInt, AAch, self-esteem, creativity and its dimensions, and overall SES and its variables.} \)

1.5.5. To understand the study variables that make significant contribution to the prediction of the variables, \( \text{PPP, AInt, AAch, self-esteem, overall creativity and their partial correlation.} \)

1.5.6. To examine whether there is significant difference in OPP, its components, \( \text{PPP, AInt, AAch, self-esteem and creativity and its dimensions of the children hailing from three type of schools: (1) government school, (2) private-aided school, and (3) private-unaided school.} \)

1.5.7. To find out whether there is significant difference in OPP, its components, \( \text{PPP, AInt, AAch, self-esteem, and creativity and its dimensions, based on: (A) gender (boy/girl), (B) mother's employment (employed/unemployed), and (C) ordinal position in the family (first-born/later-born).} \)
1.6. HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses have been formulated for the study in accordance with the objectives.

1.6.1. There will be significant relationship between OPP, its components, and the variables: PPP, AInt, AAch, self-esteem, overall creativity and its dimensions.

1.6.2. There will be significant relationship between OPP, its components and the overall SES and its variables.

1.6.3. There will be significant interrelationship among the study variables, namely, PPP, AInt, AAch, self-esteem, creativity and its dimensions, and overall SES and its variables.

1.6.4. The study variables make significant contribution to the prediction of each of the variables, namely, PPP, AInt, AAch, self-esteem, and overall creativity.

1.6.5. There will be significant difference in the variables, namely, OPP and its components, PPP, AInt, AAch, self-esteem, creativity, and its dimensions of the children from three types of school.
1.6.6. There will be significant difference in the variables, namely, OPP and its components, PPP, AInt, AAch, self-esteem, creativity and its dimensions of the children based on gender, mother's employment (employed and unemployed) and ordinal position (first-born and later-born) in the family.