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# UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO ATTITUDE AND STEREOTYPES

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- 1.2 Nature of Attitudes
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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

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Attitude is a word frequently used by us in our day to day life. In its common sense it refers to an individual's specific state of mind through which he expresses his opinions and feelings towards some conditions, things, event and persons in his social environment. For example, a person who feels favourably for widow remarriage may advocate widow remarriage, write some article in favour of it or even remarry his widow daughter, thus expressing his attitude towards the issue of widow remarriage. Psychologists, Sociologists and other social scientists have taken undertaken various researches to throw light on different aspects of attitude and related concepts like stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination. In this unit we will try to understand the meaning, characteristics, causal and maintenance factors of these various concepts. To begin with we will start from attitude.

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## 1.1 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- 1 Define and describe attitude in your own words;
- 1 Describe the characteristics of attitude;

- 1 Elucidate theories of organisation of attitude;
- 1 Define stereotype;
- 1 Describe the characteristics of stereotype;
- 1 Analyse the formation of stereotype;
- 1 Differentiate between stereotype and prejudice;
- 1 Analyse the factors contributing to stereotype and prejudice; and
- 1 Analyse factors causing and maintaining prejudice and discrimination.

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## 1.2 NATURE OF ATTITUDES

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In the beginning psychologists defined attitude in terms of one dimension i.e. attitude is a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object. Thus the essence of attitude was a person's intensity of feelings toward some object. However, some psychologists tried to explain attitude in terms of two dimensions namely, affective and cognitive components.

Cognitive component refers to a person's opinions and beliefs toward some object or event. For example, a person's beliefs and opinions regarding widow remarriage. Affective component means how strongly a person feels for the event or object in question. This feeling may be for or against. Some were of the view that attitude has three dimensions i.e. affective, cognitive and behavioural. This approach is known as ABC of attitude. Behavioural component indicates action a person would take in favour of or against the event or object of attitude. As said earlier a person having favourable attitude towards widow remarriage may organise meetings, give lectures in favor of widow remarriage or even go to the extent of marrying a widow.

These three components of attitude have some characteristics, understanding of which is imperative, in order to understand the nature of attitudes.

**Valence**— it refers to the degree of favorableness or unfavorableness to the object or event in question.

**Multiplexity**— components of attitude have the characteristic of multiplexity. It means the number of elements a component has. Higher the number of elements in a component the more complex it would be.

**Consistency**— it is found more among the valence factors than among multiplexity.

### 1.2.1 Characteristics of Attitudes

- a) **Attitude is learnt:** A person is not born with attitude but he or she acquires it through the process of becoming an acceptable member of the group he/ she belongs to. Also a person develops attitude from the experiences of life. These experiences and process of socialisation may predispose a person favourably or unfavorably to the object or event in question.
- b) **Attitude gives direction:** Attitude directs our behaviour in either away from an object or toward the object. For example, a favourable attitude

toward education will impel the person to send his children to school for formal education for the betterment of their life, while an unfavourable attitude may prompt him for not sending children to school.

- c) **Relative permanency:** It means attitudes are stable over time and changes in them take place only gradually.
- d) **Attitude is always related to some issue, object or thing:** This means for the development of attitude occurrence of some event, thing or person is a must. Attitudes do not take place in vacuum.
- e) **Attitude has motivational properties:** Attitude motivates a person to do some behaviours more readily than others. For example an individual having positive attitude for sports may readily go for play than pass his time reading some book.

### 1.2.2 Attitude and Beliefs

An attitude is closely related to belief. Before exploring the relation between the two it is important that we first understand their meaning. A belief is defined as “an enduring organisation of perceptions and cognitions about some aspect of the individual’s world.” Beliefs are cognitions or thoughts about the characteristics of objects. As of attitude we know that it is an organised system of cognitive, affective and behavioural component. Analysis of the definitions of the two concepts reveal following similarities:

Both are enduring organisation of different components.

Like attitude belief also has cognitive component.

Despite above mentioned similarities, the two concepts have following differences:

Attitude has all the three components i.e. cognitive, affective and behavioral while belief primarily has cognitive component and behavioral component is secondary. For example, a person may think that reservation in jobs is against natural justice. This is only his thinking (cognitive) and lacks any kind of feelings (affective) but he may be prompted to deliver a lecture about his views on this issue (behaviour).

An attitude has motivational properties and it directs our efforts in specific direction while a belief does not have this property.

Belief is part of attitude. All attitudes toward an object have relevant beliefs about that object.

Beliefs are based on real facts while attitude is based more on imagination and less on reality.

Change in attitude comes faster than in beliefs.

#### Self Assessment Questions

- 1) Discuss the nature of attitudes. Give suitable examples.

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2) List out the characteristics of attitudes.

3) Differentiate between attitudes and beliefs. Give examples.

### 1.3 THEORIES OF ATTITUDE ORGANISATION

Social psychologists gave a number of theories to explain attitude organisation. These theories can be clubbed under four categories.

1) Cognitive consistency theories- it includes following theories:

- 1 Heider's Balance theory.
- 1 Newcomb's A-B-X theory.
- 1 Festinger's Cognitive dissonance theory.
- 1 Rosenberg's affective-cognitive consistency theory.
- 1 Congruity theory.

2) Social learning theories include in it the following theories:

- 1 Theory based upon classical conditioning.
- 1 Theory based upon instrumental conditioning.

3) Functional theories include following theories:

- 1 Katz and Stotland theory.
- 1 Smith, Bruner and White theory.

4) Miscellaneous theories are:

- 1 Kelman's three process theory.
- 1 Assimilation contrast theory.
- 1 Adaptation level theory.

Here we will discuss a few select theories.

### 1.3.1 Heider's Balance Theory

Heider's Balance Theory-also known as P-O-X model it was given by Heider in 1946,1958. It has three elements.

- 1) First is the perceiver known as P.
- 2) Second, another person called O and
- 3) Third X an object of perception.

Pairs thus formed of these elements have two kinds of relationships, that is, unit relations and affective relations. Unit relations between pairs of elements depend on similarity, ownership, and similar membership. Affective relations are based on liking and disliking. Unit relations and affective relations may be positive or negative. Heider further stated that elements may be in a state of balance or imbalance. When balanced the individual feels relaxed and there is no tension. However, a state of imbalance between elements creates tension and motivates individual to restore balance.

Let us understand through an example.

Suppose Sunil (P) likes Krishan (X) and also likes Preeti (O) as well.

But Preeti is not liked by Krishan.

Here relations between Sunil and Krishan, Sunil and Preeti are positive but relations between Krishan and Preeti are negative.

This state of affairs is disturbing for Sunil. Now Sunil has to change his relations either with Krishan or Preeti. If he starts disliking Krishan, balance is restored or he should start disliking Preeti to restore balance.

### 1.3.2 Katz's Functional Theory

Katz (1960) Katz and Stotland (1959) opined that motivational basis is the key to understanding attitudes. The motivational basis is conceptualised in terms of functions which an attitude performs for the person. According to them an attitude serves the following four functions:

#### 1) **Instrumental, adjustive or utilitarian function**

It means that individual tries to maximise the rewards and minimise punishment. Thus he develops favorable attitude towards those objects which result in reward and unfavorable attitudes toward those which lead to punishment.

#### 2) **The ego-defensive function**

Attitude protects a person from acknowledging unpleasant realities about himself or environment. For example, a person filled with feelings of insecurity or low self-esteem may develop strong prejudice against members of minority group to compensate for feelings of insecurity or low self-esteem.

#### 3) **The value-expressive function**

Holding attitudes commensurate with our personal values or self-concept gives us satisfaction.

#### 4) **The knowledge function**

Every individual is presumed to have a basic drive to understand, to make sense out of, to structure his experience. Elements of experience that are inconsistent with what a person knows are rearranged or changed to achieve consistency.

### 1.3.3 **Kelman's Three Process Theory**

Kelman suggested that attitude organisation is influenced by three distinct processes of social influence namely, Compliance, Identification and Internalisation.

- 1) Compliance can be said to occur when an individual accepts influence from another person or from a group because he hopes to achieve a favorable reaction from the other.

Here, the expression of opinion, despite the fact that privately the person may not agree with it, is instrumental in gaining some reward or avoiding it. Thus an employee knowing that his boss is proud of the jokes he tells may laugh heartily at them even though he does not think they are funny. In this way he is able to avoid his boss's displeasure.

- 2) Identification can be said to occur when an individual adopts behaviour derived from another person or a group because this behavior is associated with a satisfying self-defining relationship to this person or group.

This is a means of establishing or maintaining a desirable relation to the other or group and of supporting the self-definition that part of the relation. One form which identification takes is shown in attempts to be like the other person or to actually be the other person. This is commonly observed in children who copy the behaviour and attitude of their parents or other models. However, identification like compliance does not occur because the behaviour or attitude itself is satisfying to the individual. It occurs because of the satisfying relation to another person or group and it requires the activation of the relation in order for it to occur.

- 3) Internalisation occurs when an individual accepts influence because the induced behavior is congruent with his value system.

Here the content of induced attitude or behaviour is internally rewarding. The attitude or behaviour helps solve a problem or is demanded by the values of the individual.

#### **Self Assessment Questions**

- 1) What are the various theories of attitude organisation?

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- 2) Discuss Katz' functional theory.

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3) Discuss Kellman's theory of attitude organisation.

4) List the various cognitive consistence theories and elucidate one of them.

## 1.4 STEREOTYPES

A stereotype is a cluster of beliefs usually lacking a rational basis regarding the members of some group. The word 'stereotype' was first used by Walter Lipman in his book "Public Opinion" (1922).

According to Albrecht, Thomas & Chadwick (1980) "A stereotype is a belief about some particular trait being prevalent among all members of a social group. Whatever be the characteristic it is assumed to vest all people in that category. Therefore, all members of the group are perceived and understood alike." From above definitions it can be concluded that:

- 1 Stereotype is a set of beliefs used to categorise people.
- 1 Such categorisation is exaggerated and lacks in truth.
- 1 This categorisation provides for the basis for gross generalisation about people.
- 1 Some particular physical, social and cultural characteristics are ascertained which serve to identify people of that group.
- 1 There is general consensus as to the prevalence of a particular trait among people of that category.
- 1 It is assumed that a person will exhibit all the traits of that category simply because he is member of that group.

### 1.4.1 Characteristics of Stereotypes

Stereotype is a mental picture or image about people of a community or category on the basis of which we ascribe traits or characteristics to people.

Stereotype is a widely agreed belief about people of some category or community. For example, it is widely agreed that politicians are opportunist.

Stereotype involves gross and exaggerated generalisations. An important characteristic of stereotype is that they develop out of experiences with individuals of other community and are then extended to apply to all members of that community. For example, it is generally believed that Bengalees are timid by nature. This may be true for some people of Bengali community but certainly not for all Bengalees.

Stereotypes usually are not amenable to change despite information and evidence to the contrary. For example, when we encounter a brave, fearless and bold Bengali we do not change our stereotype about them instead we say that this person is exception among Bengalees.

Positive or negative stereotype: A stereotype can have either direction i.e. it can be positive or negative. For example, Japanese are generally believed to be industrious and diligent and Bengalees are usually thought to be timid and shy.

### 1.4.2 Development and Maintenance of Stereotypes

Stereotypes are acquired. Psychologists have delineated following factors that go into development and maintenance of stereotypes.

A major cause of development of stereotypes is inadequate and improper experience and information about people of other group. Experiences with handful of people of other community lead to formation of wrong notions about them and it is then generalised to all members of that community.

**Socialisation:** Process of socialisation plays an important role in the formation of stereotypes. Most important agent of socialisation are parents. Many parents encourage their children to develop stereotypes thinking it will better prepare them to deal with people of other community.

**Imitation:** In order to become an acceptable member of the community or society we live in, we simply imitate beliefs, opinions and attitudes held by them without even thinking their desirability and logical validity. Result is that knowingly or unknowingly we develop stereotypes. Perhaps this is the reason a person born in Hindu community easily adopts stereotypes held by other people of Hindu community but he will not with that ease adopt stereotypes held by Muslim community.

**Traditions and folkways:** Traditions and folkways prevalent in a culture also help foster stereotypes. Everybody tries to behave according to the traditions, customs and folkways prevalent in the society because doing so brings prestige and social reputation.

**Social and cultural distance:** Social and cultural distance is another important factor in the development and maintenance of stereotypes. Social distance prevents us from gaining right knowledge and information about people of other community and society. Similarly, due to cultural distance we lack knowledge about living style, habits, customs, beliefs, opinions and attitudes of people of other culture. This lack of correct knowledge and information about other people provides breeding ground for development and maintenance of stereotypes.

### 1.4.3 Stereotypes and Social Life

Stereotypes have profound importance in social life as they directly affect social interactions. For example, teachers are usually thought to be idealistic and



accordingly we expect conversation with teachers to take idealistic tone. Thus our behaviour naturally orients toward idealistic patterns.

Stereotypes serve a number of social functions as given below:

- 1) Stereotypes help understand social behaviour. Stereotype that politicians are opportunist helps us understand their behaviour and we are not easily taken in by their statements and claims.
- 2) Stereotypes help control social behaviour. In fact stereotypes equip us with a power that automatically directs our behaviour in a specific direction. For example, Americans are known to be friendly. Therefore when dealing with an American we are in relaxed mood and try to be frank and friendly with them.
- 3) Stereotypes help in prediction. Whether right or wrong stereotypes control our social interaction. We even predict behaviour on the basis of stereotypes. For example, Nepali servants are believed to be brave, honest, and reliable. Thus we can predict that our house and property will remain safe in the hands of a Nepali servant, when we are out on vacations.

#### 1.4.4 Difference between Stereotype and Prejudice

Since our next topic would be Prejudice and Discrimination it would be relevant to differentiate between stereotypes and prejudice. The two concepts are very similar with very fine difference between them. Following are the differences between the two:

In stereotype all members of a community are treated alike as they are believed to have same characteristics while prejudice can take any direction it can be positive or negative both.

A prejudice is a type of attitude and has all the three components i.e. affective, cognitive and behavioural. However, stereotype is cognitions and expectations from person simply because the person is a member of a particular group or community.

Stereotypes are comparatively more stable than prejudices.

##### Self Assessment Questions

- 1) Define stereotypes.

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- 2) Describe the characteristics of stereotypes.

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3) How are stereotypes developed and maintained?

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4) Differentiate between stereotypes and prejudice.

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## **1.5 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit we studied the concept of attitude and the three components of attitudes namely cognitive, affective and behavioural. We also discussed how these components direct our behaviour. This was followed by a discussion on characteristics of attitudes. We now understand the nature of attitudes in full. We know that attitudes are acquired through process of socialisation and learning. We also understand why people differ in intensity and strength on the same attitude. Next we discussed the concept of stereotypes, their characteristics, how stereotypes are formed and developed. We also studied the functions of stereotypes in social life and the difference between stereotypes and prejudice.

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## **1.6 UNIT END QUESTIONS**

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- 1) What do you understand by the term attitude? Discuss in detail how attitudes are formed and maintained.
- 2) Write an essay on stereotypes and their utility in social life.
- 3) Discuss Katz's functional theory of attitude organisation.
- 4) How do stereotypes contribute to prejudice?
- 5) Discuss the various theories of attitude organisation.

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## **1.7 SUGGESTED READINGS**

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Alcock, J. E., Carment, D. W., & Sadava, S. W. (2005). *A Textbook of Social Psychology* (6th ed). Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall Canada.

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# UNIT 2 FORMATION OF ATTITUDE AND ATTITUDE CHANGE

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## Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Factors of Attitude Formation
- 2.3 Attitude Change
- 2.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.5 Unit End Questions
- 2.6 Suggested Readings

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## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

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An attitude is a hypothetical construct in that it can only be inferred through the behaviour of the individual. Attitudes are acquired and they develop out of influence of many factors. On the basis of researches and studies conducted, the psychologists have identified factors that determine development and formation of attitudes. This unit is focussed on the issues of how attitudes are formed, what factors constitute attitude formation and what are the methods by which one can change the attitude.

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## 2.1 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- 1 Explain attitude formation;
- 1 List the factors that contribute to attitude formation;
- 1 Analyse the process of attitude change;
- 1 Describe the role of persuasive communication in attitude change; and
- 1 Explain the role of various factors in attitude change.

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## 2.2 FACTORS OF ATTITUDE FORMATION

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*Need Satisfaction:* Research studies on “Need Satisfaction”, reveal that we tend to develop favourable attitude toward things which help us satisfy our needs. As is well known, whenever something hinders our reaching a goal or stop us from doing something that we want to or frustrate our attempts to satisfy our goals and needs, we feel negatively for those things which stand in our way. For example, in an experimental study it was found that students developed favourable attitudes toward those things which they viewed were instrumental in the attainment of goal. But they had negative attitude toward things that were of no use in goal attainment or which hindered goal achievement.

*Social learning:* This is another factor that plays an important role in the development of attitude. Process of learning affects the development of attitude

and the way an individual learns other forms of behaviour. Three processes of learning affect development of attitudes and these are (i) Classical conditioning (ii) Instrumental conditioning and (iii) Observational learning. These are being discussed below:

*Classical Conditioning:* According to classical learning a neutral stimulus comes to elicit an unconditioned response when repeatedly paired with an unconditioned stimulus. Social psychologists opine that it applies to the development of attitudes as well. For example, when a child repeatedly listens from his father that Pakistan is an enemy country, and all the terrorist activities in our country are Pakistan supported, the child gradually develops a negative attitude towards Pakistan, even though initially the word Pakistan was a neutral word for him.

In a classic experiment on the role of classical conditioning in attitude formation, two nation words – Dutch and Swedish were presented before a group of subjects. When the word Dutch was presented it was followed by recitation of positive adjectives like happy, laborious and sacred etc. But the word Swedish was followed by recitation of negative adjectives like dirty, ugly, bitter etc.

At the end of the experiment it was found that subjects had developed positive attitude toward the nation word Dutch as it was followed by positive adjectives and a negative attitude among subjects was evident for the nation word Swedish. It was presumed that repeated pairing with positive words elicited a positive response for nation word Dutch.

*Instrumental Conditioning:* According to this theory of learning states, we learn those responses that are rewarded and show an increased probability of repeating such responses. However, we tend not to repeat responses that are punished. Studies reveal that children develop attitudes maintained by their parents simply because holding such attitudes is rewarding. Exhibition of attitudes and behaviour similar to parents is often met with reward and praise from parents and dissimilarities or deviation is met with punishment and admonition. Thus children soon learn that holding attitudes similar to that of parents is instrumental in getting the desired results.

*Observational learning:* A number of behaviours are learned by watching the activities of others and the outcome of such activities. Children growing often watch parents and significant others in the family and society doing things which they follow without questioning the wisdom or logic behind these activities. They follow without question only because they trust in the wisdom of their parents and significant others in the family and society.

*Group Affiliations:* Group affiliations are an important source of formation and development of attitude. An individual adopts the values, norms, opinions, beliefs and way of behaviour in order to become an acceptable member of that group, because following the line suggested by the group is rewarding. Besides group exerts pressure for conformity to group and nonconformity is met with punishment. According to social psychologists group affiliations affect attitude formation.

Primary group is immediate group of the individual that is family, peer group etc. Such groups have limited number of members and enjoy face to face interactions. Since primary groups are based on close cooperation, affinity and compassion members of primary group often develop similar attitudes. Family members

particularly parents have tremendous influence over development of attitude among children. According to social psychologists attitudinal homogeneity among primary group members can be attributed to four reasons.

Since primary groups are closely interknit, members face too much pressure for conformity to group. Therefore members of primary group are more likely to show attitudinal similarity. Primary groups create conditions where attitudes of one member are favourable to other members which breeds liking among them. This liking breeds further similarity and this similarity in turn leads to attitudinal similarity.

All members of the primary group receive similar or same information. They are more likely to process and analyse the information in more or less similar fashion thus developing attitudinal homogeneity.

Any new member of a primary group is more likely to develop attitudes similar to the group in order to gain acceptance in that group.

Reference group is a group, the individual is not a member of which but he aspires to be like members of that group. Thus such a group is used as standard for reference or comparison. Usually a person identifies with such groups by changing or adopting values, norms, goals similar to that of reference group.

*Cultural Factors:* Cultural factors also affect the development of attitudes. Every society has its culture and every culture has its traditions, norms, values, religion etc. Thus socialisation of every person is affected by the cultural factors of that society. Studies reveal that people reared in different cultures exhibit different attitudes while people reared in the same culture show similarity of attitudes. For example, a marriage proposal between first cousins is viewed favorably in Muslim culture while in Hindu culture it is viewed with disdain.

In one of the studies it was found that cultural differences lead to development of certain common attitudes among members of a given culture. For example, members of Arapesh tribe are liberal, cooperative, and kindhearted. On the other hand members Mundugumor tribe are usually aggressive, zealous and selfish. Anthropologists concluded that it was due to difference in emphasis on the development of different personality traits among the two cultures.

*Personality Factor:* Personality traits also have an important role to play in the formation and development of attitudes. Attitudes which are in consonance of personality traits are acquired easily. In a research study it was found that persons with highly organised attitudinal system accept merits and demerits of their personality as a matter of conscience. Some other studies found that people with low IQ and literacy level are usually conservative, suspicious, hostile and has a tendency to attribute their faults to others.

*Stereotypes:* Every society is characterised with some stereotypes. Stereotypes are simple generalised expectations about people of other groups. For example, it is believed that women as compared to men are more religious and suggestible, it leads to development of certain attitudes towards women.

*Given information:* Information given to the individual also plays important role in the formation of attitudes. In modern society modern means of communication, particularly radio and television, play important role in shaping the opinions, views

and attitudes about many a issue of public concern. Although not all types of information have equal effect on attitudes.

### Self Assessment Questions

1) What factors contribute to attitude formation?

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2) Describe the processes of attitude formation in terms of social learning.

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3) Put forward the three theories of social learning that are related to mattitude formation.

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4) What is meant by group affiliation and how these factors affect attitude formation.

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5) Discuss the cultural factors that affect the development of attitudes?

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6) What are the personality factors that affect the development of attitudes?

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7) How do stereotypes affect attitude development?

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## 2.3 ATTITUDE CHANGE

As pointed out earlier attitudes are relatively permanent meaning thereby that they are subject to change but slowly overtime. Psychologists claim that attitude change is of two types

- 1) *Congruent change and*
- 2) *Incongruent change.*

When a favorable attitude becomes more favourable after an incident, it is congruent change. However, when attitude change is unfavourable that is direction of change is opposite of the already held attitude, it is called incongruent change. Two factors are important in attitude

### **Change:**

- i) Other things being equal congruent change in attitude is easier to bring about than incongruent change.
- ii) If the strength, stability and consonance among the present elements of attitude is higher, then congruent change is easier to about than incongruent change.

Psychologists have identified a number of factors that affect attitude change which are as:

*Changing reference group:* Psychologists found that change in reference group leads to change in attitude as well. In one of the experiments Newcomb (1950) found that a group of fresh entrants of girls were conservative as they were coming from a family of conservative parents. However, environment of the college promoted liberalism and one of the aims of college was to promote liberalism among students. In the last year of college it was found that girls had shifted from conservatism to liberalism.

*Changing group affiliations:* This has direct bearings on change in attitudes. It has been observed that when a person breaks ties with old group and joins new one, he readily adopts norms, values, opinions and beliefs of the new group. Therefore change in attitudes is also there. However, change in attitude or change in group affiliations depend on two things

- 1) characteristics of group, and
- 2) characteristics of membership in group.

By characteristics of the group we mean norms, values and beliefs of the group. If the standards, norms, beliefs and values of new group are more attractive to

the individual then the individual is likely to change his attitudes more readily. Similarly, characteristic of membership refers to the individual's position in the new group. If new position in new group accord greater status and power and prestige, then the individual is more likely to change his attitude in the direction held by the group.

For example, if a leader is changing his affiliations from BJP to Congress Party, he may find himself elevated to the level of national level, certainly he would change his attitudes more in favour of Congress and its policies.

*Additional information:* Change in attitude is also brought about by information received from means like Radio, Television, and Newspaper. The person also gets information through interaction with others. However, change in attitudes resulting from reception of additional information depends on the nature of social situation in which information is given. Psychologists have delineated three types of such social situations which are as follows:

When the additional information is given in front of several people then when individual is alone, attitude change is faster and greater.

When an individual publically accepts and declares his attitudes and beliefs, he commits himself to those attitudes and beliefs. Such public commitment brings about a sort of rigidity in his attitudinal stand and any additional information is likely to bring change in attitudes. However, in a situation where the individual has not made public his attitudes and values i.e. his commitment is private not public. Additional information will bring more change in attitudes because public is not aware of the individual's previous stand on the issue.

It has been noted that attitude change if advocated through discussion method is more successful instead of lecture method. For example, in one of classical experiments in this regard it was aimed to bring attitudinal shift among housewives in favour of beef consumption as compared to other types of meat. One group of housewives was motivated to discuss the issue among themselves and arrived at unanimous conclusion that increased rate of beef consumption is beneficial for several reasons. Another group of housewives was not allowed to discuss the matter but was given a lecture by an expert on benefits of increased beef consumption.

Later on it was found that 30 % of group of housewives who had discussed the matter and reached a unanimous resolution in favour of beef consumption actually registered a shift in their attitude toward beef consumption.

However, only 3% of housewives subjected to lecture method changed their attitude.

*Persuasive Communication:* By persuasive communication we mean communication of such facts and information as are attractive and appealing to the listener and has direct bearing on the attitudes of the person.

Change in attitude through persuasive communication depends on four factors:

- 1) Source of communication
- 2) Characteristics and content of communication

- 3) Channel of communication, and
- 4) Characteristics of audience.

By source of communication we mean the person who provides information for attitude change. Studies reveal that there are certain characteristics of source which are effective in producing attitude change and these are:

- i) Credibility of the communicator
- ii) Attractiveness of the communicator
- iii) Content and characteristic of communication.

**Credibility of the communicator:** A person who is viewed as more trustworthy and expert in the issue on hand is likely to bring about more change in attitude. For example, in a study on two groups of students, one group was told that information given to them comes from a highly credible person who is an expert in the field and can be relied upon. But another group was told that information given comes from a person who is not expert in the field and can not be much relied upon. It was found that student receiving information from highly credible source registered greater change as compared to students receiving information from low credible source. Amazingly with the lapse of time source of information loses its relevance and only content of message is retained. Psychologists call it sleeper effect.

**Attractiveness of communicator:** This also has its impact upon change of attitude. Attractiveness of communicator has two aspects:

- a) physical beauty, and
- b) similarity.

When the communicator is highly beautiful change in attitude is more. For example, a beautiful heroine advocating use of a particular shampoo is more likely to bring change in attitude, than an ordinary looking woman.

Perhaps this is the reason why most of advertisements have beautiful heroines and good looking men for promoting the products of different companies. People are more influenced by people who are like them. Such people are considered to be one of them, and are less expected to deceive the person. For example in a study on Black students, message from black communicator was more effective than message from a white communicator.

**Content and characteristic of communication:** There are three dimensions of content of communication which are note worthy, and these include (i) fear arousing appeal (ii) Organisation of communication (iii) ) Channel of communication .

#### 1) *Fear arousing appeal*

When some information is aimed at arousing fear or negative emotions but at the same time it provides you with alternatives to reduce that fear, it has been found to be more effective. For example, statutory warning on cigarette packets that cigarette smoking is injurious to health, is an example of this type.

## 2) *Organisation of Communication*

Attitude change is affected by the way in which communication is organised and presented.

The first issue in regard to organisation of communication is the effect of one-sided versus two-sided communication i.e. should a communicator present just the arguments in favour of the change of attitude in receiver or should the arguments be presented with the counter arguments also?

One other issue in regard to organisation of communication is whether the message should draw its own conclusion or it should be left to the audience.

Another issue in organisation and presentation of communication centers over the primacy vs. recency effect that is, whether the information presented first or information presented last is more effective. Let us deal with these issues one by one.

*One-sided vs. Two-sided communication:* In order to test the effectiveness of one-sided vs. two-sided arguments, social psychologists conducted an experiment to prepare Allied forces soldiers for a long protracted war against Japanese forces, after the surrender of German forces.

In one presentation soldiers were presented with arguments that described toughness of Japanese soldiers, Japanese weapon system and resources and stockpiles of Japanese forces. In another presentation same arguments were presented but it also contained arguments for the possibility of a short duration war, like the earlier victories of Allied forces, the losses incurred by Japanese forces and lowered morale of Japanese commanders after the surrender of German forces.

### **Results showed that**

- i) None of the two types of communication was more effective than the other. However, one interesting fact that emerged was that one-sided communication was more effective with soldiers who were only high school pass and two-sided communication was more effective with graduate soldiers.
- ii) Secondly, initial stance taken by the soldiers also came out to be an important factor. Soldiers who originally expected the war to be short one, were more influenced by two-sided arguments while those who initially expected the war to be a long protracted one, were more influenced by one-sided communication.
- iii) **Innocking effect:** one-sided and two-sided communications also differ in their ability to “inoculate” people against later counter propaganda. In an experiment two sided communication produced astonishing innocking effect among people. In one experimental study two-sided communication was dramatically effective in innocking the audience. Different groups of subjects who had heard argument that Russia would not be able to produce atomic bomb for next five years were later exposed to counter communication. They differed radically in their receptiveness to the countercommunication, depending upon whether or not the initial message had been one-sided or two sided. Only 2 percent of those who had initially been exposed to one- sided communication retained position advocated by that communication, where as 67 percent of those who had initially been exposed to a two-sided communication retained its position inspite of counter communication.

Whether the information provided first has more effect than the information presented later. When the earlier information is more effective it is known as primacy effect and when information presented later is more effective it is known as recency effect.

*Channel of communication:* To what extent a communication will be effective depends on which channel of communication is being used. Different channels have differential effect on attitude change.

Radio, television, newspaper etc. are example of mass media directed at communicating with the masses. Communication through mass media is impersonal in the sense that face to face interaction is lacking here. But when a communicator reaches out to audience in person he establishes personal contact with them. It has been found that personal contact more effective than mass media in producing attitude change.

Psychologists found that attitude change is greater when an individual receives information through active participation than when he receives information through pamphlets or posters glued on walls.

*Characteristics of audience:* Effectiveness of communication aimed at changing attitudes of audience is also dependent upon the characteristics of the audience receiving the message. It has been found that people who are high in self-esteem, self-confidence and are aggressive by nature are less likely to be affected by a communication to change attitude.

Age has also been found to adversely affect change in attitude. Increase in age brings about rigidity and conservatism in thinking thus an aged person is less likely to be affected by persuasive communication.

*Enforced contact:* One important factor in attitude change is enforced contact. By enforced contact we mean a social situation in which two opposing parties are compelled to interact with each other. For example, when an Indian and a Pakistani are compelled to live in the same room and share other things. It is presumed that such enforced contact allow people to understand each other in a better way through repeated exposure to each other. In such situation people receive first hand information about each other and has the opportunity to test the information received.

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## **2.4 LET US SUM UP**

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In the preceding paragraphs we studied factors that go in to the development of attitudes. We now know that a number of factors like need satisfaction, social learning, group affiliations, personality factors and cultural factors contribute to the development of attitudes. Thereafter, we discussed the process of attitude change. We discussed the role of group reference, changing group affiliations, persuasive communication and personality factor in bringing about attitudinal change. In persuasive communication we discussed the role of characteristics of communicator and how these affect attitude change. Then we discussed importance of content of the message, its order of presentation and also channel of communication and characteristics of the audience receiving communication. Thus, now we fully and understand the process of attitude change.



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## 2.5 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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- 1) Discuss in your own words factor of attitude formation.
- 2) What is the role of persuasive communication in attitude change? Give suitable examples.
- 3) Write an essay on process of attitude change.
- 4) What is meant by Primacy and Recency effect and how do they bring about an attitude change?
- 5) Discuss characteristics of audience and enforced contact as responsible for attitude change.

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## 2.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Baumeister, R. F., & Bushman, B. J. (2008). *Social Psychology and Human Nature*. Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth.

Crisp, R. J., & Turner, R. N. (2010). *Essential Social Psychology* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.



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# UNIT 3 PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

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## Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Characteristics of Prejudice
- 3.3 Types of Prejudice
- 3.4 Discrimination
- 3.5 Development and Maintenance of Prejudice and Discrimination
- 3.6 Manifestation of Prejudice
- 3.7 Methods of Reducing Prejudice and Discrimination
- 3.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.9 Unit End Questions
- 3.10 Suggested Readings

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## 3.0 INTRODUCTION

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Social Psychologists tried to define prejudice from different viewpoints. Some psychologists define prejudice as a preconceived irrational judgement, while others define it as an expression of dislike against members of some religion, race or group. However, majority of psychologists agree upon the definition given by Secord and Backman “Prejudice is an attitude that predisposes a person to think, perceive, feel and act in favourable and unfavourable ways towards a group or its individual members.” According to Baron & Byrne “Prejudice is generally a negative attitude towards the members of some social, ethnic or religious.” Prejudice be it negative or positive is decidedly an attitude and has all the three components of attitude i.e. affective, cognitive and behavioural. In this unit we will be discussing the definition of prejudice, characteristics of prejudice and types of prejudice. We will also be discussing discrimination as a process and how the prejudice and discrimination are developed and maintained. Finally we try to see how one can reduce prejudice and discrimination.

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## 3.1 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- 1 Define prejudice;
- 1 Describe the nature of prejudice;
- 1 Elucidate the characteristics of prejudice;
- 1 Explain the nature of discrimination.
- 1 Analyse the factors responsible for development and maintenance of prejudice and discrimination;

- 1 Explain how prejudice manifests itself in different ways; and
- 1 Elucidate the methods of reducing prejudice.

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## 3.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF PREJUDICE

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Psychologists have identified following characteristics of prejudice:

*Prejudice is acquired:* Like attitude prejudice is acquired through the process of learning and socialisation. When born a child is like a blank slate and is free of any kind of prejudice. It is only when the process of socialisation begins that he starts imitating his parents and their likes and dislikes. Norms, values, customs, and traditions of the society of which he is member make him prejudiced toward members of other group. Acquisition of prejudice is facilitated by classical conditioning, instrumental and observational learning. A child learns to hate Pakistanis only because he sees significant others in the society hating Pakistanis.

*Emotional overtones:* Prejudice is always colored with emotions. It is either for or against some group, community or religion. If favourable, the person would show too much affection, love, care and sympathy for members of another group. But if unfavourable the person would show hatred, dislike and hostility.

*Prejudice is irrational:* Prejudice does not lend itself to reason, wisdom, and relevance. The individual does not change his prejudice in the face of information and evidence to the contrary.

*Prejudice is functional:* Prejudice helps the individual justify his hostilities, repressed desires and strengthen feelings of self-esteem and prestige. It helps individual justify his exploitation, discrimination of members of other group. For example, in Indian society the upper caste Hindus justified their exploitation of lower castes reasoning that they are like that only and deserve to be exploited and discriminated against.

*Prejudice has no connection with reality:* It is primarily based on hearsay, incomplete and wrong information, customs and traditions of the society. It can't stand test of logic and reasoning.

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## 3.3 TYPES OF PREJUDICE

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Prejudices are of different types depending upon the social conditions of the individual. Sociologist and Psychologists delineate following main types of prejudices:

*Racial prejudice:* This is aimed at members of another race. For example, Negroes have been subject of racial prejudice at the hand of whites. Similarly, Jews were a target of prejudice by Nazis in Germany. Hitler went to the extent of exterminating at mass scale.

*Sex prejudice:* This is for centuries women have been target of prejudice. They have been thought of weak, dependent and intellectually less gifted than men.

*Caste prejudice:* Indian social structure is the best example of such prejudice. Our society is divided into numerous castes and each caste is believed to have specific characteristics.

*Language prejudice:* This is often evident when we go to different parts of India. Particularly in South India it is very evident. People despise Hindi knowing fully well that it is our national language. They prefer to speak English but not Hindi even if they know Hindi. Infact organisation of states in India has been on linguistic basis.

*Religious prejudice:* This has been a burning problem in India since pre independence days. Creation of Pakistan was only because of religious differences. In religious prejudice individual holds positive attitude toward his own religion and unfavourable attitude toward other religion. Consequently, misunderstandings and misconceptions about people of other religions crop up.

Some other prejudices are political prejudice, communal prejudice etc.

### Self Assessment Questions

1) What is prejudice?

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2) Enumerate the characteristics of prejudice

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3) What are the various types of prejudice? Give suitable examples

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## 3.4 DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination is the differential treatment of individuals belonging to a particular social group or community or religion. It is generally the overt or behavioural expression of prejudice. Generally the person discriminated is denied some privilege or right that is accorded to other members of society who do not belong to the minority group.

According to the exchange theory when the reward-cost outcomes of two separately bounded groups are perceived to be mutually exclusive, so that each group can increase its gains only at the cost of other, members of each group try to protect or increase their outcomes. If the two groups are unequal in power, they will establish different outcomes unless prevented by norms that restrain

exploitation of the weaker by the more powerful. These different outcomes create differences in the status of the two groups.

The extent to which the members of the minority group feel discriminated against and dislike or feel hostile toward the majority group is a function of the relation between their comparison level and that of the majority group. If the minority group has the same comparison level as the majority group, it will feel dissatisfied and hostile. But if comparison is sufficiently low relative to majority group no adverse feelings would occur.

However, 'minority groups' use of comparison level relative to majority group depends upon past experiences, the outcomes available in alternative relations, and structural and cultural factors. For example, in Indian society lower caste people were not allowed to take water from wells reserved for people of upper castes. They were not supposed to sit before people of upper castes and there were many more restrictions imposed upon them simply because they were born in shudra castes.

Sometimes discrimination occurs without the accompanying feeling of prejudice. For example, a proprietor may refuse to accept as patrons members of a minority group because he feels it would injure his business. He may not be prejudiced towards those people but he gives priority to his business.

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### **3.5 DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION**

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Psychologists have categorised the causal and maintenance factors of prejudice as given below:

*Status and Power structures:* The structure of relations between two groups in terms of relative status and power sometimes gives rise to prejudice. For example, where a dominant group holds another group in a condition of slavery, slaves are likely to be considered lazy, irresponsible and lacking in initiative. These beliefs emerge from the fact that slaves act upon orders from their masters and not given an opportunity to demonstrate initiative or responsibility. Thus the beliefs about them are consonant with their behaviour, which is controlled by structure of relations.

*Historical facts:* Prejudice and discrimination develop out of history of economic conflict as well as from political power distribution among groups of people . Historical incidents led to the development of attitude which slowly takes form of prejudice. In our society prejudice against women is one such example. Women have always been considered weak, dependant and tools such prejudice developed out of atrocities perpetrated over women and they kept tolerating them thinking it to be their duty.

Similarly some professions have historically been thought to be fit for men than women. For example, truck driving has never been considered fit for women, Women in this profession and other such professions are looked down upon.

Another example of historical reason of prejudice comes from prejudice against Jews. An image of Jews as rich, grasping, and shrewd grew out of their occupational roles as money lenders. The church prohibited Christians from lending

money at interest, but did permit them to borrow from Jews. Thus the Jews became bankers when this occupation was extremely profitable, and the cognitive image commensurate with the role became firmly established. Besides competitive circumstances produced negative effect against Jews.

*Situational Factors:* The number of situational factors in the immediate environment of the individual also lead to development of prejudice:

*Social learning:* Every individual during the process of socialisation learns and acquires beliefs, values and attitudes through parents, school, religion and church. These agents of socialisation invariably transmit prejudices held by them to the child. Besides childrearing practices adopted by parents have been shown to help develop prejudice and discrimination.

*Job Competition:* Scarcity of job avenues and abundance of applicants is one important economic factor for development of prejudice. It led to the emergence of sons of soil theory. For example, the Marathi movement against North Indians in Mumbai and other parts of Maharashtra has one of its reasons based in economic factors. North Indians coming to Mumbai are ready to work for longer hours and that too at cheaper wages as against Local people. They have gradually outpace local people in petty and traditional jobs thus rendering many of people jobless and fending for struggle to survive. It has led them to believe that north Indians are responsible for their plight and are replacing them in their own home. Such beliefs lead to development prejudice against North Indians.

*Conformity to Norms:* Once prejudice and discrimination against outgroup are well established, the accompanying cognitions and feelings concerning the out group acquire a normative quality. They are shared by members of the ingroup and the members expect each other to hold such attitudes. The factors underlying conformity to the norms of prejudice may be explained in terms of the varying reward-cost outcomes ensuing from conformity or nonconformity. If prejudice and discrimination against other group is the norm, then overt expression of prejudice and discrimination will receive approval from other members of the group.

*Interaction Patterns:* Prejudice and discrimination create certain interaction patterns that contribute to maintenance of the status quo. Several interaction patterns increase cohesion and thus strengthen the power of the group to enforce conformity to norms of prejudice and discrimination. Any factor that makes members more dependent on the group is likely to increase cohesion. Interaction pattern within the ingroup may also increase the economic dependence of members upon each other. Finally, if interaction within each group predominates over interaction across group lines, the development of patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving unique to each group is fostered. Such interaction patterns increase the cultural gulf that separates the two group.

*Psychodynamic factors:* Researches reveal that a number of psychological factors also give rise to prejudice.

*Frustration and Aggression:* Frustration also gives rise to prejudice. The underlying theory in it is displaced aggression. According to this theory when individual finds some obstacle between him and his goal he gets frustrated and becomes aggressive toward the obstacle. Since the interfering agent is stronger and powerful and has the power to punish him this frustration and aggression is



displaced toward some weaker object. Thus, the weak person or group becomes scapegoat.

*Authoritarian Personality:* Among psychological factors of prejudice authoritarian personality has received much attention from psychologists. People with authoritarian personality exhibit rigid thinking, punitive tendency. These tendencies predispose individual toward prejudice. Besides these people value people on the scale of power, people above them in the power scale are attributed all good characteristics, and people below them on power scale are treated as inferior and deserve to be exploited and hated.

*Personality needs:* A variety of personality needs may support prejudice and discrimination. One such need is “intolerance for ambiguity”. Persons differ in the extent to which they are disturbed by confusing or ambiguous situations. Some persons like to have everything in black and white i.e. they are unable to tolerate least uncertainty or complexity in situation while some persons are least disturbed by confusing or uncertain situations. In general it has been found that individuals who are more intolerant of ambiguity are also likely to be more prejudiced because prejudice for them serves to clarify ambiguity and uncertainty embedded in the situation. Similarly, a need to achieve superior status may be supported by prejudice, which provides a group of persons lower in status than oneself. The need for security may be satisfied through rejection of outgroup.

#### **Self Assessment Questions**

1) What is discrimination?

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2) Delineate the causes for discrimination.

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3) Present the theoretical approaches in regard to maintenance factor of prejudice.

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4) Discuss the causal and maintenance factors of prejudice.

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5) What are situational factors that lead to the development of prejudice and discrimination.

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### 3.6 MANIFESTATION OF PREJUDICE

As we know that a prejudice is a negative attitude directed toward some member of a particular group. An attitude is a hypothetical construct observable only through the behaviour of a person. A prejudice manifests itself through the following modes of behaviour:

**Withdrawal:** It means moving from the object of prejudice. For example, a person is prejudiced against Jews. He goes to a party and finds that some Jews have been invited to that party. Now instead of making Jews leave that party he decides to move away from that party.

**Avoidance:** Keeping away from the social situation where the object of prejudice may be present. For example, the person who is prejudiced against Jews and hates them, comes to know before-hand that some of the invitees at the party are Jews. In that condition he may decide to not to join that party. Thus he is able to avoid a situation where he might have to interact with object of prejudice.

**Discrimination:** It involves biased behaviour against the object person of prejudice. For example, a teacher who is prejudiced against a particular community may fail students belonging to that community. He may not select students of particular community for school team, although the students in question deserve and merit selection against all criteria.

**Lynching:** It involves behaviour aimed at causing physical hurt or injury to the object person of prejudice. For example, the teacher in above example may go to the extent of actually subjecting students of a particular community to physical punishment without any reasonable ground.

**Extermination:** It is an extreme form of manifestation of prejudice. It is aimed at removing the existence of the object person of prejudice. For example, in the Second World War, Hitler, the then Chancellor of Germany, ordered mass extermination of Jews. Millions of Jews were massacred at the orders of Hitler. Hitler believed himself to be Aryan and he aimed to cleanse Germany of Non-Aryans.

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## 3.7 METHODS OF REDUCING PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

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Social psychologists have suggested a number of methods for reducing prejudice which as follow:

*Intergroup Contact:* Allport was the first psychologist to realise the importance of intergroup contact in between prejudiced person and the target person. Such interactional situations provide the two parties an opportunity to know each other from close quarters and understand each other thereby reducing misunderstandings and misconceptions. However, for intergroup contact to be effective certain conditions are to be met.

Intergroup contact is an effective method of reducing prejudice only in those conditions where both the parties have equal status.

For this technique to be effective contact between the prejudiced person and target person ought to be intimate and not superficial. Intimate and honest contact between the concerned parties motivates the person to perceive members of target group more as humans than as stereotypes.

Intergroup contact method is more successful in situations where the success of both parties is dependent on each other i.e. when a common goal is to be achieved. In such situation both parties are forced to understand each other in a better manner.

*Education:* Social psychologists emphasise that appropriate education has important role to play in reduction of prejudice, particularly racial prejudice. In it both informal and formal education are important. As far as informal education is concerned parents ought to be encouraged not to indulge before children in things which knowingly or unknowingly promote prejudice.

As for formal education, its syllabus and curriculum should be designed to promote harmony between different sections of society. It should aim at developing healthy minds. It has been found that higher and better formal education leads to decreased prejudice and increased liberalism.

Recently, psychologists have devised a new method called *cultural assimilator*. In this method a group of prejudice persons is explained about traditions, norms, beliefs and value system of people of other communities and races so that they can appreciate those communities and races in the light of recent information. A number of social psychologists have successfully used this method.

*Antiprejudice propaganda:* Through mass media it has also been helpful in reducing prejudice. In one of the studies it was found that films and documentaries aimed at reducing prejudice have been successful in reducing prejudice upto 60 percent. Some other psychologists have reported antiprejudice propaganda to be more effective than formal education.

*Incongruent role:* It has been found that when a person is made to play a role contrary to his prejudice it leads to reduction in prejudice after some time. It happens because playing such role creates dissonance in the individual. This dissonance gives rise to tension compelling the individual to change his prejudice

and restore balance between his behaviour and attitude. The person can't change his behaviour as it is public but his prejudice. For example, if a person prejudiced against a particular community is entrusted the task of welfare of that community, he is left with no alternative but change his prejudice because he is not able to change his role.

*Social legislation:* This is another method of reducing prejudice. Government in different countries have adopted and enacted several legislations which prohibit expression of prejudice in any form. Any public manifestation of prejudice is unlawful and liable to punishment. Let us take the example of our own country.

Our constitution states that state shall not make any discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, sex, and religion of the individual and no person shall be allowed to do so. Consequently, today we don't mind a harijan sitting beside us and offering prayer in the temple. Government even encourages people for intercaste marriages. Persons belonging to deprived communities or castes have been provided reservation in jobs.

*Personality change techniques:* This is for prejudice reduction to be effective a person must have balanced personality and open mind. However in cases where prejudice is an integral part of personality it becomes imperative to seek help of therapeutic treatment. A number of psychotherapies have been developed to help such persons. For example, Play therapy is an important tool for detecting prejudice at early stage and to bring reformation in personality of children.

### Self Assessment Questions

1) How do prejudice and discrimination manifest themselves?

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2) How can social legislation reduce prejudice and discrimination

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3) What are the personality change techniques that could reduce prejudice and discrimination?

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### 3.8 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we studied prejudice and its nature. What are the different types of prejudices and what havoc they play with society and individual. We also studied characteristics of prejudice. Then we studied discrimination, what does it mean and we also discussed prejudice and discrimination. It was followed by a detailed discussion on the causes of development and maintenance of prejudice. We studied manifestation of prejudice. In the last we discussed methods of reducing prejudice.

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### 3.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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- 1) What do you understand by the term prejudice? What are the different types of prejudice?
- 2) What do you understand by the term discrimination? What are the different forms of prejudice manifestation?
- 3) Write an essay on factors of development and maintenance of discrimination and prejudice.
- 4) Discuss the psychological factors that give rise to prejudice and discrimination
- 5) Explain how authoritarian personality and personality needs contribute to the development of prejudice and discrimination?

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### 3.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Aronson, E., Wilson, T. D., & Akert, R. M. (2010). *Social Psychology* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Crisp, R. J., & Turner, R. N. (2010). *Essential Social Psychology* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

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# UNIT 4 SOCIAL CONFLICT AND ITS RESOLUTION

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## Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Nature of Social Conflict
- 4.3 Forms of Social Conflict
  - 4.3.1 Overt Conflict
  - 4.3.2 Objective Conflict
  - 4.3.3 Subjective Conflict
- 4.4 Methods of Conflict Resolution
- 4.5 Blake and Mouton Strategies
- 4.6 Two Dimensional Model
- 4.7 Group Conflict in Indian Society
- 4.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.9 Unit End Questions
- 4.10 Suggested Readings

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## 4.0 INTRODUCTION

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Any society be it Indian, British, American or Japanese is composed of different institutions and groups of people. These groups constituting the society have their own distinct identity. Besides, these groups have their own agenda to pursue. Further no nation or society has resources to meet the demands of all groups and stay in harmony. Consequently these groups while pursuing their goals often find themselves at logger heads to exploit scarce resources and maximise their gains or outcomes. Thus a social situation develops where different groups constituting the society are opposing each other to promote their own interest at the cost of others. This social phenomenon is termed social conflict or group conflict by sociologists, Psychologist and Anthropologists. Social conflict is also evident when one social group compares its gains and feels that it is being marginalised by other groups or when it perceives that it is being deprived of what is duly available to other groups in the society. In this unit we will be dealing with nature and definition of social conflict, the types and forms of social conflict the methods of resolution of the conflicts and we will be presenting the group conflict in Indian society.

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## 4.1 OBJECTIVES

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On completing this unit you, will be able to:

- 1 Define and describe social conflict;
- 1 Explain in your own words different types of social conflict;
- 1 Analyse the implications of social conflict on the lives of people;

- 1 Describe the different methods of conflict resolution; and
- 1 Analyse the different types of social conflict affecting Indian society.

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## 4.2 NATURE OF SOCIAL CONFLICT

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Social conflict or group conflict occurs when two or more actors oppose each other in social interaction, reciprocally exerting social power in an effort to attain scarce or incompatible goals and prevent the opponent from attaining them.

Group conflict or social conflict is a social relationship wherein the action is oriented intentionally for carrying out the actor's own will against the resistance of other party or parties.

If we analyse the above definitions following conclusions can be drawn:

Social conflict revolves around social power. In almost all kinds of social conflict struggle to get hold of power is central. Access to power or hold over power ensures a group's success in attaining its goal. Consequently the powerful group wins and the weaker one loses the competition. For example, the recent Gurjar movement in Rajasthan to get entry into scheduled tribes club was thwarted by Meenas, another tribe of Rajasthan.

This could be possible only because Meenas have proliferated in highest services of India and today they enjoy tremendous political, bureaucratic, and economic clout. This access to power has made them formidable. Therefore, they successfully thwarted Gurjars' attempt to share tribal status with and take a part of the cake of reservation from them.

Social conflict involves incompatibility in the sense that in social conflict some people are able to get what they want while others fail to get what they want. Thus for some their want remains an unfulfilled desire and they keep seething with discontent. This incompatibility once created develops into a vicious cycle which is broken only when some strong social reform movement takes place.

For example, for centuries people belonging to Harijan community were being maltreated by the so-called upper class Hindus. They could raise their voice against it only when people like Mahatma Gandhi, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Jyotiba Phule took cudgel against it and it converted into a movement of self-respect for Harijans that it was realised that these people need to be given fair treatment. Even then only a small dent could be made in the existing situation.

Mostly social situations are such that not all individuals in it have similar or identical interests. Every person participating in social interaction tries to maximise his gain at the expense of other person involved. This situation invariably leads to struggle to win and keeping others from goal. However, it is impossible to find a social situation which can be described as pure group conflict like struggle between two warring teams of football. In most social conflict situations element of cooperation is intertwined along with competition.

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## 4.3 FORMS OF SOCIAL CONFLICT

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A social conflict may take different forms and manifest itself in different manners. However, psychologists have identified three different forms of social conflict which are as follows:



### **4.3.1 Overt Conflict**

In this form social conflict is open and explicit. Competition between both the parties is fierce and direct. For example, negotiation between management representatives and labour union or war between two countries. A more simple example of it is debate, in which one speaker emphasises and justifies his own point while questioning the validity of opponents point of view. The explicit aim is to defeat the opponent and ensure ones victory.

### **4.3.2 Objective Conflict**

Objective conflict occurs when one group tries to gain advantage over another group or groups. Thus by objective social conflict we mean a social situation inherently benefits some while causing loss to others. For example, it is often seen that when government takes some welfare steps, some people are more benefitted but some others receive less than expected benefits and still some others are at loss. This gives rise to a kind of social conflict known as objective social conflict.

Let us take the case reservation in jobs. OBC were given a quota of 27 % in Government jobs and this category included in it numerous castes. However, only a few of the dominant castes in OBC category— Jats, Ahir, Kurmy and Kumawat— were able to garner majority of the share in OBC quota and other castes like Gurjar, Luhars etc. could not reap much benefit. Result was that slowly members of these castes started feeling left out and began to clammer for a separate quota for them. Recent Gurjar movement for inclusion in the scheduled tribe category was a result of such objective conflict because Gurjars were not able to compete with Jats and Ahirs in the OBC category and could not obtain equal benefit.

### **4.3.3 Subjective Conflict**

When a person identifies or perceives a situation involving struggle it is known as subjective conflict. Sometimes a person remains in a state of subjective struggle without bringing it to overt level.

#### **Self Assessment Questions**

1) Define the Nature of social conflict.

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2) Describe the nature of social conflict.

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3) What are the forms of social conflict ?

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4) Describe overt conflict

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5) How is objective conflict different from subjective conflict?

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#### 4.4 METHODS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Like any other problem Social psychologists have developed number of approaches for resolution of social conflict. Some of the main methods as follow:

*Mutually beneficial goal:* A common approach to ameliorate social conflict is to establish mutually beneficial goals. Such goals prompt the warring parties to work in close cooperation and help reduce feelings of group struggle. In a classical experiment Sherif and Sherif put two groups in a social situation which involved competition between the two parties. It was observed that very soon they developed feelings of animosity and competition. Things reached to a level where both parties raided each other's camps to hurt and damage their prospects of attaining goal. In the next phase of the experiment both the warring parties were put in a situation which called for joint efforts to reach the goal. Since neither of them had sufficient resources to attain goal on their own, they were left with no alternative but to help each other to surmount problems faced by them. Not longer than before it was observed that members of both parties began trying to understand each other's concerns. They started seeing members of opposite group very often and appreciated each other's approach to handle problems. Thus by the end of the experiment both the groups had developed better understanding of each other and there was a marked reduction in feeling of conflict.

*Compromise:* Reaching a compromise between the two parties also leads to reduction of struggle. Compromise is a situation where no party stands to gain or lose anything. Thus it gradually leads to reduction in struggle. For example, when Gurjars in Rajasthan pressurised the government for inclusion into scheduled tribes, the Meenas vehemently opposed their demand since they have been the

biggest gainer in Rajasthan. This conflict led to open war between them and resulted in many casualties and bloodshed. Now that location of both communities is such that they are found living side by side almost all over Rajasthan, they soon realised the futility of opposing each other. A compromise was struck between the two and an understanding was arrived at under which Gurjars dropped their demand for inclusion into scheduled tribe but asked for a separate quota for themselves and Meenas agreed to support Gurjars demand. Thus under the new agreement both parties stood to gain or lose nothing at the cost of each other.

*Developing special norms:* Conflict between two warring factions or groups may be reduced through development of special norms. For example, in a game, the question of who will take first turn may be settled by leaving it to the umpire. Thus the bone of contention is removed and thereby the cause of conflict is removed. Psychologists have delineated social conditions, on the basis of studies, where conflict and struggle can be handled through developing special norms. According to them social conditions where in both the parties have the ability and will to influence each other lend themselves to such interventions. This technique has reportedly been successfully used in a number of situations with different communities.

*Prosocial behavior:* By prosocial behaviour we mean behavior that creates some kind of positive social influence among others. For example, giving charity, working for the welfare of others, helping others in distress are some of the forms of prosocial behaviour. Studies reveal that when members of a community engage in some kind of prosocial behaviour toward members of other community it has direct impact on their perception and opinion about them and results significantly in the reduction of feelings of conflict and struggle.

Psychologists observed that when an individual engages in prosocial behaviour, that is when a person is involved in helping a person in distress, the person passes through four stages:

- 1) First, the individual takes stock of the seriousness of the condition or situation in which help is to be given.
- 2) Second, the individual takes responsibility for the helping another person.
- 3) Third, the individual enters a state where he wishes to help the person in distress and
- 4) Finally the person recognises the fact that the individual is capable of helping another person.

*Use of scientific approaches:* Social psychologists suggested some scientific approaches for reduction of group conflict, which is as follows:

a) Win-Lose approach b) Lose-Lose approach c) Lose-Win approach. Let us describe these approaches:

**Win-Lose approach** – In this type of approach one party or group adopts different methods, means and approaches aimed at ensuring defeat of opponent party and victory for themselves. In other words, one group tries to thwart another group from reaching the target or goal so that they can reach the goal. This approach has two underlying assumptions: that is (i) conflict among people

is inevitable and unanimity is impossible. (ii) gain of one party results is loss for the other party. In other words, only one party can win or reach the goal and another party is bound to fail in the process. In such situations, conflicts do arise. Now that conflict is inevitable and there can only be one winner, the best technique or approach is leaving no stone unturned to ensure defeat of opponents and victory for self.

Success can be achieved using socially acceptable means like exercising our democratic rights and also to some extent by using subversive methods like threatening the opponents of dire consequences, making opponent allies cross over the fence by luring them with different types of benefits or even taking recourse to unlawful activities as advocated. Thus in nutshell this approach advocates putting in exercise the age old aphorism that every thing is fair in love and war. It is the end that matters the most and not the means employed to achieve the end.

**Lose-Lose approach** – This approach is called lose-lose approach because none of the parties involved in the struggle stand to gain much and are not able to cause what they wanted to happen. Underlying assumptions of this approach are:

- i) Some thing is better than nothing.
- ii) It is better to stay away from struggle than indulging in it and wasting resources.
- iii) When groups reconcile with each other after initial bouts of struggle the lose-lose approach is exemplified.
- iv) Another characteristic of this approach is that it results in quick solution of the problem and values and motives of individuals do not find place.

**Win-Win approach:** This approach is different from the above two approaches mentioned earlier. This is considered ideal for reduction of struggle between warring groups. It involves both parties resorting to different types of cooperative measures and techniques to arrive at a conscious solution of the struggle so that all the concerned parties are benefitted to the maximum.

Underlying assumption in this approach is that it considers struggle as a mutual problem which can be solved amicably. It lays emphasis on the difficulties and problems of both parties and not on the means of ensuring victory. Both parties sit together and work on the solution of the problem and whosoever reaches the solution first acquaints the other party. Thus the solution arrived at is acceptable to all concerned. However successful application of this approach requires skill in human relations otherwise it is difficult to achieve success using this approach.

#### Self Assessment Questions

- 1) What is meant by mutually beneficial goal?

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2) Define and describe “compromising” as a conflict resolution strategy.

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3) What type of special norms will you develop for conflict resolution?

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4) Can pro social behavior be used for resolution of conflict? Explain

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5) What are the various scientific approaches for reducing conflict?

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## 4.5 BLAKE AND MOUTON STRATEGIES

Blake & Mouton on the basis of their research stated that people adopt one of the following five strategies for reduction of conflict and struggle which are given below:

*Withdrawing:* In this the person resolves the problem by stepping back from the situation of struggle (lose-lose approach).

*Smoothing:* This comprises of putting emphasis on points of common interests and avoiding discussion on matters of debate or controversy. Thus this approach tries to minimize differences between the two warring factions (lose-lose approach).

*Compromising:* This strategy seeks to decrease differences through discussion (lose-lose approach).

*Forcing:* This approach is an all or none approach in that it takes a competitive stand. It is this way or that way approach (win-lose approach).

*Confrontation and problem solving:* Both parties openly discuss all matters and the best mutually acceptable solution is accepted (win-win approach)

## 4.6 TWO DIMENSIONAL MODEL

This model presumes that all sorts of conflict handling behaviour can be understood in terms of two dimensions i.e. assertiveness and cooperation. These two basic dimensions of behaviour define five different modes for responding to conflict situations:

**Competing** is assertive and uncooperative—an individual pursues his own concerns at the other person's expense. This is a power-oriented mode in which you use whatever power seems appropriate to win your own position—your ability to argue, your rank, or economic sanctions. Competing means “standing up for your rights,” defending a position which you believe is correct, or simply trying to win.

**Accommodating** is unassertive and cooperative—the complete opposite of competing. When accommodating, the individual neglects his own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person; there is an element of self-sacrifice in this mode. Accommodating might take the form of selfless generosity or charity, obeying another person's order when you would prefer not to, or yielding to another's point of view.

**Avoiding** is unassertive and uncooperative—the person neither pursues his own concerns nor those of the other individual. Thus he does not deal with the conflict. Avoiding might take the form of diplomatically sidestepping an issue, postponing an issue until a better time, or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation.

**Collaborating** is both assertive and cooperative—the complete opposite of avoiding. Collaborating involves an attempt to work with others to find some solution that fully satisfies their concerns. It means digging into an issue to pinpoint the underlying needs and wants of the two individuals. Collaborating between two persons might take the form of exploring a disagreement to learn from each other's insights or trying to find a creative solution to an interpersonal problem.

**Compromising** is moderate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness. The objective is to find some expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties. It falls intermediate between competing and accommodating. Compromising gives up more than competing but less than accommodating. Likewise, it addresses an issue more directly than avoiding, but does not explore it in as much depth as collaborating. In some situations, compromising might mean splitting the difference between the two positions, exchanging concessions, or seeking a quick middle-ground solution.

Each of us is capable of using all five conflict-handling modes. None of us can be characterised as having a single style of dealing with conflict. But certain people use some modes better than others and, therefore, tend to rely on those modes more heavily than others—whether because of temperament or practice.

**Third party intervention** Another way of resolving group conflict is to seek mediation of an arbitrator or third party. This third party tries to arrive at a solution keeping in view the characteristics of the warring factions. Solution generated by the third party is binding on all the concerned parties. A good feature of this type of resolution is that the third party does not enforce a decision but the decision is arrived at through open discussion and negotiation over points of problems. However, this approach requires third party to be very mature and adept at human relations.



### Self Assessment Questions

- 1) Describe in detail what Blake and Mouton strategies involve in conflict resolution?

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- 2) Discuss the two dimensional model in conflict resolution.

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- 3) What is meant by third party intervention and how does it help in resolving the conflict?

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## 4.7 GROUP CONFLICT IN INDIAN SOCIETY

**Tribal problems** In Indian society tribal groups have a special place. They represent minority communities and always emphasise on keeping their independent existence. These tribes think that assimilation with majority population would jeopardize their separate identity. Formation of state of Jharkhand out of Bihar exemplifies this attitude of tribals.

**Caste conflict** India is conglomeration of castes which can broadly be divided into three categories, that is the forward castes, backward castes and scheduled castes and tribes. These castes always show an inclination to outsmart each other.

**Communal problems** Since independence India has been plagued with communal problem between Hindus and Muslims. This has witnessed innumerable bloody riots between the people of two religions and cost thousands of innocent lives and millions of dollars worth property.

Demolition of Babri Masjid is a blatant example of conflict between these two communities.

Other social conflict problems are— labour management problems, student problems, landlord-tenant problem, confrontation between advantaged and disadvantaged class, language problem and job problem etc.

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## 4.8 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we studied the nature of social conflict. We tried to understand various elements involved in it. We also studied different types of social conflict and their implications on the life of people in the society. This was followed by a detailed discussion on methods of conflict resolution. Now we understand different approaches taken to resolve social conflict and the rationale behind them.

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## 4.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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- 1) Discuss social conflict and various forms of social conflict in detail.
- 2) Throw light on various approaches to conflict resolution.
- 3) Discuss in detail different types social conflict that plague India and suggest approaches for their resolution.

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## 4.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Arrow, Kenneth J.(1995). *Barriers to Conflict Resolution*. W.W. Norton. NY

Burton, John W. and Frank Dukes.(1990). *Conflict: Readings in Management and Resolution*. St. Martin's Press. NY