Chapter Three

PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES
Social competence of children has become an area of extensive research in recent years. Researchers have increasingly sought to describe the process by which children become socially competent. Interest in social competence, particularly during preschool years, has been fuelled by accumulating data indicating that children who are socially rejected at this age are at heightened risk for maladaptive outcomes in adolescence and early adulthood (Kupersmidt, Coie, Dodge, & Rabiner, 1989). Children who manifest social skill deficits are likely to evidence lower level of academic achievement (Green, Forehand, Beck, & Vosk, 1980; Hartup, 1970; Kaufman, 1985; Laughlin, 1954; Muma, 1965; Patterson, 1964; Pellegrini, Masten, Garmezy, & Ferrarese, 1987). Difficulties in areas, such as social cognition and social behaviour have also been reported for samples of learning disabled (Hallahan & Kaufman, 1986; McConaughty & Ritter, 1986; Ritter, 1989) and emotionally disturbed, and depressed children (Blechman, McEnroe, Carella, & Audette, 1986; Connolly, 1989; Kaufman, 1985; Lee, 1987). These studies reveal the high significance of social competence in understanding the behaviour of the children.

Various researches conducted in the field of social competence indicate that children learn many of their social behavioural patterns in their family (see Maccoby & Martin, 1983) suggesting that family environment plays a key role.
in the development of social competence and status among peers in the school setting. In various other studies also family environment has been found to be an important predictor in determining the social competence of children (Lamb, Hwang, Bookstein & Broberg, 1984; Long, Forehand, Fauber, & Brody, 1987; Wynne, 1987). Some investigators have examined the relationship between the quality of parenting and more general form of childhood social competence. For example, it has been noticed that the children who establish secure attachment relationships during infancy are more likely to be competent with peers than insecurely attached infants at the age of 2-5 years (Amato, 1989; Arend, Grove, & Sroufe, 1979; Main & Weston, 1981; Pastor, 1981). These studies have been important in demonstrating the development of social competence in early years of life.

A careful observation of the existing literature on social competence of children clearly reveals that the development of social competence largely depends on parenting practices. It has been observed that parental indulgence and protectiveness are associated with children's high self-concept, vocabulary, apathy, and altruism (Turner & Harris, 1984). Similarly, higher level of parental initiation is also found to be associated with greater peer-acceptance and lower level of peer-rejection (Ladd & Golter, 1988). Parents negative or developmentally inappropriate expectations for the children's behaviours are likely to contribute negatively to their
children's development of social competence (Dix & Grusec, 1985). On the contrary, high-level of parental support and control and low-level of parental punishment have been found to contribute positively to the general competence of primary school children (Amato, 1989). Various other parenting variables have also established their significance in the development of children's social competence (Jones & Lanz, 1986; Klein & Durfee, 1979; MacDonald & Parke, 1984; Myhrman, 1988; Putallaz, 1987).

The above mentioned studies clearly indicate the momentous role played by parental behaviour in shaping children's social competence. Since behaviour of the individual is largely governed by the environmental and circumstantial factors, it is reasonable to assume that various environmental and circumstantial factors (like, culture, socioeconomic status, education, etc.) associated with parents would also have an important role in the development of their children's social competence. Although these aspects have been studied by some investigators as detailed in chapter 2, (eg., culture: Meisel, 1989; Misawa & Motegi, Fujeta, & Hattori, 1984; SES: Finnie & Russell, 1988; Meisel, 1989)

the study of such an important aspect has been neglected so far in Indian context. Therefore, the present study has been undertaken with a view to test the hypothesis that the social competence of the children would be influenced by
by their parents' locale, i.e., culture (urban/rural/tribal), socioeconomic status and education. The effects of age and sex of the subjects on social competence would also be investigated. The specific problems and their related hypotheses are detailed below:

1. The first major problem of the present study is to investigate locale difference in social competence. Here it is noteworthy to mention that we have used the word 'locale' to refer to three different cultures, i.e., tribal, rural, and urban. Now the problem is to examine whether tribal, rural, and urban subjects differ significantly in their social competence.

The tribal, rural, and urban cultures have their own characteristics and distinct pattern of socialization. Therefore the tribal, rural, and urban children differ in their parenting, behaviour-patterns, language etc.. Since they are developed, nourished and nurtured under quite different conditions, it is expected that they would also differ in their social competencies. The review of existing literature on social competence reveals that the studies investigating the role of tribal, rural, and urban cultures are quite scanty though a wealth of literature of social competence has already been reported. Moreover, a few studies conducted to investigate the locale-effect on social competence, have not reached any unequivocal conclusion. For example, Clarfield (1972) and Glidewell and Swallow (1969) found that urban
children had more behavioural problems than the suburbs. Gesten (1976) also noticed that the rural children had significantly higher scores on a measure of personal and social competence than the urban children. On the contrary Kagitcibasi (1979) observed that urban subject had higher I.Q. than the rural subjects. Similarly, Muralidharan (1983) found that skills related to personal social development were developed first in the urban children, followed by the industrial children, and last of all in the rural children.

Taking into consideration these contrary results and also the lack of studies in this field especially in the Indian context, the present study intends to ascertain the exact role of the tribal, rural, and urban cultures in the development of social competence of preschool children. On the basis of the results obtained by Kagitcibasi (1979) and Muralidharan (1983) it is hypothesized that those living in urban areas would show the highest social competence and those coming from tribal areas would show the lowest of it.

2. Socioeconomic status has its own significance in the development of several behaviours. Therefore, social competence too should be determined, to some extent, by the socioeconomic status of the family. While making an investigation into the dynamics of social competence, it would be worth considering to examine whether the children coming from high and low socioeconomic status would show differential social
competence. Several studies (e.g., Achenbach, 1978; Eckholdt & Lenzenweger, 1990; Gainotti, 1979; Guidubaldi & Perry, 1984; Laosa, 1984; Meisel, 1989), have suggested that children coming from high socioeconomic status generally do better in various aspects of social competence. Generally, socioeconomic status affects parents in significant ways that are reflected in their child-rearing practices, which consequently, influence the children's development of social competence. When the children with high socioeconomic status are compared with those of the low socioeconomic status, it is generally noticed that the more privileged children usually rank higher in health, growth, nutritional status, self-esteem, achievement motivation, impulse control, intelligence and language development. Analysis of parental behaviour usually show that the parents of the high socioeconomic status provide more care, guidance, stimulation and teaching that make it possible for their children to develop well. These children are, therefore, more likely to do well in school, to develop personality characteristics favourable to success, to learn technologies of culture, and to achieve economic affluence or at least comfort. Taking these facts into consideration and also the results obtained by the above cited investigators it is expected that the children belonging to the high socioeconomic status would exhibit higher social competence as compared to those coming from the low socioeconomic status.
3. Another factor to be studied in the present research, is education. Education contributes to most of the acquired behaviour. A larger section of our population is still illiterate, whereas some have achieved distinction in various fields because of their education. Since a child acquires social competence in his family, it is imperative to think to what extent education of parents contribute to the acquisition of social competence. Generally educationally deprived children are at severe disadvantage in many ways. In contrast to children from more educated families, they are more personal and concrete, more dependent on action and context, and lacking in the skills of linguistic analysis and synthesis (Chilman, 1975). Some other studies (e.g., Bouchalova, et al. 1980; Peniston, & Mclean, 1979) have also revealed that education of the parents significantly contributes to the development of different facets of social competence. Although education is generally included in socioeconomic status but since education plays a very vital role in the development of personality it was thought appropriate to study the role of parental education separately in social competence of children. The review of the literature related to social competence indicates that the studies investigating the role of education are quite rare though a number of studies investigating the influence of socioeconomic status are available. To meet out this deficit in the
available literature the present study would test the hypothesis that the children reared in the high educated family would show higher social competence than the children reared in the low educated family.

4. Further, we intend to investigate whether the subjects with high and low age differ significantly in their social competence. Results of various studies (e.g., Abraham & Christoperson, 1982; Adams, 1983; Brag, Huttman, & Wacrh, 1976; Philippot & Feldman, 1990) have revealed that social competence increases with the increasing age. As mentioned earlier, the theories about skill and competence acquisition (Bruner, 1970; White, 1959) presume that competence is acquired slowly as a part of broader biological maturation process that involves small day-to-day increments throughout the infancy and childhood. That is why, with the increasing age increased biological maturation is obtained. As children mature, their physical structure becomes more complete, and they are able to experience their environment in more sophisticated way (Piaget, 1978) which, in turn, results into higher social competence. On the basis of the results obtained from the above studies it is hypothesized that the subjects with high age would show higher competence than the subjects with low age.

5. The last variable subjected to empirical investigation is the role of sex in determining social competence of the children. Studies investigating the role of sex in social competence
have generated controversy and confusion. Some studies (e.g., Kadar, 1980; Thomas, Due, & Wigger, 1987; Steigelman, 1981) have revealed that males show higher competence than females whereas some studies (e.g., Carson, Wagner, Schultz, 1987; McGuiness, 1985; Michael & Joseph, 1976) have concluded females to be more competent than the males. Still there are some studies (e.g., Horstman & Bornstein, 1985; Quay & Jarrett, 1984, Sater & French, 1989) in which no sex difference has been observed. It seems, that possible basis for observed sex difference may depend in the encouragement of a more dependent role for women. Barry, Bacon, and Child (1957) have called attention to difference in social role of men and women in most societies. A survey they made of a number of cultures, mostly illiterate, showed that men more often engage themselves in activities, as work and warfare, that place emphasis on self-reliance and achievement. Women, in contrast, more often have nurturant role of home-maker and child-rearer. These differences are consistent with differences in training goal for the two sexes; training for the boys leads to independence making them more competent whereas training for the girls encourages them for a more dependent role. Taking into consideration the above contention it is hypothesized that boys would show higher degree of social competence than girls.