CHAPTER III

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS
Individual's social standing depends broadly upon two sets of variables. One set is ascribed to him by virtue of his birth in a particular family which grants him recognition, assigns him a caste label, religious faith, and a specific network of relationships along with other life opportunities. The second set includes those variables which he acquires on his own, that is, his education, occupation, property, etc. The inter-play between these two sets of variables, not only determines his social standing in hierarchical order but also his style of life, outlook, and his behavior pattern. It is, therefore, essential that whenever we conduct a sociological study we should account for the socio-demographic variables which play an important role in the life of an individual.

The present study deals with social development of children for which we have made parents and children as two units of study. This division was made with a particular purpose in mind. No doubt, social development of children can be measured with the help of certain tools,
but in doing so we will not be able to identify the variables which have facilitated the child to attain a particular level of development. Development has to be treated as a dependant variable. As such, a search has to be made to locate independent variables which accelerate or retard child development. Since the children in the age group of 6-11 years are completely dependant upon their parents, it is, therefore, essential to know the socio-demographic variables of the parents, as well as, the type of life opportunities they provide to their children for growth and development.

The present chapter has been divided into three parts. The first section deals with familial background, that is, the parental socio-economic conditions, whereas second section is limited to children under study and the third part throws light on the social environment under which the children under study were brought up. The social background of parents has been further divided into assigned and acquired attributes. In the end, a composite socio-economic status of parents was computed to find out division of sample respondents into different classes.
It was done because of the basic assumption undertaken in study that development of children is dependant on socio-economic status of the family to which they belong.

FAMILIAL BACKGROUND

1) ASSIGNED ATTRIBUTES:

Under the assigned attributes of social background we have included parents' age, caste, religion, and family structure and composition.

Parent's age:

Age is an important demographic variable which not only determines individual's physical and mental maturity but also depicts his life experiences. Members of the older group, who were not exposed to modern methods of child rearing and education, may hold traditional values. Hence they may follow traditional practices of child rearing. Whereas younger parents may hold a different set of values. It is for these reasons that age of parents becomes a significant factor for development of dependant children.

Mean age of the fathers was approximately 40 years and of the mothers it was 35 years (Table 3.1 and 3.2).
More than 70 per cent of fathers under study were in the group of 31-45 years. It is a well known fact that age of the wife vis-a-vis her husband is lower. It is for these reasons that we find that majority of mothers were in the age group of 20-35 years. The representation of the younger and older parents in our sample was relatively low because of the sampling technique adopted. It is again attributed to the demographic factors that parents of higher age group would not have children in lower age group, that is, 6-11 years. Similarly parents who have been recently married would also have no children in this age group. In short, majority of our respondents were middle aged persons. This demographic variable would play an important role in the development of children, because middle aged persons are likely to hold both traditional and modern values, particularly with regard to child rearing practices. The influence of age of the parents on child development will be discussed in the next chapter.

Caste:

Indian society is hierarchically divided based on
casts and this is more true in rural areas. The position of a caste is independent of economic status because the higher status is associated with the concept of pollution and ritual purity. Results of different recent studies conducted in rural India can be divided into two. One set of studies indicate convergence of caste and class status (D’souza, 1981), whereas, another set of studies do not find this type of association (Dilbagh, 1985; Majajan, 1987). Traditionally also we find that Brahmins who were at the apex did not enjoy better economic status in comparison with those castes which were placed lower to them in the social ladder. Caste determines social prestige, status, and is also associated with different type of social practices. We can not, however, deny that in modern society greater importance is being given to economic standing. Nevertheless, people are still graded on their caste positions and this is more true in the hilly areas of Himachal Pradesh.

Distribution of the sample by caste indicates that majority of families under study (48.7 per cent) belonged to Rajput Castes, followed by Scheduled castes, whose
representation was approximately 30 per cent (Table 3.3).

Under the scheduled caste category we have Koli, Lohar (treated as backward in Punjab), Chamar, Domnas, etc. Brahmins had also representation of 18.7 per cent, whereas other caste groups, such as, Banias and Khatri had less than 2 per cent representation in the sample. The Dwija, that is, Brahmins, Rajputs, Banias, and Khatri in the local parlance are called as 'Swarna Jati' hence are grouped together. This group of castes constitute 70 per cent of the sample and the rest 30 per cent is that of scheduled castes. In brief, majority of our respondents were 'Twice born' and enjoyed higher social status.

Religion:

With regard to religion-wise distribution of the sample with exception of two respondents all the respondents were Hindus and this distribution is in accord with the distribution of population in Himachal Pradesh based on religion, where Hindus have representation of over 95 per cent.

Family Structure and Composition:

Another social variable of importance is the family structure and composition. Familial structure and composition, not only determine the social practices
of its members, but also provides a basic network of relationships. The joint structure of the family can be maintained only when the members have submissive personality configuration. Similarly, number of children, their age groups, presence of absence of other sibs in the family are likely to influence quality of child rearing practives. In sum, family structure and composition is likely to have direct bearing on child development. It is for this reason that information on the familial background is essential.

In the present study at least two conjugal units either lineal or collateral found living together were treated as constituting a joint-family. Nuclear family stands for those households where there was one conjugal unit living with their unmarried children. It was only in one case where a widowed father was residing with his married son, and this case was treated as the nuclear.

Majority (53.7 per cent) of our respondents were found to be living in nuclear households (Table 3.4). It does not, however, mean that joint families were not there. In the rural areas under study we found 46.3
per cent households having joint-structure. In other words quite an appreciable number of our respondents still manifest positive values in favour of joint living.

The structure of family would become meaningful only when we go a little deeper and find out authority pattern, property, etc. Further, information regarding operational leaders is also needed to comprehend the exact structuring of the family system. Instead of going into all these details it was thought that the family size might play more important role in child development rather than its structure, because it was noticed that even in nuclear composition the structure of joint family is retained, that is, father/husband is the instrumental leader and it is his say which carries weight.

Family size of the respondents under study was grouped into three categories. All the categories include both children as well as their parents. The household having total number of members upto 5 was designated as small. The households having 6-10 members were labelled as medium, and those with more than 10 members were called large families.
No doubt, the previous table gives us an impression that majority of our respondents were living in nuclear households, but when family size was looked at it was noticed that more than 73 per cent of the respondents were having medium and large size of the households (Table 3.5). This would imply that respondents had large number of children and this particular fact would further have bearing on providing life opportunities to growing children which would ultimately affect development of their children.

ii) **ACQUIRED ATTRIBUTES**

Under the acquired attributes we have taken education, occupation, and land holding of the respondents. We have not included income for certain obvious reasons because rural people do not account for the monetary value of the agricultural produce which they retain for self consumption. For them income means that money which they get for selling agriculture produce. As agriculture is the main occupation, instead of income, we have taken land holding, because ownership of land is still valued in rural India.

**Parent's education**

Education is considered an important variable not
only for widening mental horizon of the individual but it also helps a person to make use of rational and scientific approach to child development. It is a known fact that literacy rate in India with the exception of Kerala, is very low, and this is more true in rural areas. Similarly there are marked differences in the literacy rate among the sexes. The position of Himachal Pradesh vis-a-vis the national average is quite encouraging in the sense that literacy rate for whole of India stands at 36.23, and whereas for Himachal Pradesh it is 42.98 (Census, 1981).

In the sample under study we notice that approximately 56 per cent of the fathers were literate and only 44 per cent were illiterate. Among the literate 16 per cent had studied upto middle level and about 18 per cent had education upto matric level (Table 3.6). Mothers of the children on the other hand were placed at a disadvantageous position in the sense that about 80 per cent of them were illiterate. Out of the literate 6.6 per cent had formal schooling upto middle level and about 7 per cent upto matric level (Table 3.7). In the case of fathers there were 5 per cent who had
educational qualifications up to undergraduate level and in case of mothers 1.7 per cent were graduates.

The data not only reveal discrepancy between the sexes regarding their educational attainment but also indicate that parents of the respondent children have not been exposed to formal schooling. They are, however, better placed if we compare literacy rate with the literacy rate at the State level.

Parents' Occupation:

Another variable which determines the individual's social standing is his occupation, because not only different occupations have different prestige but are also associated with different privileges and economic benefits. Those respondents who are owner cultivators have better status and better life opportunities than those who are agricultural labourers. Hence, the difference in their occupational standing would have bearing on the development of children, so far, as making available certain life opportunities is concerned.

The break up of data with regard to occupational background shows that 55 per cent father respondents were
engaged in agriculture and only 6.66 per cent of respondent fathers were labourers (Table 3.6). The rest of them were either engaged in petty business, artisanship, or were employed at a lower level. The small percentage of agricultural labourers in our sample is attributed to the fact that most of the landless had either moved to the urban centre for earning livelihood or they took up other occupations like, petty shop keeping or class IV government service. Further, in the area under study and particularly at places of higher altitude where the agricultural fields are of different types and there is no practice of engaging agricultural labour because the families depend upon exchange labour.

Women on the other hand devote most of their time to household activities. It does not, however, mean that they do not contribute to family work. In addition to looking after children and managing household, they help in economic activities of the family whether it is agricultural, shopkeeping, or activities of the artisan group. From the morning till late evening they are busy
in different activities. They cut grass for animals, fetch water, collect wood, weave, spin, etc. As they are engaged in economic activities of the family they are not labelled as earners and it is only in case of 6 per cent who were designated as workers among the mother respondents (Table 3.). It may not be out of context to say here that not only women but children of both the sexes also contribute their mite in the economic activities of the family. Even officially it has been reported that the highest proportion of child population in economic activity is found in Himachal Pradesh. In the population of 0-14 years the national participation rate comes to 2.63 in 1981 and for Himachal Pradesh it was 5.40 (Child in India, 1985).

After having discussed education and occupation we move now to third important variable, that is, land holding. As stated earlier land is the main source of livelihood and it is the land which accords social status to an individual in rural Himachal Pradesh.
Land holding:

The distribution of the sample according to size of the land holding has been shown in Table 3. We notice that 33 per cent of respondents had land holdings ranging between 1 - 10 bighas, and approximately 25 per cent had land holdings ranging between 11 - 20 bighas. The average land holding comes to 16.6 bighas which may on the face value appear to be quite large in comparison with the holdings of the people residing in the plains. We should not, however, forget that land at a high altitude is not productive enough as it is in plain areas. The agricultural farms are not extended as in plains but they are found on small terrains and large chunks of land also are not cultivable. Further, the respondents still depend on traditional methods of agriculture and natural resources. All these things combine in such a manner that the net produce is very much limited and it is difficult for them to meet their basic needs. Keeping in view these arguments if we combine the two categories, that is, those who own land up to 20 bighas we find that majority
(58 per cent) were only marginal farmers. Twenty-two per cent of respondents were landless and it was only 22 per cent respondents who owned land more than 20 bighas and could be considered economically better off. To sum up with regard to landholding we find three categories of respondents: (1) who do not own land, (2) the marginal farmers, and (3) the big landlords.

If we compare this distribution with their occupational distribution, we will notice that most of the landless were either agricultural labourers, artisans or engaged in occupations of low prestige. In short, only one fifth of respondents could be treated as financially better off, so far, as landholding is concerned.

**Socio-Economic Status:**

After having discussed the assigned and acquired attributes individually an attempt would be made to have a composite status of the respondents. For the purpose of determining socio-economic status use has been made of Socio-Economic Status Scale (rural) by Pareek and Trivedi (1964). This scale consists of nine items, namely:

possession, (8) Family Type, (9) Education. These items are significant in measuring socio-economic status of a rural family. These items in our data were accounted and scored. Then a composite score for each individual was obtained. Pareek and Trivedi divided scores on the scale into five categories, however, for our purpose it was thought to divide the respondents into three socio-economic status categories. For this purpose based upon Mean (21.47) and Standard Deviation (7.05) of the scores obtained by the respondents on the scale, they were divided into two extreme categories on the basis of Mean ± 1 Standard Deviation and third category in between the two extremes, as under:-

Scores > (M + 1 S.D) = 1st Category
Scores ≤ (M -1 S.D) = 3rd Category
Scores between (M - 1 S.D) to (M + 1 S.D) = 2nd Category

Category - I = Scores > 29 = High SES
Category - II = Scores 14 - 29 = Middle SES
Category - III = Scores ≤ 14 = Low SES

Hence, three socio-economic status categories, namely (1) High Socio-economic Status, (2) Middle Socio-
economic Status, and (3) Low Socio-economic Status have been used in this study.

When projected on Normal Distribution Curve it was found that our sample was representative of the population under study. And this is clear if we look at the distribution where approximately 16 per cent of the sample population occupies place at upper and lower levels, and 68 per cent at the middle level (Table 3.11).

This exercise was done with a particular purpose in mind. It was assumed that child development is dependant upon the socio-economic status of the parents, that is, higher the socio-economic status of the parents higher would be the level of social adjustment on part of the children. In other words, difference in level of development among the children is attributed to differential life opportunities. The parents belonging to lower socio-economic status would not be able to provide those kind of life chances and opportunities which the parents of high socio-economic strata could afford to. The association between the level of socio-economic status and development will be discussed
in the next chapter. It will suffice for the present purpose to say that respondents under study were not equal and majority of them enjoyed middle level of socio-economic status.

CHILD'S ATTRIBUTES:

After having discussed the socio-economic status of the parents we shall highlight personal characteristics of the children under study. In this section we shall consider the age, sex, order of birth, and schooling of the children, so that, we get an idea about their demographic and social characteristics.

AGE:

As stated in the second chapter on methodology, the present study was confined to children in the age group of 6-11 years and method of selection was such which did not help us to have equal number of children by age and sex. It is, therefore, desirable now to specify their distribution according to their age.

We had 114 children in age group of 6-7 years representing 38 per cent of the sample, children of 8-9 years with representation of 33.3 per cent, and
more than 31 per cent children in the highest age group, that is, 10-11 years. In this way the distribution seems to be quite normal in three age categories (Table 3.12).

**Sex:**

The break up of data according to sex indicate more male children than female children had been represented. In comparison with 42.7 per cent female children we had 57.3 per cent male children in the sample (Table 3.13). This unequal distribution according to sex of the child is attributed to the sampling technique adopted for the present study. At the time of selection of the sample special care was taken so that there is approximately equal distribution of children in three age categories which was also based on availability of the child for administering the purpose of administering social behaviour inventory. It was for these reasons that we could not get equal distribution according to sex.

**Order of Birth:**

Another demographic variable which is likely to affect social development, is ordinal position of the child in the family, that is, whether he is firstborn,
secondborn, or lateborn. For the purpose of the present study birth order was treated at three different levels, that is, the firstborn, secondborn, and the lateborn. In the last category we had children whose ordinal position with regard to birth order ranged between 3 to 9. However, as the number was very small they were clubbed with the third ordinal position, that is, lateborn.

The birth orderwise break up of data reveals that 32 per cent of the children were firstborn, 29 per cent were secondborn, and 39 per cent were lateborn (Table 3.14). What bearing order of birth has on their social development would be worked out in the next chapter.

Schooling:

We have already stated that formal education helps individual to have not only wider contacts but also wider outlook of life. Schooling in the case of children helps them not only to incorporate the formal course of discipline but also learn to cooperate in different activities. Such learning would have bearing on their level of social development. It is for this
that we have collected information regarding the number of years of schooling of the child respondents had.

In table 3.15 the years of schooling have been shown as 0 - 6. The category zero indicates those children who have never been to any formal school. Majority of our child respondents had indicated two years of schooling. This is attributed to their younger age. Secondly, these years of schooling did not mean that all the 85 per cent of the respondents were still in the school but it designates the number of years of schooling respondent have or had been going to the school.

The foregoing discussion helps as to conclude that majority of the children belong to middle-socio-economic status. And with regard to their own personal demographic variables they were fairly distributed in three age categories. After having thrown light on their socio-demographic background, we would be interested to know the socio-cultural milieu in which they lived because this would help us to understand and interpret the data in a more meaningful manner.
Role of social environment is of utmost importance in child's development before and after birth. Influences of environment are potent in all phases of home, school, and cultural life. The contributions of environment in influencing development of the child have been highlighted by many sociologists, psychologists, and anthropologists, in their theories of child development. Owen (1980) and Mc Neil (1971) have been the main advocates of the role of environment in influencing development of the child. Franklin (1925) and Thompson (1955), Strong (1968), and Khan (1980) have also stressed the role of environment.

In this chapter socio-cultural environment of the children in the study villages has been described. The explanations are based on the information gathered from personal observations and informal discussions with a few village workers, such as, teachers, panchyat officials, elderly people, and the parents. It is made clear that it is very difficult to take into account all those elements which constitute the environment, but
keeping the nature of study in mind some of the pertinent components have been taken into account. For the sake of convenience environment has been divided into three categories i.e., the home, the school, and the community environment. The nature of socio-cultural environment may exert both negative and positive influence on development of the children, depending upon specific life situations.

**Home environment:**

The home environment is very important for child's growth and development. Not only the parents but every member of the familial group contributes to the child's development. The quality of life chances and opportunities provided to him/her ultimately have impact on his/her overall development. The treatment the child meets and the facilities in home are some of the sociological variables and their influence on development of the child will be discussed later, however, here a general reference with regard to the home environment of the children under study is made.

The major occupation of parents in the study
villages was agriculture. Farming was done by traditional means. There was preponderance of small land holdings. In addition to cultivation majority of families kept some animals like oxen, mules, goats, sheep, and cows, which provided milk, wool, and farm power. Generally the people were poor and lived on subsistence economy. Though villages were electrified but about fifty per cent houses had no electricity which indicated their poor economic conditions. The nature of their occupation demanded cooperation from all members of the family. Participation in household activities is the traditional feature of the rural society. This not only provides some sort of training in the process of development but also provides some relief to the parents. Therefore, children are expected to participate in domestic and economic activities, of the family. School going children from the time of their waking and till the retirement to bed attended to various chores, such as, fetching water, looking after younger siblings, taking care of animals, shopping, cleaning the house, helping in sowing and harvesting of crops and other miscellaneous jobs.
Cooking, cleaning, and looking after younger sibs was generally done by girls. These jobs were attended to before their going to school and after returning from school. Those who did not go to school attended to these pieces of work during whole of the day. The child who was an all rounder, that is, he who actively participated in domestic chores, agricultural pursuits, and in schooling, was considered good by the people.

Generally, illiteracy among parents was rampant. A few parents had studied up to matric and above. Their illiteracy may be accounted to non-availability of facilities and the poverty. However, with the extension of educational facilities their children have better opportunities of schooling. Now majority of children were school going. However, emphasis on education by the parents was superficial. The hours of study at home were not fixed for children except in few cases. Only before and during examinations parents stressed their children to study regularly at home. Such an attitude on part of the parents and demands of the family have direct bearing on their scholastic achievements.
Smoking and drinking were quite common among the adult male population. Some women belonging to the lower segments also smoked and drank. So far as the drinking was concerned it was normally done secretly, however, there were certain occasions when people drank openly. Children are likely to pick up these habits quite easily which might adversely affect their health.

People were generally superstitious. They practised black magic for prosperity and to keep away the evil spirits. They had also faith in various gods and goddesses. Periodically they visited temples to worship and offer prayers. Generally, they were accompanied by their children, and women. They offered prayers in their homes also. Children are likely to be influenced by these activities and the methods adopted for prevention from the evil eye.

Parents treated boys and girls differently which would have bearing on their development. People of this area generally discriminated between boys and girls as far as their education was concerned. Education of girls was restricted, and boys were encouraged for education. Son was more valued than the daughter. There were
instances when husband and wife quarrelled with each other on some issues. Other members of the family also quarrelled such uncongenial atmosphere might adversely influence child’s development.

Children were generally punished when they refused domestic work assigned to them. Form of punishment varied from denial of food to beating. Scolding and abusive language were the common form of punishment, however, such behaviour was not quite common and patterned. The parents resorted to physical punishment to inculcate discipline and to correct the deviants.

The parents believed that future of their children more or less depended on fate. That is why they did not have high expectations from their children, however, the educated parents aspired that their children after getting education should get government jobs.

School environment:

The influence of the school in development of the child is very great because the school becomes a substitute for the home, and the teacher acts a substitute
for the parents. The school influences development both directly and indirectly. The teacher affects the way child feels about himself and indirectly by helping the child to adjust to the group. This depends upon the quality of interaction the teacher has with his pupil. School is an institution for drilling children in cultural orientation. It has relevance to a child's level of individual development. Gene and Johnson (1969) observed that school is the social force which reinforces parental socialization and it is next only to family where proper socialization could take place.

The school environment can be divided into external and internal. The external school environment includes: furniture, building, accommodation, teaching aids, cleanliness, availability of play ground, sanitary facilities, etc. The internal school environment relates to the cultural and social conditions, that is, the student-teacher relationship.

Three primary schools, one middle school, and one high school were visited and informal talks were held with teachers besides observing the external conditions.
The students who escaped work assigned to them and those who did not maintain discipline, and those who disobeyed the teacher were generally punished. Punishment was generally in the form of scolding and slapping, and sometimes beating. The teachers were of the opinion that punishment generally helped children to become better students. Punishment was given irrespective of caste and social status.

Participation of children in extra-curricular activities was discouraged. One of the reasons was that such activities were not given emphasis especially in primary and middle schools, and second was a lack of motivation. However, in games boys participated more as compared to girls.

Teachers generally were not punctual. They used to come late or often remained absent which was attributed to the location of school away from their residence and lack of residential facilities. Absenteeism was also found quite common among the students also which was attributed to inclement weather, engagement in domestic chores, social functions, fairs and festivals, etc. In the study villages, only one village had a high school.
two villages had middle schools, and others had no schools, however, primary schools were available within 5-10 km radius in rest of villages. Except in Nohra village others had no facility of higher education. Problem of dropouts was common among the schoolers. It is attributed to non-availability of educational institutions, distantly located schools and the demands of agricultural activities.

Of the three Primary schools only one had a Pucca room which was constructed by villagers and expenditure was met from the donations. Other schools had no basic facilities. The middle school building in one of the villages was Pucca having three rooms with roof having GI sheets. But the roof was in a bad shape. It had a small playground. All these schools lacked sanitary facilities. High School, Nohra, had good building and facilities for teaching and outdoor games.

However, shortage of regular teaching staff was a chronic problem. Majority of the teachers in Primary and Middle schools had been working on adhoc basis for the last 5-6 years. Parents in general were not satisfied
with the internal\external environment of the schools.

Though schools in the study not only lacked in physical equipment, that is, well furnished class-room, recreational facilities, and big playgrounds but there was also lack of motivation as far as participation of children in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities were concerned. This may have negative influence on the development of children.

Community environment:

In addition to school and familial atmosphere, the quality of the relations that prevail among the people in the villages also affect child's social health. Community based social interactions help the child to learn the desired behaviours. Community helps in shaping attitudes, beliefs, and values of the child. The child comes in contact with a number of social groups and develops strong likes and dislikes for certain individuals and groups. Community environment operates in several forms and it is not possible to cover all these forms in this study and, therefore, only a few aspects have been covered.
Free or restricted contacts between the individuals of different castes, classes, and religions influence the emotional bondage. Permissiveness leads to cohesion and social distance inculcates built-in prejudices. These qualities of the social groups, condition the behaviour of children in the long run.

Among the older people, especially Rajputs, the caste feelings were very strong. They considered themselves belonging to 'Swarna Jati', and placed themselves above other castes, such as, Brahmins, Banias, Khatris, and Schedule castes. Social intercourse between Rajputs and Scheduled Castes was very much restricted. Rajputs treated the members of the scheduled castes as untouchables. This belief was very strong amongst the older people of Rajput community whereas the younger people were less orthodox. The rigidity of such feeling and practices is, however, diluting gradually with the recent changes which are taking place as a result of socio-economic advancement. Inter-caste marriages were not permitted. People had strong parochial feelings toward their caste group. Majority of them did not
view caste-system as a social evil. Hence, these differences in caste groups may directly or indirectly influence values and attitudes of the children. Lack of basic amenities like health, education, communication and transport, recreation, etc., puts the children to disadvantageous position. In short, children do not get access to those opportunities in the course of their growth and development which are generally found in the urban environment. Lack of dynamic environment and basic amenities may retard the development of child in the context of modern demands. In other words, the dynamism which is found in urban areas was not available in the villages under study.

After having discussed socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and the social environment in which children under study were brought up, we shall now examine the impact of sociological variables on child's development which had been treated as dependant variable.