CHAPTER VI

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Belief is the subjective probability of a relation between the object of the belief and some other object, value, concept or attribute. Beliefs are the fundamental building blocks in our conceptual structure and have been extensively studied in cognitive social psychology, however, belief in heredity/environment for human characteristics and its relation with other behavioural attributes have not been examined. Present study was designed to study the effect of belief in heredity/environment for human characteristics on social perception. There were three major objectives of the study. First, to know about the extent and distribution of heredity-environment belief and also to identify its demographic determinants. The second objective of the study was to examine the effect of belief in heredity/environment for human characteristics on the perception of their own (self) characteristics and values. The third objective was to investigate the effect of belief in heredity/environment for human characteristics on perception of other’s characteristics (social perception).

To fulfill these objectives, the study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase a survey was conducted on a large sample (n=1033) drawn from general population. In addition to taking sociodemographic information, a measure of belief in heredity/environment for 20 human characteristics
Summary was administered to all the subjects. In the second phase a three group design was used. The three groups were heredity (H) believers, balanced (heredity/environment) believers and environment (E) believers, shortlisted from the first phase. A total of 300 subjects i.e. 100 in each group were selected for further study. The subjects in the three groups viz, H, E and balanced believers were administered value test (Ojha, 1992) and especially prepared semantic differential for 20 human characteristics for measuring perception of their own (self) characteristics. Each characteristic was presented in the form of bipolar adjectives and the S's were asked to rate the characteristics on a 7 point scale. Endorsement to scale point 1 shows the characteristic, trait was present in it's full vigour while on 7 shows that the characteristic / trait was not present. For measuring perception of other's i.e. social perception, 4 semantic differentials with primed protocols for two social classes i.e. low (Harijan) and high (Brahmin) with two background environmental conditions i.e. deprived and enriched, were taken. Subjects were asked to rate the 20 characteristics on a 7 point scale in 4 protocols. The obtained data were analyzed by using descriptive as well as inferential statistical techniques. For examining the effect of heredity/environment belief on self perceived characteristics simple analysis of variance was used. To analyse the effect of heredity/environment belief on the perception of other's characteristics (i.e. social perception), 3x2x2 ANOVA suitable for repeated measure design was used. Post hoc tests were also used wherever
necessary.

The distribution of heredity/environment belief was not found to be perfectly normally distributed and was slightly positively skewed and platykurtic. Females, general (social) class and elder subjects were found to be more heredity oriented in their belief than males, scheduled caste/class and younger subjects. Belief in heredity/environment for human characteristics significantly influenced the self-perception of three characteristics viz., activity/energy, numerical ability and body weight, where the balanced believers perceived themselves to be more active/energetic, to have more numerical ability and to have more balanced body weight than the heredity and environment believers. Balanced believers perceived themselves to have more aesthetic values than the heredity and environment believers.

Belief in heredity environment significantly influenced the perception of other's linguistic ability, creativity and body weight and the balanced believers perceived other's to have more linguistic ability, creativity and body weight. Belief in heredity/environment in interaction with social class significantly influenced the perception of other's egocentricity, creativity, humour and body weight. Perception of other's linguistic ability and creativity was also influenced by interaction of belief in heredity/environment and background environmental condition. Higher order interaction of belief in heredity/environment, social class and environmental background condition
was significant on reasoning ability, altruism and body weight.

To sum up, the potency of belief in heredity/environment emerged as selective i.e. it was effective for few characteristics - linguistic ability, creativity and body weight. Restrictive effect of heredity/environment belief was also noticed in the perception of humour in lower social class protocols. These characteristics do not belong to a single class. Numerical ability and creativity belong to cognitive domain whereas, body weight is physical characteristic and humour is a personality characteristic. Thus it is concluded that there is no general effect of heredity/environment belief on person perception.