INTRODUCTION

Children of today are the citizens of tomorrow. As such, they are the architects of the nation and act as the pillars. It is, therefore, necessary to ensure that each pillar is as strong as the other. If it is so, we cannot bring about optimum human resource development without uplifting the low achievers who constitute a substantial percentage of student population. These low achievers in some instance turn out to be dropouts due to failure. Such a problem is common in the Indian education system. Hence the concern about the low achievers reflects the concern about the waste of human potential which India, as a developing country, needs to avoid.

It is a widespread common belief that the ability to deal with abstract and symbolic materials is likely to be limited on the part of low achievers. Also their ability to apply reasoning in practical situations tends to be inferior to that of high achievers. Thus the major problem with these students lies probably with their power of thinking and ability to learn. Since it is believed that success at the workplace depends on one's level of intelligence, academic achievements, examinations passed and marks obtained assume greater importance from the viewpoint of successful career. In all probability, high achievers are expected to do well than low achievers in their occupations. That is why an individual's intellectual credentials such as doing well in school, obtaining high scores on an IQ test or holding an engineering degree/ advanced computer degree assume a great deal of importance. High achievers are then likely to find themselves in an advantageous position compared to low achievers.

However, it is true at the same time that many seemingly ordinary people are found to have built up their way to success at work and in life in general. One glaring example of this is that of Bill Gates (Microsoft fame), a
college dropout earlier, who could manage to build a vast empire for which he is envied by the entire world. There are many others like him who have made such a difference. This will make it clear that academic intelligence by itself cannot guarantee success outside the classroom. There one requires that kind of brilliance which enables him or her to face life’s difficult moments. A different kind of resourcefulness, termed emotional intelligence, is perhaps needed for being smart in a different way.

The point is, even a low achiever or for that matter a dropout, can successfully build career and feel extremely satisfied with his or her life. It is, therefore, essential to provide due attention, timely help and proper guidance to low achievers with a view to minimize the incidence of dropout and stagnation, and prepare them to face life’s problems. This calls for a thorough investigation of this problem.

To start with, it is necessary to understand the nature of academic achievement and its role in educational development.

1.1 Academic Achievement:

Academic achievement is the central concept in educational psychology. In the school situation it is also called scholastic achievement. According to Good’s Dictionary of Education, academic achievement means “knowledge attained” or “skills developed” in the school subjects usually designated by the test scores or by marks assigned by teachers or by both.

Academic achievement is reflected in the evaluation of academic performance according to some internally or externally imposed criterion which requires an individual to compete with others or which calls for working in terms of some standard of excellence. The problem of low academic achievement indicates scholastic backwardness on the part of a sizable number of students. Eventhough low academic achievers may
become successful in building up career due to non-cognitive skills or abilities, which are basic to emotional intelligence, it does not mean that nothing should be done to understand why the incidence of low academic achievement is noticed among some students and not others. Moreover, this problem, as reviewed by the educationists as well as psychologists during the past few years, has not been found to be exclusively concerned with the intellectual ability of the students. Rather, it has turned out that academic achievement is related to both intellectual and non-intellectual factors.

In fact, how a learner or student perceives and reacts to all that is provided by the educative process, is something which is important in the ultimate analysis. In general, the determinants of academic achievement can be categorized into the following three broad classes: physical, psychological, and environmental.

Physical determinants of academic achievement include health, physical fitness, normal physical development and so on.

Psychological determinants are intelligence, motivational and temperamental characteristics, self-concept, attitudes, emotional balance and moral development.

Environmental determinants are associated with family, school, economic background, social influence etc.

Though the above mentioned factors have been segregated into different categories for the convenience of understanding, in reality they tend to be intertwined with each other in many instances. However, the present research has its focus on family environment, school environment, self-concept and attitude toward learning.
Most of the studies on academic achievement have generally centered their focus on student progress and factors affecting it. But very few of them appear to have taken efforts to find out how low achievers tend to get affected by certain environmental and personal non-cognitive factors such as attitudes and self-concept. The present investigation is an attempt at bridging this gap. It would be worthwhile to examine at this juncture the nature of home and classroom environments, attitude toward learning, and self-concept with a view to understand how these could be related to the problem of low achievement.

1.2 **Home Environment:**

Home environment is an important and powerful factor in shaping a child's personality. This is because the family tends to be the most significant single influence on the development of a child. It is the home where he/she first experiences the meaning of love and affection. The home is the reservoir of strength from which the child draws to meet his physical and psychological needs. This helps the child to build the feeling of worth, which influences his motive to achieve.

Home is also considered as the oldest form of social organization known to man. It is said to be the first school of the child. According to Sills (1968), home can best be characterized by the presence of affiliative bonds within the individual that links the individual to a network of social structure. Webster (1961) has stated that it is the abiding place of affection, especially domestic affection. Family plays an important role in providing the most congenial atmosphere within which the child forms the basic patterns of his life and behaviour. Also it contributes to child's educational and cognitive development. Hence it deserves due consideration while understanding the problem of low achievement.
Home environment is a broad term and it can be conceived in terms of certain dimensions which may be treated as its constituents. Moos and Moos (1986) have, for example, identified the following three major dimensions of family environment: relationship, personal growth, and system maintenance.

‘Relationship’ includes three dimensions, namely, cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict. Cohesion is reflected in the degree of commitment, help and support family members provide for one another. Expressiveness refers to how far family members are encouraged to act openly and express their feelings directly. Conflict is reflected in the amount of open anger, aggression, and disagreement or incompatibility among family members. Personal growth includes dimensions like independence, intellectual orientation, recreational orientation and moral and religious emphasis. System maintenance includes dimensions like organization (clear structure in planning family activities and responsibilities) and control (use of a set of rules and procedures to run family life).

Relationship shared at home by the child with all the members in the family has its direct or indirect effect on his development as well as academic performance. Families where there is better understanding, respect, and love for each other lead to healthy and progressive life. Healthy relations, which are conducive to high success, are mostly experienced by the high achievers.

Parental support and encouragement works as a motivator for the child in that it enforces the child to use all his potentials for his better outcome. That is why parents are considered to be the architects of personality of the child. The foremost duty of the parents is to provide their children with need satisfaction by creating in home emotional climate which is conducive to their healthy personality development. Besides fulfilling
their physical needs, they are also responsible to satisfy their psychological needs for affection, belongingness, praise and above all, to provide a suitable model for their behaviour. A good family relationship is supposed to be full of love and affection. If the parental relationship is good, the child would turn out to be well adjusted, secured and self confident. Moreover, such relationship tends to be conducive to better academic achievement. Low achievers, by contrast, generally come from home settings where the family relationship is poor and where the children have had inadequate help, support and love or wrong type of training and guidance during the formative years.

It is believed that in most cases, the cause of low academic achievement may be traced back to the early years of one’s life. Unfavourable home conditions and experiences are found to be responsible for personality difficulties, which in turn lead to misdirected abilities with their adverse effect on academic progress. Inadequate support, help and encouragement from the family members prevent the individual from realizing his potentials.

Lack of good relationship and frequent family conflicts cause feelings of fear and insecurity, and create unhealthy atmosphere. This in turn prevents the child from expressing himself well making it difficult to do well in examinations and other assignments. Relationship with high demand and pressures affects primary interpersonal and social relationships that create an impact on the psychological structure and functioning of the person. Moreover, problems related to child’s social and emotional development create learning difficulties. Thus emotional impairment leads to poor academic achievement, and it is generally experienced by most of the low achievers.
Anxiety resulting from conflicts or unhealthy relationship interferes with the child's concentration on the school work which otherwise is necessary to reach his optimum potentials. It is also observed that children belonging to poor coordinated and conflicting homes tend to suffer from emotional difficulties, substance abuse, conduct problems and above all poor academic performance. Children who, on the other hand, are more emotionally stable and confident about themselves, tend to seize more opportunities to express their views freely. As a result, such children are likely to do well in their academic performance. In general, it can be said that active parental support to their children in matters related to learning can raise the level of their academic achievement.

In fact, the home environment and family processes provide a network of social and intellectual forces which leads to the child's effective learning as well as personal growth. The encouragement and support provided by the family to children in respect of their educational activities facilitates their self understanding and induces them to realize their potentials to the fullest possible extent.

Homes with the provision for good books, magazines and opportunities for cognitive development of the children create an environment, which is conducive to establishment of positive attitude toward learning and achievement of high academic success. Thus intellectual and moral support provided by the family, helps the child to build a positive approach toward his studies and academic achievement. That is why high achieving students tend to have frequent dialogues with their parents, who in turn consider it to be their responsibility to help their children to gain knowledge and acquire basic literacy skills. They (i.e., parents) communicate regularly with the school teachers and are involved in school functions and activities. Such behaviour is not found among parents of low
achievers. High intellectual orientation in the family makes children spend more time on their study and less time in watching television which helps the child to improve their academic performance.

Family structure, another dimension of family environment, has been found to be associated with the child's mental and cognitive development. Families which are high in cohesion, support and intellectual orientation provide better environment for the children to understand their abilities and use them properly.

Rules and regulations formulated in the family certainly exert their influence on the behaviour of children. If there is clear structure in terms of what is to be done, how it is to be done and when it is to be done, there would be little chance of deviating from the desired behaviour. The children then learn what to do if they have to perform well. However, when children are subjected to excessive enforcement and discipline or control by the parents or other family members, a feeling of lack of confidence and helplessness is likely to get developed in them. This may create an adverse effect on their academic performance.

Homes where parents set high goals for their children and praise them for the attainment of such goals, can create that environment which may lead to high academic achievement.

1.3 Classroom Environment:

The concept of classroom environment refers to multiple elements that constitute the learning environment for students at the school. It includes the physical environment such as infrastructure, administration of services, instructional management, guidance practices, learning and behavioural management practices, work and study climate, quality of relationships between students, and between staff members and students, the
nature and extent of parental and community involvement in school activities, scope for participation in extracurricular activities and so on. Whether these elements are considered separately or grouped into various combinations, the fact remains that they tend to affect the academic achievement of the students. That is why the school is considered to be an important part of a child’s environment from childhood to adolescence. It not only affects his academic development, but self development also. However, academic achievement takes precedence over other developmental issues in the school in general and classroom in particular. Since the formal learning takes place in classrooms, students are expected to take maximum advantage of what goes on in them during the school hours. Of course, how far the classroom environment is likely to affect the academic achievement of students depends, in the ultimate analysis, on the extent to which they perceive it to be effective along certain dimensions.

The theoretical framework for understanding the importance of environmental influences on individuals is rooted historically in Lewin’s formula. Lewin (1936) believed that human behaviour is determined by the complex interaction of an individual and his/her environment. He introduced the formula $B = f(P, E)$ to describe human behaviour ($B$) as a result of two interdependent influences, the person ($P$) and the environment ($E$). He suggested that reciprocal interaction between the person and the environment influences human behaviour.

Following the formula of Lewin, Murray (1938) suggested a Needs-Press model of interaction between personal needs of people and the environment where they live. In furthering Murray’s work, Moos (1979) discussed the ‘personality of environment’. He argued that just as it was possible to characterize an individual’s personality, environment could also be characterized in terms of personality. The idea is social environment, like
people, can also have qualities such as warmth and supportiveness or rigidity and restriction. Within this perspective, Moos has developed the concept of social environment. Based on his analysis of various types of environment such as school, family, and prison, he has proposed that the social environment of an institution consists of three dimensions: relationship, personal growth, and system maintenance and change.

The relationship dimension is concerned with the degree of involvement, mutual support, and free and open expression within the setting. This dimension includes factors such as affiliation, teacher support, peer cohesion, and conflict resolution. The personal growth, or goal orientation dimension includes the areas in which personal development and self-enhancement tend to occur. It is concerned with matters such as task orientation, competition, achievement, and interdependence. The system maintenance dimension includes factors such as organization, rule setting, rule clarity, and teacher control.

Moos (1979) argues that student perceptions provide an important perspective on educational settings. Classrooms, which are meaningful and important to students, tend to contain the elements of homogeneity and cohesiveness. These elements are more likely to exert strong influences on students. Moreover, a classroom acts as an agency equipped with multiple opportunities that stimulate the child to explore himself in many ways. As such, the classroom climate tends to facilitate not only acquisition of knowledge and skills, but their application too in the practical settings.

Students' optimal development is contingent upon satisfactory relationships they share in their school context. During the process of development, each child needs some kind of affiliation that promotes a healthy self-concept, promising outlook toward learning as well as life. Teachers play a unique role in this context, as they share extended period of
time with the children and create a great deal of influence on them. They thus can do a lot in moulding the personality of school children and improve scholastic performance. Positive reinforcement from the teacher, for example, accelerates the learning process. Such positive reinforcement is sure to contribute a lot to the academic development of students. Particularly, the high achievers are more likely to receive positive feedback, which act as reinforcement from their teachers, than do the low achievers. As a result, the former tend to get more opportunities to express themselves in the classroom than the latter.

The classroom where students find support, encouragement, affiliation and less rigid control from their teachers can lead to more favourable attitude toward learning on the part of the former. This in turn can create a positive impact on academic performance. Similarly, other aspects such as good relationship between the students and teacher, innovative ideas used in the class as a teaching method and healthy competition among them are also conducive to favourable attitude toward the school and learning. Such attitude certainly acts as an essential prerequisite for high academic achievement.

Coming to the personal growth of students, every educational institute is supposed to look upon it as an important objective and strive for attaining it. Adequate task orientation, better adjustment and positive approach toward one’s learning goals need to be encouraged in classrooms. This would make the students more active in classroom learning. Such active participation in learning may result in high academic achievement.

Classrooms with poor rule clarity and unduly strict discipline can create adverse effect on students’ attitude toward school and learning. Such negative attitudes lower motivation to learn and concern for self development. Thus unfavourable classroom environment, coupled with
negative attitudes, may adversely affect academic performance. In some cases such effect tends to be so much severe that the concerned students do not want to even continue their education.

1.4 Self-Concept:
1.4.1: What is self-concept?

When an individual says, 'I like vegetarian food' or 'I am honest and sincere', or 'I like to mix up with others in a party', he is describing himself. These and such other descriptions indicate his likes and dislikes as well as beliefs concerning what kind of person he thinks he is. The way a person perceives himself reflects his self-concept. As such, the above mentioned statements can be regarded as indicative of the self-concept of an individual.

Every individual has a self-concept. It develops as he grows up and interacts with others right from his childhood. As a child, when he starts interacting more and more with others, he gets influenced by the attitudes of some important people such as teachers, classmates, and neighbours. Their attitudes get reflected in the appraisals they make of him as a child. As a result, he starts seeing himself as they see him. That is why if the appraisal of the person by these important people turns out to be favourable, he also starts seeing himself favourably. This leads to the development of a positive self-concept. If the appraisal is perceived as unfavourable, the self-concept turns out to be negative. Positive appraisals made by others are thus conducive to positive self-evaluation, while negative appraisals lead to negative self-evaluation by the individual as a growing child.

In general, self-concept refers to the way an individual perceives himself in terms of certain characteristics believed to be possessed by him, his likes and dislikes, values, habits and tendencies, and abilities. The self-concept of an individual indicates how he is disposed toward himself.
Rogers (1961) has dwelt on the nature of self-concept and its impact on the psychological adjustment of people. According to Rogers (1961), fully functioning persons are those who are in close touch with their values and feelings, and experience life more deeply than most other people. He, however, has pointed out that when life experiences tend to be inconsistent with our self-concept (our ideas about ourselves or our belief and knowledge about ourselves), a lot of anxiety is generated. Such a state is likely to create problems of health and adjustment.

1.4.2 Aspects of self-concept and their classification:

People hold self-concept concerning various aspects of their surrounding. Accordingly, an individual is likely to express himself in several ways depending on with what he is concerned.

The major aspects of self expression have been listed below.

1. Existential aspects: This aspect pertains to how does an individual express his existence. The examples are: I am an artist, I am very strong and stout.

2. Interpersonal attributes: This expression contains some kind of relation an individual has with some one, eg. I am his son or I am his disciple.

3. Ascribed characteristics: Here the expression involves attribution of certain characteristics to self, such as I am a proud Indian or I am a senior citizen.

4. Interests and activities: The self-expression of this type indicates interests and activities preferred by the individual. The examples are, I like music or I prefer taking up some social task.
5. Self-determination: The expression here indicates what an individual thinks he can do. For example, “I can act well in plays” or “I can deliver effective public speeches.”

6. Social differentiation: Here the self-expression involves the elements of differentiation from the view point of social classification. The examples are: I belong to middle class; I am north Indian; I am a native of Western Ghats of India and so on.

7. Self-awareness: This expression indicates an individual’s perception of what kind of person he thinks he is. Examples: I am hard working; I am open-minded; I derive satisfaction from helping others.

8. Internalized Beliefs: Through this expression an individual indicates his beliefs and view points. Examples: I don’t believe in casteism; I give utmost importance to merit rather than anything else; Homeopathy is the best kind of treatment for diseases.

1.4.3 Components of Self-concept:

Self-identity, Self-evaluation and Self-ideal are considered to be the major components of self-concept.

Self-identity: A newborn baby is not aware of where does his body end and environment begins. Thus he is not in a position to differentiate his body and environment. But, gradually he starts perceiving his body as a separate entity and such awareness is regarded as ‘body image’. This image leads to the development of physical self-identity which forms the core of his self-concept.

With further development, interaction with the mother and other members of the family make it possible for him to become aware of who he is, what is his name, who are other members of the family and what are their
names. He can now identify himself as a separate entity and differentiate himself from the other persons and things in the environment. The process of socialization accelerates this kind of awareness and he learns to use the pronouns 'I', 'me' and 'we' appropriately. Eventually, he knows well the family, community, city, state and country to which he belongs. The choice of work role plays a significant role in the establishment of self-identity of every individual.

**Self-evaluation**: During the process of self-identity, an individual also makes 'quality judgments' about himself. These judgments are determined by the kind of experiences, good or bad, the individual undergoes from time to time. If he is consistently praised or appreciated for whatever he has done, he starts evaluating himself as good, superior or capable. If, on the other hand, he is repeatedly criticized or blamed for whatever he has done, he is likely to devalue himself as bad, inferior or incapable. Thus how the individual would evaluate himself depends on how significant persons like parents, teachers, neighbours and others with whom he is closely associated tend to evaluate him. The evaluation an individual makes of himself reflects the perception he has of his self worth. Such perception is referred to as "self-esteem". The person who perceives himself to be more capable or competent is said to be having high self-esteem, whereas a person who perceives himself to be incapable or incompetent is said to be having low self-esteem.

Thus, self-esteem is that component of self-concept which refers to the extent to which an individual consistently perceives himself capable, successful, important, and worthy person. Individuals high in self-esteem tend to take on more challenging assignments and be successful. It is then likely that school students identified as high achievers may turn out to be higher in self-esteem than those identified as low achievers.
Self understanding and relationship with others are so crucial a part of one’s life that they ought to form a major part of any educational programme or achievement related to it. Self concept thus tends to be a facilitating factor in school achievement. On the other hand, achievement too can have its influence on self-concept in general and self-esteem in particular. It is, therefore, reasonable to expect that self-esteem and academic achievement would turn out to be positively related to each other.

**Self-ideal** : Apart from self-identity and self-evaluation, how an individual would like to perceive himself, (i.e. ideal self) also forms a part of self-concept. An individual’s expectations and ambition act as motivations for him to change the present self-image and switch over to ideal self-image. Thus he may like to improve his present competence or capability to such an extent that in some specified future period of time he would emerge as the ‘most competent’ person in his field. This indicates that he would like to perceive himself as the ‘most competent’ person in some future period of time. This is known as the ‘ideal self’.

Ideal self can play an important role in the educational and career development of individuals. A student, for example, who wants to perceive himself as the topper in the school or college final examination may work hard to change from the actual to ideal level of competence.

Out of the three components of self-concept described above, the present study has explored the ‘self-evaluation’ component with a view to find out whether the high and low achievers tend to differ in the way they evaluate themselves. It is expected that high achievers tend to evaluate themselves more favourably than do low achievers. Since the evaluation an individual does of himself or herself reflects his or her self, it may be likely that high achievers would turn out to be higher in self-esteem than would low achievers be.
1.5 Attitude Toward Learning:

Learning is generally defined as any relatively permanent change in behaviour that occurs as a result of practice or experience. It occupies an important place in the school programme. In fact, schools are set up for making children learn. All efforts of the teachers are, therefore, expected to lead to effective learning on the part of children. Learning pervades every thing that we do and think. It plays a central role in the language we speak, our customs, our attitudes and beliefs, our personality, and even our perception. Academic success of school children depends on how well they learn.

Attitude toward learning on the part of students will have a direct bearing on their ‘desire’ for learning. If they feel that the resultant change or modification of their behaviour is in their interest such as personal growth, academic success or other benefits, they will respond positively to participation in learning activities carried out at the school. Such a favourable attitude toward learning will in turn increase their motivation to learn. Increased motivation will certainly result in efficient learning, improvement in academic performance and modification of behaviour.

It is then likely that the students, who turn out to be high achievers in the school, might be having a favourable disposition toward learning. Such a favourable disposition tends to make them more involved in learning activities of the school. High involvement in learning in turn leads to more hard work and eventual success in their academic performance.

Moreover, students with favourable attitude toward participation in learning activities are more likely to consider the ‘need for achievement’ as more important than those with less favourable attitude. Individuals high in this need are motivated to do well in the tasks at their hand, because outstanding performance tends to be the major source of satisfaction for
them. The sense of accomplishment is basic to such satisfaction and it can be experienced only when the tasks being performed are challenging or at least moderately difficult. As such, students assigning greater importance to need for achievement tend to set difficult goals like attaining high percentage of marks or grades in the school examination. In order to reach such high levels of performance, they become more and more motivated to work hard, compete with others and go ahead of them.

Favourable attitude toward learning on the part of high achievers, is also likely to make them assign greater importance to the need for self-actualization. An individual with greater self-actualization need feels more strongly that he must not only seek opportunities for realizing his potentialities, but also improve in those abilities and skills which are regarded as important by him. He thinks that his capabilities must not be left unfulfilled.

All this can be considered as providing basis for the prediction that students who are functioning at high level (i.e. those who are high achievers) are likely to be more favourably disposed toward learning than those functioning at low level (i.e. those who are low achievers). It would, therefore, be worthwhile to find out whether the high and low achievers differ in their attitude toward learning.
1.6 A Brief Review of Previous Studies:

Since the present study aims at finding out whether students identified as high and low achievers differ in their perceptions of family and classroom environments, self-concept and attitude toward learning, it would be desirable to have a brief review of earlier studies with a view to assess the empirical status of trends in this respect.

1.6.1 Family environment and academic achievement:

Family plays a pivotal role in providing the most congenial atmosphere within which the child forms his style of life and basic patterns of behaviour. Over the years, home environment has been identified as being a contributing factor to the child’s cognitive and educational development. How the students perceive their home environment determines to a considerable extent the effectiveness of their learning. (Bloom, 1986).

There has been some indication that most of the children who are successful and well adjusted come from homes where a wholesome relationship exists between them and their family members. Parents of children with better academic performance, for example, tend to be trusting, loving, encouraging and showing greater tolerance toward their children (Prasad, 1979).

Healthy interpersonal relationships among the members of the family make school students feel secured and confident. Such feelings help them in concentrating well on their study which is necessary for achieving high level of academic performance (Krishna, 1977). Children with severe disagreement with their parents or those who belong to home environment filled with conflicts suffer from emotional difficulties, substance abuse, conduct problems and poor academic performance. On the other hand, the home environment which is full of love and support motivates children to do well in their academic activities (Kaushik and Rani, 2005). Parents’ level of
education and involvement in their children's academic activities create lasting effects on the education and career of the latter. That is why students get benefited when parents help them in completing their home work or feel encouraged when parents discuss with them the school activities (Christerson and Sheridan, 2001). Eccles and Aarold (1996) have categorily found that while parents of high achieving children tend to participate more in school activities, those of low achievers happen to be less involved in the school activities and home work of their children.

In general, students at all grades tend to be good in academic work, display positive school attitude and engage in positive behaviour if parents are encouraging, knowledgeable, and involved in school activities of their children. However, the relationship between the home environment and academic achievement of students gets adversely affected by the frictions and conflicts in their families. Conflicts and frictions lead to poor sensitivity to social exchange and apathy toward events within the family. This in turn creates a demotivating effect on the school going children and adversely affects their academic performance (Bradley and Corwyn, 2000). A similar effect on academic performance is caused by that home environment in which members become upset due to family worries and anxieties (Ruscell et al., 2000).

Certain rules and procedures might have been set in almost every family to regulate the behaviour of members. The extent to which such set rules and procedures are used indicates the degree of control exercised in the family. If such control is used in appropriate degree, it would be conducive to increase in home work time and regulation of television watching time. Such a state leads to improvement in the academic performance of children (Fehram et al., 1987).
Intellectual orientation, another dimension of home environment, has been reported to be associated with the mental as well as academic development of children (Wilson and Matheny, 1982). High intellectual orientation in the family makes children spend more time on study and less on television watching (McMillan and Hitton smith, 1982). As a result, they are driven to work hard and achieve greater academic success. Thus, family settings which are not only high on cohesion and support, but also high in intellectual orientation provide that kind of home environment which is conducive to better mental development of children (Gottfried and Gottfried, 1984). It has been observed since long that homes which provide good books, magazines and opportunities for cognitive development of children, create an environment leading to high achievement motivation and better academic performance (Farser, 1959). On the other hand, homes with lack of resources (such as books and magazines) and interest in the social and intellectual activities provide that kind of environment which leads to poor learning experiences and academic difficulties (D'Agostino, 2000; Nye et al., 2001).

1.6.2 Classroom environment and academic achievement:

Schools represent an important part of environment by which individuals are surrounded since their childhood to adolescence. In fact, they constitute the second most intimate environment after the home. The school, therefore, exerts substantial influence on the social and educational development of an individual. Particularly, the classroom in which he spends his major period of time, acts as an agency equipped with multiple opportunities that stimulate him to explore his potentials in many ways. The climate of a classroom is governed by classroom practices and conditions created thereby. Factors like qualification, method of managing the class and behaviour of teachers are important in making the classroom environment as favourable or unfavourable as well as gratifying or discouraging to the
students (Upadhyaya, 1983). The success of students is determined, at least in part, of by the quality of social environment of classroom (Brembeck, 1966). The dynamics of social system of a classroom includes components like student behaviour, teacher behaviour, students-teacher and teacher-student behavioural interactions.

In view of the importance of classroom environment, researchers have tried to understand the nature of factors that determine the kind of perception students are likely to have of their classrooms. Mishra (2002) conducted a study on 200 students, 100 were tribal and the remaining 100 were non-tribal. In each group of 100 students, 50 were urban and 50 were rural students. These students were administered on the Classroom Environment Scale constructed by Upadhyaya (1983). The classroom environment, as perceived by the students, was considered in terms of (i) interpersonal relationship, (ii) personal development or goal orientation, and (iii) system maintenance and system change. The trends of result indicated that the urban, non tribal and male students perceived the classroom environment more favourably than the rural, tribal and female students, though the difference was significant only in case of sex and not in caste and locale.

The factor ‘tribal-v/s-non tribal’ students has been explored in some other studies also. Dikshit (1980), for example, has observed that non-tribal students of tenth grade excelled in academic performance, leaving their counterpart tribal students far behind. Similarly, another factor whether the students belong to the urban or rural area has also been explored in some studies. For example, Grewal and Shing (1987), found that the urban students covered in their study were significantly higher in academic performance than the rural students. Because of the difference between the tribal and non-tribal as well as urban and rural students as described above,
Mishra’s (2002) contention in his study was that tribal and rural students were lagging behind in their academic progress, and classroom environment was partly responsible for their retarded educational progress. With this rationale, he decided to compare the perception of classroom environments of ‘tribal and non-tribal’ and ‘rural – urban’ students. The results, as already mentioned, revealed trends which were in the predicted direction, but statistically non-significant.

Moos and Trickett (1987) have reported in their “Classroom Environment Scale Manual” that classes in which teachers are involved and tend to be supportive have students who enjoy learning and who report high desire for self improvement. In contrast, classes with high rigid control by the teacher and organization of assignments and classroom activities in a highly formalized manner express negative feelings about school and are less interested in learning and self improvement. Apart from this, the motivation provided by the teacher also has its own importance in the academic development of students. Specifically, if the teacher provides positive reinforcement to the students, their learning process gets accelerated. Some students reach higher levels of academic performance due to the heightened expectation that if they do well in the classroom they would get recognition and appreciation from the teacher. Thus the positive reinforcement in this form stimulates them to express themselves and excel in academic performance in the classroom (Suneetha and Mayuri, 2000). This suggests that those who emerge as high achievers in the class are likely to have a favourable perception of their classroom environment.

The extent to which students’ active participation in learning is encouraged in the classroom is very important from the viewpoint of generating conducive classroom environment. The interaction potentials of the classroom, therefore, depend on the style of teacher behaviour. If the
behaviour of a teacher encourages free communication and open interaction between him and the students in the classroom, the latter become motivated to participate actively in the learning that takes place in it (i.e. classroom). Consequently, such learning turns out to be more effective (Lulla, 1974). Garrett (2003) has reported a study which aimed at determining the various types of academic, social and/or institutional factors that can be attributed to the low and high academic achievement of Latino students in a small high school. The Latino population continues to be the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States. However, the Lations have higher high school drop out rates and lower high school completion rates than White and Black students combined. The present study was conducted on 30 students from a Milwaukee-based alternative high school. Among the findings obtained, one is very much relevant to the classroom environment. Specifically, it was found that the lack of congenial student-teacher interpersonal relationships could be a factor explaining the oppositional behaviours of many of the "low achieving" students. Several of the students interviewed by the researcher mentioned that they lacked interpersonal relationships with their teachers. These students often felt that their teachers did not care about them because they did not hold them to high expectations, exposed them to psychological abuse, or because they felt their teachers did not have a genuine interest to know them or the communities in which they lived.

Subramanyam (1984) and Pandya (1991) found that teacher's morale, his/her skills, and his/her expectations about the student's performance are some of the significant factors which directly affect academic motivation and plays a role in moulding the personality of students, which in the ultimate analysis tends to affect the scholastic performance.
Jyothi and Ramkrishnaniah (2000) have studied the relationship between scholastic achievement and academic adjustment. Data were collected from 300 intermediate students selected randomly from colleges situated in Tirupati. The results revealed that the scholastic performance of the well adjusted students is far better than that of the poorly and moderately adjusted students.

Teacher effectiveness is regarded as an important factor in the context of classroom environment. It depends on teaching competencies, general skills like communication and human relations, cognitive abilities, affective abilities and professional competencies (Verma, 1968; Thomas, 1991; and Vora, 1998). Teacher effectiveness determines to a considerable extent the quality of social environment of classrooms. The students who perceive their teachers to be more effective along the dimensions of teaching skills, classroom management and sound interpersonal relationship as reflected in the extent of warmth, permissiveness and support toward them, may turn out to be more successful in their academic performance than those who perceive their teachers to be less effective.

In one study Sun-Geun Baek and Hye-Jeong Choi (2002) administered the Classroom Environment Scale, developed by Moos and Trickett (1987), to 1012 students of the 10th and 11th grades at the same school district in Seoul, Korea. The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between students' perception of classroom environment and their academic achievement. The results of correlation analysis showed that the seven subscales in the Classroom Environment Scale (i.e. involvement, affiliation, competition, task orientation, order and organization, rule clarity, and teacher control) had a significant correlation with students' academic achievement. Furthermore, the results of multiple regression analysis revealed that the multiple correlation (R) between the 9 subscales of
Classroom Environment Scale and students’ academic achievement was 0.27. Based on these results, it was claimed that classroom environment was a good predictor of students’ academic achievement.

Studies have also found that students’ perceptions of the classroom environment can have a direct impact not only on their achievement but also on their personal social behaviours (Vasquez, 1988). Furthermore, depressed rates of students classroom participation predict lowered achievement as early as the first three grades.

According to Scott-Jones and Clark (1986), “Academic achievement is dependent more on social environment than individual abilities and aspirations. The social environment in which learning takes place can enhance or diminish the behaviours that leads to achievement”.

Overall, quality of classroom environment as reflected in the teacher–student interaction, teacher’s attitude and style of behaviour, social and personal adjustment of students in the classroom, and teaching methods adopted by teachers tends to affect the academic achievement of students. A brief review presented above indicates that if teachers exert less rigid control, are supportive, encourage students’ active participation in learning, other students are cooperative are likely to feel comfortable in such environment and achieve great academic success. Taking this into consideration, it is reasonable to expect that students identified as high achievers may perceive their classroom environment more favourably than those identified as low achievers.

1.6.3 Self-concept and academic achievement:

A person’s self-concept is both a cause of his present behavior and effect of his past experience. One’s opinion about himself depends to a considerable extent on his past history of failures and successes, or the
quality of his interactions with others and what he believes they think of him. Self-concept tends to create impact on a child’s behaviour including his academic success.

Specifically, how does a student evaluate himself with respect to certain abilities and skills would have a significant impact on the relevant behaviour and performance. In other words, the self-esteem of students may play a significant role in the determination of his academic achievement.

Students’ performance in school depends in part on how they feel about themselves (Covington and Beery, 1976). What an adolescent thinks about his ability may be more important than his actual level of ability. The more positively individuals feel about their ability to succeed, the more likely they are to exert effort and feel a sense of accomplishment when they finish a task. Similarly, the more negatively individuals evaluate their ability to succeed, the more likely they are to avoid tasks in which there is uncertainty of success, the less likely they are to attribute any success or lack of it to themselves.

Persons with low feelings of self-worth (i.e. low self-esteem) tend to have a high feelings of failure (Covington and Beery, 1976). Given a task in which they must set goals, those with low self-esteem are likely to set unrealistically difficult or very easy goals.

In one study, the relationship between achievement related expectancies, academic self-concept, and mathematics performance of 191 academically under prepared adolescent students was examined (House, 1993). It was found that students with higher academic self-concept earned significantly higher mathematics grades.
Mboya (1998) found a significant positive correlation between self-concept scores and academic achievement for boys and girls in a study of 244 African adolescents.

Muijs (1997) has observed in his study that academic self-concept and academic achievement are strong predictors of one another, even controlling for other variables and stability of both over time. However, the author has concluded that the results involving regression analysis indicated that achievement turned out to be causally predominant in the present case.

Some studies have shown that students who evaluate themselves positively, i.e. perceive themselves as competent, tend to be higher in academic achievement than those who evaluate themselves somewhat negatively (Begum and Huque, 1978; Mintz and Muller, 1977). It is not only the school grades but extracurricular activities in the school which are also correlated with the self-concept of the students (Leonardson, 1985). Studies have also shown that the specific, rather than general, self-esteem such as self-evaluation with respect to academic intelligence (i.e. academic self-concept) tends to show a positive correlation with measures like grades awarded by teachers or marks obtained by the students in the examinations (e.g. Lyon, 1990). The positive correlation between academic self and academic performance has been observed among both boys and girls, and that this relationship holds across the age levels (e.g. Mboya, 1998).

In general, many researchers (e.g. Don Hamachek, 1998) have suggested that the relationship between self-concept and academic school achievement is interactive and reciprocal in that they tend to affect each other mutually. This implies that high academic performance makes an individual feel that he is competent and such a perception of self-worth on his part in turn makes him do well in academic activities. Whatever it may
be, the indication is clear that the academic self-esteem tends to show a meaningful relationship with academic achievement.

1.6.4 Attitude toward learning:

Attitude toward learning has been conceptualised in this study as general affective or emotional disposition of the students covered in this study toward learning the subjects included in the syllabus for them.

Attitude toward learning includes affective responses students express toward the process of learning various subjects and themselves as learners. General feelings such as liking/disliking are relevant to attitude toward learning. Also, perceptions of difficulty, anxiety, and attribution of success and failure, can be taken into consideration.

Many studies on attitude toward mathematics have examined students’ perceptions of the usefulness of mathematics (Armstrong, 1980; Armstrong and Price, 1982; Fennema and Sherman, 1977,1978; Kloosterman and Cougan, 1994). In these studies the importance or relevance a student attaches to his / her study of mathematics is related to his/her perception of its usefulness.

Armstrong (1982) has concluded that perceived usefulness of mathematics for education and career goals is one factor affecting women’s and men’s participation in mathematics. Reyes (1984) states that a better understanding of the importance of mathematics in a wide range of careers and in education beyond high school has special significance as they make decision about how much mathematics to take in high school.

A common complaint of students who are not doing well in school is that they have trouble taking tests. They are often found saying that tests cause them to experience high levels of anxiety. This may lead to the development unfavourable attitude toward learning which is measured
through performance on the tests or examinations. That is why test anxiety has been described as anxiety aroused by evaluative situations (Byrd, 1982). Hembree (1988) had also found that test anxiety causes poor performance, and that it relates inversely to students' self-esteem and directly to their fears of negative evaluations, defensiveness, and other forms of anxiety.

The style of teaching can also serve as a source of attitudinal reactions of students. Dowaliby and Schumer (1976) found that a student's performance under a "structured" or teacher centered instructional style depended upon the student's level of manifest anxiety. High anxious students did better in a teacher-centered approach (teacher does most of the talking), while low anxious students did better in a student-centered mode (students did most of the talking). The implications of these findings are that high anxious students would prefer their teacher telling them about the subject being taught. On the other hand, low anxious students would prefer a teaching session which allows maximum scope for them to actively participate in learning through interactions with the teacher.

Confidence, in learning situations, can be defined as how sure a student is of being able to perform or accomplish some task. Students who are confident tend to learn more, feel better about themselves, interact more with their teachers, spend more time on task, and be more interested in purchasing mathematical ideas than students who lack confidence (Reyes, 1984). This indicates that confidence tends to affect students' attitude toward learning which in turn leads to above mentioned positive behaviours necessary for effective learning. Kloosterman (1988) reports that students tend to be more comfortable when confronting mathematical situations, if they are confident in their ability in mathematics.

According to Ferreria (1995), students' attitudes are shaped to some extent by the structure (facilities) through which they are mediated. Stockard
and Mayberry (1992) found that the quality of physical plant or environment is related to non-cognitive outcome, such as better attitudes toward school. These outcomes may eventually relate to higher academic achievement.

Students who have better attitudes usually learn more and work harder. Mc Guffery (1972) conducted a study investigating pupil attitudes toward their school buildings in the elementary level. He found that students housed in newer school buildings which were fully carpeted and air-conditioned showed more positive attitudes than students housed in older buildings.

Studies have shown that students placed in ‘beautiful’ rooms look upon them as “energetic” and “well-being”. On the other hand ‘average’ and ugly’ rooms are defined as “fatigued” and “displaced” (Maslow and Mintz, 1956). Furthermore, the students placed in the beautiful room expressed feelings of comfort, pleasure, enjoyment, importance, energy and a desire to continue their activity (Maslow and Mintz, 1956). Thus, if children have positive attitudes and look forward to attending school, it is reasonable to except that they will do better in their classes (Christopher, 1988).

1.7 Rationale for the Present Study:

In the present educational system emphasis is placed on intellectual pursuits. Academic achievement, therefore, assumes greater importance, because it is conceptualized as knowledge or skills acquired in the subjects prescribed for the given standard in a school or college. The level of acquisition of knowledge is indicated by the examinations passed or marks assigned by teachers or by both.

In fact, academic achievement does not exclusively depend on the intellectual ability; it rather depends on a host of psychological, sociological
and environmental factors which tend to interact with the learning process of the student. The increased awareness of the role of above factors has resulted in a gradual shift of emphasis from intellectual to non-intellectual factors as determiners of academic success.

Furthermore, it is being now realised that many seemingly ordinary people, i.e. those who are at the average level of intellectual ability, can also build successful career and lead the life happily.

It would be then worthwhile to differentiate the high and low achievers on the basis of non-intellectual factors like perception, motivation and attitudes. Specifically, it would be desirable to find out whether the high and low achievers could be differentiated in terms of their home and classroom environments as perceived by them as well as their attitude toward learning and self-concept.

In many instances the roots of low academic achievement appear to be lying in unfavourable home conditions involving poor family relationships, inadequate support and help, and lack of encouragement from the family members. Such type of home environment creates adverse effect on the child's tendency to realise his potentials. On the other hand, if the child gets intellectual and moral support from the family, a positive approach toward his studies and academic achievement is likely to be developed on his part. It is then reasonable to expect that a home environment which is favourable may lead to better academic achievement than the environment which is unfavourable. This in turn is likely to get reflected in the perceptions of high and low achievers of their home environment. The former may turn out to be having more favourable perception of home environment than the latter.
Classroom environment, another non-intellectual factor, can also exert its influence on the academic success of students. The classroom, for example, where students find support and encouragement from their teachers coupled with less rigid control tend to be disposed more favourably toward learning. This in turn can create a positive impact on their academic performance. Classrooms with poor rule clarity and unduly harsh discipline, on the other hand, can create adverse effect on students’ attitude toward learning. Negative learning attitude in turn can lower motivation to learn and lead to lower academic performance. In view of the effects of favourable and unfavourable classroom environment on the academic performance of students, it is likely that high achievers and low achievers may differ in their perception of classroom environment with the former tending to have more favourable perception of their classroom environment than the latter.

Self-concept is one more non-intellectual factor which tends to exert its influence on the academic achievement of students. Every individual has a self-concept. It reflects his perception of himself in terms of what kind of person he thinks or believes he is. As a growing child, his interactions with others, particularly his teachers, classmates and neighbours indicate to him how they appraise him. Thus when he realizes that he is praised or appreciated by others, he also starts perceiving himself as good or competent. If, on the other hand, he realises that he is being repeatedly criticized or blamed by them, he also starts seeing himself as bad or incompetent. The evaluation an individual, or for that matter a student, makes of him reflects the perception he has of his self-worth. Such perception is referred to as self-esteem. An individual with high perception of self-worth is said to be having high self-esteem, while an individual with low perception of self-worth is said to be having low self-esteem. Individuals high in self-esteem prefer taking up tasks or assignments which are more challenging. Easy tasks do not provide them the kind of
satisfaction they would like to derive by achieving success in difficult tasks. This leads to the prediction that school students identified as high achievers may be having higher self-esteem than those identified as low achievers.

Finally, one more non-intellectual factor that can be considered in the context of understanding what is that which can differentiate high achievers from low achievers is attitude toward learning. Attitude toward learning is, in the ultimate analysis, linked with motivation which basically involves willingness to learn. If the students believe that the resultant change or modification of their behaviour, which forms the core of learning, is in their interest such as personal growth, academic success or other benefits, they will respond positively to participation in learning activities carried out at the school. A favourable attitude toward learning may increase their motivation to learn, and increased motivation in turn would lead to efficient learning, improvement in academic performance and modification of behaviour. It is, then, likely that the high and low achievers could be differentiated in terms of the extent to which they are favourably disposed toward learning.

In sum, it is likely that high and low achievers may differ in their perceptions of home and classroom environments, self-concept, and attitude toward learning.

1.8 Statement of the Problem and Hypotheses:

The main objective of the present study is to find out whether high and low achievers differ in perceptions of family and classroom environments, self-concept and attitude toward learning. In addition, it also aims at finding out whether English and Marathi medium students as well as male and female students, regardless of their level of academic achievement, differ in the aforesaid perceptions, self-concept and attitude toward learning.
1.8.1 **Problem:**

The present study has been undertaken to find answers to the following questions:

1. Do the school students of grade nine, who are identified as high achievers, perceive their home environment more favourably than do those identified as low achievers?

2. Do the school students of grade nine, who are identified as high achievers, perceive environment of their classrooms more favourably than do those identified as low achievers?

3. Do the school students of grade nine, who are identified as high achievers, tend to be higher in their perception of self-worth than those identified as low achievers?

4. Are the school students of grade nine, identified as high achievers, disposed more favourably toward learning than those identified as low achievers?

5. Do English and Marathi medium students of grade nine, regardless of whether they are high or low achievers, differ in perceptions of their family and classroom environments, self-concept and attitude toward learning?

6. Do male and female students of grade nine, regardless of whether they are high or low achievers, differ in perceptions of their family and classroom environments, self-concept, and attitude toward learning?
**1.8.2 Hypotheses:**

The following hypotheses have been formulated for this study in order to provide answers to the aforesaid questions:

1) School students of grade nine, who are identified as high achievers, tend to perceive their home environment more favourably than those identified as low achievers.

2) English and Marathi medium students of grade nine, do not differ in the perceived favourableness of their home environment.

3) School students of grade nine, who are identified as high achievers, tend to perceive the environment of their classrooms more favourably than those who are low achievers.

4) English and Marathi medium school students of grade nine, do not differ in the perceived favourableness of their classroom environment.

5) School students of grade nine, identified as high achievers, tend to be higher in their self-esteem than those identified as low achievers.

6) English and Marathi medium school students of grade nine, do not differ in their self-esteem.

7) School students of grade nine, identified as high achievers, tend to be more favourably disposed toward learning than those identified as low achievers.

8) English and Marathi medium students of grade nine, do not differ in their attitude toward learning.
9) Male and female school students of grade nine, do not differ in the perceived favourableness of their home environment.

10) Male and female school students of grade nine, do not differ in the perceived favourableness of their classroom environment.

11) Male and female school students of grade nine, do not differ in the level of their self-esteem.

12) Male and female school students of grade nine, do not differ in their attitude toward learning.