
UNIT 3 PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

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3.0 INTRODUCTION

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.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

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 Anlyse 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

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.

3.3 TYPES OF PREJUDICE

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, Negros 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.

3.5 DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

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 outplaced local people in patty 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 of 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 groups.

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.

3.7 METHODS OF REDUCING PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

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

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.

3.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 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?

3.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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.