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School of Social Sciences

BPCC - 107 SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY





SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

**School of Social Sciences
Indira Gandhi National Open University**

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BLOCK 1
INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL
PSYCHOLOGY



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BLOCK 1 INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Introduction

This block comprises of two units. *The first unit* deals with definition, nature and scope of Social Psychology. It also deals with the assumptions of social psychology and tries to explain the context of social psychology in India.

The *second unit* highlights the relationship of social psychology with other disciplines. The unit also describes the historical background of social psychology. It discusses the levels of analysis of social behaviour and various theoretical approaches of social psychology.



UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY*

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Definition, Nature and Scope of Social Psychology
 - 1.2.1 Definition of Social Psychology
 - 1.2.2 Nature of Social Psychology
 - 1.2.2.1 Social Psychology Applies Scientific Methods of Study
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 - 1.2.3 Scope of Social Psychology
- 1.3 Historical Development of Social Psychology
 - 1.3.1 Early Years of Social Psychology
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 - 1.3.3 Expansion of Social Psychology
 - 1.3.4 Social Psychology in 21st Century
 - 1.3.5 Social Psychology in India
- 1.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.5 Unit End Questions
- 1.6 Glossary
- 1.7 Answers to Self Assessment Questions
- 1.8 Suggested Readings and References

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Define social psychology;
- Explain the nature and scope of social psychology;
- Describe the historical background of social psychology; and
- Illustrate the development of social psychology with reference to India.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Let us ponder upon some situations, events, issues and people. While going for a job interview we dress up individually; but when we reach the interview venue we find that all the candidates are dressed up in almost similar fashion. In another situation, after the *Nirbhaya* incidence in Delhi on 16 December 2012, thousands of people flooded on the roads of Delhi and other parts of the country protesting against the incidence. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela, Dalai Lama and many others like them influenced thoughts, feelings and behaviours of the masses in a great manner and led the people's thought toward remarkable social, religious, political and ethical revolutions.

* Dr. Ari Sudan Tiwari, Scientist 'E' Defence Institute of Psychological Research, Ministry of Defence, Lucknow Road, Timarpur, Delhi

These are few examples from the history of human being where either we are influenced by other people or we influence other people's behaviours. Social psychology is the branch of psychology which studies human behaviour in an array of social situations. The present unit will help you to understand the definition, scope and nature of psychology. Further, in this unit, you will be acquainted with the historical background and social psychology with reference to Indian context.

1.2 DEFINITION, NATURE AND SCOPE OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Social psychology is an important branch of psychology which studies human interaction, its manifestations, causes, consequences and the various psychological processes involved in it.

1.2.1 Definition of Social Psychology

Social psychology is defined as the scientific study of “*how we feel about, think about and behave toward the people around us and how our feelings, thoughts, and behaviours are influenced by those people in the social context*” (Kassin, Fein, & Markus, 2017). In a slightly different expression social psychology is defined as a *discipline that uses scientific methods in an attempt to understand and explain how the thought, feeling and behaviour of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of others* (Gordon Allport, 1985, p. 3).

1.2.2 Nature of Social Psychology

Careful explanation of definitions given above reveals that it has three major components that characterise the nature of social psychology. These characteristics have been further elaborated below:

1.2.2.1 Social Psychology Applies Scientific Methods of Study

Social psychology is scientific in nature. It applies the scientific method of systematic observation, description and measurement to the study of the human behaviour in social context. Social psychological studies refer to the data being collected through direct observation or experiment. Such experiments and observation are carried out carefully and reported in detail so that other investigators can repeat and verify the work.

The scientific social psychology carries out three major activities: description, explanation and prediction of social behaviours. Social psychology provides a scientific account of social behaviour based on direct observation rather than on common beliefs. Social psychology also attempts to explain why people behave in a particular way in a particular social situation. Such interconnected explanations of social behaviours lead to formation of theories which help in predicting social behaviours and managing them in a desirable direction.

1.2.2.2 Social Psychology Studies Individuals' Thought, Feeling and Behaviour

The varied issues of the field of social psychology include— individuals' thought, feeling and behaviour. Cognition is referred as the manner in which people process information. Social psychology studies cognition that relates to social activities and that helps us in understanding and predicting our social behaviours. Social psychology also studies the feelings we experience as an individual in our social lives. What we think or feel in the social context is finally expressed through our behaviours in social interactions. Social psychology studies these behaviours in the forms of cooperation, helping behaviour, conflict, aggression, etc.

1.2.2.3 Social Psychology Studies Individuals' Behaviour in Social Contexts

Social psychology studies individuals' thoughts, feelings and behaviours in the social contexts. This component of social psychology refers that our behaviour is influenced by the presence of other people and we also influence other people's behaviour. The social context referred to in the definition of social psychology does not have to be real or present. Even the implied or imagined presence of others can have important effects on individuals (Gordon Allport, 1985). However, in order to establish general principles of human social behaviour, social psychologists sometimes examine non-social factors also. Kurt Lewin (1936), one of the important early figures in social psychology proposed a model for understanding social behaviour, which says that social behaviour is a function of the interaction of the situation and the individual's characteristics (see box for detail).

BOX 1.1: KURT LEWIN'S CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY: A MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Kurt Lewin (9th September, 1890-12th February, 1947) was a German-American psychologist and is often recognized as the “founder of social psychology”. Social psychologists are interested in the forces that operate on individuals and cause them to engage in specific examples of social behaviour. But social behaviour is typically complex and has many contributing causes. Consequently, explaining social behaviour is a difficult task. To simplify this task, we can assign the multiple causes of social behaviour to one of two broad categories: the situation and the individual. According to a formula first proposed by Kurt Lewin (1936), social behaviour is a function of the interaction of the situation and the individual's characteristics, or $B = f(P, E)$

This suggest that the behaviour is the product of an individual and her/his environment.

1.2.3 Scope of Social Psychology

Social psychology concentrates on the individual behaviour in the social context, so the subject matter of social psychology is the interactions of the individual with other individuals and society as well. It is the social world, based upon the relations of human to their fellow beings which furnishes the subject matter of

social psychology. The scope of social psychology can be broadly outlined in the following ways:

- People generally express feelings of approval and disapproval, favourability and unfavourability, or likes and dislikes towards different persons, objects or issues that further influence their thought and actions. This phenomenon is termed as attitudes and social psychologists have been emphasizing upon various aspects of attitude, such as formation of attitude, attitude structure, attitude change, function of attitudes and relationship between attitudes and behaviour.
- One of the emerging areas of social psychology is social cognition, which studies the ways people perceive, ponder and remember information related to social stimuli. Various phenomena studied under social cognition are person perception, attribution process, schema, stereotypes, etc.
- Social influence is a traditional, core area of study in social psychology which refers to the way people affect the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of others.
- Social psychologists are also interested in the question of why people sometimes act in a pro-social way (helping, liking or loving others), but at other times act in an antisocial way (hostility, aggression or prejudice against others).
- Social psychologists have vastly studied various phenomena related to social groups and group dynamics. Groups may be understood in terms of group composition, group structures, group process and the effect this has on individual change and group development, as well as on task performance. Thus, a social psychologist studies almost everything that we do every day in the social context (see box below for detail).

Box 1.2: CONTRIBUTIONS OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

WHAT DO SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGISTS STUDY?

- Social psychologists study why we are often helpful to other people and why we may be unfriendly or aggressive at other times.
- Social psychologists study both the benefits of having good relationships with other people and the costs of being lonely.
- Social psychologists study what factors lead people to purchase one product rather than another.
- Social psychologists study how men and women behave differently in social settings.
- Social psychologists study what makes some people more likely to engage in environmentally friendly behaviours than others.
- Social psychologists study how someone might choose to risk their life to save that of a complete stranger.

1) Define social psychology.

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2) How can you say that social psychology is a science?

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3) Describe the nature of social psychology.

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4) Give an account of scope of social psychology.

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1.3 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Although philosophical analysis of human behaviour in society has always been a major issue of interest for the social thinkers, a systematic empirical approach to the study of social psychology did not appear until the latter part of the nineteenth century. History of social psychology can be outlined in following developmental stages:

1.3.1 Early Years of Social Psychology

The earliest roots of social psychology are thought to be a group of German scholars who were influenced by the philosopher Hegel. In 1860, Steinthal and Lazarus founded a journal devoted to this *Völkerpsychologie* that published theoretical and factual articles on the study of the collective mind. This concept of collective mind was interpreted in conflicting ways: on the one hand a societal way of thinking within the individual and on the other a form of trans-individual mentality that could encompass a whole group of people.

The two earliest textbooks on social psychology were written by the psychologist-William McDougall (1908) in Britain and the sociologist- Ross (1908) in America. However, none of these textbooks were like a modern social psychology textbook and their main topics were principal instincts, primary emotions, nature of sentiments, moral conduct, volition, religious conceptions and structure of character.

At the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century social psychology started to systematically measure the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of human beings. A number of laboratories were set up in Europe and United States which started with a psychological laboratory at Leipzig in 1879 set up by Willem Wundt to provide an experimental basis for psychology in Germany. Meantime, the behaviourist John Watson published his classic scientific manifesto for psychology in 1913.

In 1924, inspired by Watson, Floyd Allport published an agenda for social psychology. Building on Watson, Allport argued that social psychology would flourish only if it became an experimental science. Shortly after, Gardner Murphy and Lois Murphy (1931/1937) felt justified in producing a book actually entitled *Experimental Social Psychology*. First experiment in social psychology is often identified as Norman Triplett's (1898) study of how people can put more effort into a task when other people are present as observers or competitors.

1.3.2 Formational Years of Social Psychology

During the 1940s and 1950s, Kurt Lewin and Leon Festinger argued for a scientifically rigorous social psychology. Lewin, known as “the father of social psychology”, developed many of the important ideas of the discipline, including a focus on the dynamic interactions among people. In 1954, Festinger edited a book called *Research Methods in the Behavioral Sciences*, which stressed the need of scientific measurement and to use laboratory experiments to systematically test research hypotheses about social behaviour. He also noted that for factual results in these experiments the participants may be kept blind about the purpose of the research.

During the time of World War II, the studies on conformity were conducted by Muzafir Sherif (1936) and Solomon Asch (1952). Studies on obedience were conducted by Stanley Milgram (1974) and Philip Zimbardo (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973).

1.3.3 Expansion of Social Psychology

Social psychology further expanded on other topics. John Darley and Bibb Latané (1968) developed a model to explain the context when people do and do not help others in need. Leonard Berkowitz (1962) started the study of human aggression.

Many other social psychologists focused on the process of decision making in group (Janis, 1972). Still other social psychologists, including Gordon Allport and Muzafir Sherif, focused on intergroup relations with the goal of understanding and potentially reducing the occurrence of stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination.

In late 20th century social psychology expanded into the field of attitudes and significance of cognitive processes in attitudes. Social psychologists also started studying the process of persuasion by which advertisers and other people could present their messages to make them most effective and persuasive (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1963). They focused on the cognitive processes that people use when evaluating messages. Relationship between attitudes and behaviour was also an important aspect which was extensively studied during this period. Leon Festinger's important cognitive dissonance theory was developed during this time and became a model for later researches (Festinger, 1957).

In late 20th century, due to advances in information technology focus of social psychology on cognitive process was further substantiated (Fiske & Taylor, 2008). The social cognition approach has been focused on understanding of how our knowledge about our social worlds develops and how it influences our social thinking and behaviours. Further more, the extent to which humans' decision making could be flawed due to both cognitive and motivational processes that were documented (Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982).

1.3.4 Social Psychology in 21st Century

Social psychology has been still expanding into varied areas of social behaviour. Social psychologists have studied impact of social situations on our health and happiness, important roles of evolutionary experiences and cultures on our behaviour. The field of social neuroscience has also emerged, which studies that how our social behaviour, both influences and is influenced by the activities of our brain (Lieberman, 2010). Social psychologists are consistently searching new methods to measure and understand social behaviour and the field continues to evolve.

1.3.5 Social Psychology in India

In 1928, first book on social psychology in India, entitled– *Introduction to Social Psychology* was written by Narendra Nath Sengupta, the first chairman of first department of psychology at the Calcutta University, in association with an eminent sociologist Radhakamal Mukherjee. However, this initial association between social psychology and sociology could not continue and Indian social psychologists, in effect of western research orientations, put out all efforts to establish the identity of psychology as a scientific discipline. Jamuna Prasad, inspired by Bartlett's (1932) reconstructive memory of events, studied the famous earthquake in Bihar in 1934 and collected and analyzed more than 35 thousand rumours and published this work in the British Journal of Psychology in 1935. This, and the later work of Durganand Sinha (1952) on similar lines, was reported by Festinger as the basis of formulating his theory of cognitive dissonance.

In the later years, Indian social psychologists continued working in the areas of prejudice, stereotypes and social attitudes. Large scale surveys were conducted taking various attitude measures. Adinarayan conducted studies on racial and

communal attitudes (1953) and on caste attitudes (1958). With increasing emphasis on public awareness programmes for health, family planning, agricultural innovations, attitude change became a major topic of research. During these years social psychology was growing in popularity in India as evident from surveys conducted from time to time.

Social psychologists further explored the areas of intergroup relations (Singh, 1981), relative deprivation (Misra, 1982), ingratiation (Pandey, 1986) and leadership (J.B.P. Sinha, 1980) in which influence of social groups on individual behaviour was investigated. More recently, the interest is shifting to study ethnic identities, the rise of depressed classes and related topics. In much of this research, efforts are being made to establish causal linkages between macro-level variables (demographic, social or cultural) and micro-level variables (attitudes, feeling of deprivation, etc.). The approach and methodology remained consistent with individual social psychology of the American variety. Another area which persisted in popularity for long was achievement motivation. A large number of scales were constructed to measure achievement motivation of school and college students. In recent years the work of Ashish Nandy on self, science, nationality and Sudhir Kakar's work on identity and relationships have been somehow indigenous and not directly influenced by what and how of social psychology in America and Europe (see Dalal & Mishra, 2001).

Self Assessment Question II

State whether the following are 'True' or 'False':

- 1) The earliest textbooks on social psychology was written by the psychologist William Mc Dougal in Britain.
- 2) The behaviorist John Watson published his classic scientific manifesto for psychology in 1913.
- 3) Lewin, Known as the father of social psychology.....
- 4) Narendra Nath sengupta was the first chairman of the first department of psychology at the mumbai University.

1.4 LET US SUM UP

It can be summed up from the above discussion that social psychology is a field which analyses our thoughts, feelings and behaviour toward the people around us. It also explains how others have an influence on our behaviour in the social context. Thus, social psychology concentrates on studying the interactions of individuals with other individuals and society. Foundation of social psychology as specific branch of psychology can be traced back to early 20th century. However, the major expansion in the scope of social psychology took place in later half of 20th century. Indigenous studies in social psychology in India have been majorly focused on self and culture, nationality and identity, etc. Although social psychology is closely related with other discipline of social sciences, as well as other branches of psychology; it differs from them in approach.

Social psychologists investigate human social behaviour at various levels. Primarily, these levels are intrapersonal social behaviours, interactions between individuals, interactions between individual and group and interactions between group and group.

1.5 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Define social psychology and explain the nature and scope of social psychology.
- 2) Present an account of historical development of social psychology.

1.6 GLOSSARY

Social Psychology: Social psychology is defined as the scientific study of how we feel about, think about and behave toward the people around us and how our feelings, thoughts, and behaviours are influenced by those people in the social context.

Social Neuroscience: Social neuroscience is the study of how our social behaviour both influences and is influenced by the activities of our brain.

Classical Conditioning: Classical conditioning presumes that when a neutral stimulus (conditioned stimulus, CS) is paired with a natural stimulus (unconditioned stimulus, UCS), neutral stimulus alone acquires the ability to elicit the response (conditioned response, CR) which naturally occurs (unconditioned response, UCR) after natural stimulus.

Reinforcement: Reinforcement is the mechanism by which people learn to perform a particular behaviour because it is followed by something that is pleasurable or that satisfies a need (or they learn to avoid behaviour that is followed by unpleasant consequences).

Observational Learning: Observational learning presumes that people often learn social attitudes and behaviours simply by watching other people, known technically as “models”.

Social Exchange Theory: Social exchange theory uses the concept of reinforcement to explain stability and change in social interactions and relations between individuals.

Social Cognitive Theories: Social cognitive theories emphasise that a person’s behaviour depends on the way he or she perceives the social situation.

Schema: Schema is a mental representation capturing the general characteristics of a particular class of episodes, events or individuals.

Principle of Cognitive Consistency: Principle of cognitive consistency maintains that individuals strive to hold ideas that are consistent or congruous with one another, rather than ideas that are inconsistent or incongruous.

1.7 ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS (SAQ)

Self Assessment Question I

- 1) Social psychology is defined as the scientific study of “*how we feel about, think about and behave toward the people around us and how our feelings, thoughts, and behaviours are influenced by those people in the social context*” (Kassin, Fein, & Markus, 2017).

- 2) Social psychology is scientific in nature. It applies the scientific method of systematic observation, description and measurement to the study of the human behaviour in social context. Social psychological studies refer to the data being collected through direct observation or experiment. Such experiments and observation are carried out carefully and reported in detail so that other investigators can repeat and verify the work.
- 3) The following three major components characterise the nature of social psychology:
 - Social psychology applies scientific methods of study.
 - Social psychology studies individuals' thought, feeling and behaviour.
 - Social psychology studies individuals' behaviour in social contexts.
- 4) The scope of social psychology can be broadly outlined in the following ways:
 - Social psychologists emphasize upon various aspects of attitude
 - Social psychology also deals with social cognition.
 - Social influence is a traditional, core area of study in social psychology.
 - Social psychologists are also interested in the question of why people sometimes act in a pro-social way but at other times act in an antisocial way.

Self Assessment Question II

- 1) True
- 2) True
- 3) True
- 4) False

1.8 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 2 THEORIES OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY*

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
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2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Illustrate the levels of analysis of social behaviour;
- Explain the relationship of social psychology with other disciplines;
- Delineate various theoretical approaches of social psychology;
- Discuss the different types of research methods in social psychology; and
- Elucidate the various ethical issues of research methods.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

It must be clear to you from the previous unit that, social psychology is the branch of psychology which studies human behaviour in an array of social situations. In this unit, you will be explained about the Social psychology as branch of psychology, its nature, scope and relationship with other disciplines. You will also be acquainted with the historical background and various theoretical

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approaches to social psychology. The unit will also discuss the levels of analysis of social behaviour.

2.2 SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND OTHER DISCIPLINES

Social psychology is related to other social sciences and to other branches of psychology. It also differs from them in important ways.

Social psychology is related to other disciplines in the family of social sciences and to other branches of psychology in many ways. It also differs from them in important ways.

2.2.1 Social Psychology and Other Social Sciences

Social scientists study people and the societies in which people live. They are interested in how people relate to one another. The various social sciences focus on different aspects of social life.

- **Social Psychology and Anthropology**

Anthropology is the study of human culture. The field of anthropology and social psychology are inter related. Human culture consists of the shared values, beliefs, and practices of a group of people. These values, beliefs, and practices are passed down from one generation to another. Human beings are not only social animals, they are also cultural animals. In order to understand human behaviour, social psychology requires to understand the cultural context in which that behaviour occurs.

- **Social Psychology and Economics**

You might know that the field of Economics deals with the trends of production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services of a particular society. This equally diverts the interest of social psychologists. In fact, some social psychological theories are based on economic principles. For example, social exchange theory predicts commitment to relationships by considering factors such as the costs, rewards, investments, and the number of alternatives available. Economics also calls our attention to large social systems (such as the labour market or money system) and to how these systems shape behaviour. Again, a full understanding of human behaviour requires appreciating not just what goes on inside one person's head and what is happening in his or her immediate environment at the time, but also how the person's behaviour fits into the larger social system.

- **Social Psychology and Political Science**

Political science is the study of political organizations and institutions, especially governments. Social psychologists conduct research on political behaviour. They study political issues such as voting, party identification, liberal versus conservative views, and political advertising. They are also interested in what makes some people better leaders than others.

- **Social Psychology and Sociology**

Sociology is the study of human societies and the groups that form those societies. Although both sociologists and social psychologists are interested in how people behave in societies and groups, they differ in what they focus on. Sociologists focus on the group as a single unit, whereas social psychologists focus on the individual members that make up the group. Some sociologists call themselves social psychologists and the exchange of ideas and findings between the two fields that have sometimes been quite fruitful because they bring different perspectives to the same problems.

2.2.2 Social Psychology and Other Branches in Psychology

Psychology is the study of human behaviour. Psychology is like a big tree that contains many branches. Social psychology is just one of those branches, but it is closely related with some of the other branches.

- **Social Psychology and Biological Psychology**

Everything that people think, do or feel involves some bodily processes such as brain activity or hormones. Biological or physiological psychology and more recently neuroscience have focused on learning about what happens in the brain, nervous system and other aspects of the body. Until recently, this work had little contact with social psychology, but during the 1990s many social psychologists began looking into the biological aspects of social behaviour and that interest has continued into the 21st century. Social neuroscience and social psychophysiology are now the thriving fields.

- **Social Psychology and Clinical Psychology**

Clinical psychology focuses on abnormal behaviour, whereas social psychology focuses on normal behaviour. Social psychological theory can shed a great deal of light on so called normal behaviour. Both the branches, social and clinical psychology, have had a long tradition of exchanging ideas and stimulating insights into each other's fields. In particular, clinical psychologists have made good use of social psychological theories.

- **Social Psychology and Cognitive Psychology**

Cognitive psychology is the basic study of thought processes, such as how memory works and what events people notice. In recent decades, social psychology has borrowed heavily from cognitive psychology, especially by using their methods for measuring cognitive processes. Social psychologists study that how people think about their social lives, how they think about other people or solve the problems in their social world.

- **Social Psychology and Developmental Psychology**

Developmental psychology is the study of how people change across their lives, from conception and birth to old age and death. In practice, most developmental psychologists study children. Developmental psychology has been studying that at what age children begin to show various patterns of social behaviour. Social psychologists interested in self-regulation, emotion, gender differences, helping behaviour and antisocial behaviour sometimes look to the research on child development to see how these patterns get started.

- **Social Psychology and Personality Psychology**

Personality psychology focuses on important differences between individuals, as well as inner processes. For example, some people are introverted and avoid social contact, whereas other people are extraverted and look for social contact. Social and personality psychology have had a long and close relationship. This relationship has been sometimes complementary (personality psychologists look inside the person, whereas social psychologists look outside at the situation) and sometimes competitive (is it more important to understand the person or the situation?). In recent years, the line between these two fields has become overlapping, as social psychologists have come to recognize the importance of inner processes and personality psychologists have come to recognize the importance of circumstances and situations.

Self Assessment Questions I

State whether the following are ‘True’ or ‘False’:

- 1) Social psychologists study that how people think about their social lives.
.....
- 2) The social cognition approach do not focus upon understanding of our knowledgetowards social world, thinking and behaviours.
.....
- 3) None of the social psychological theories are based on economic principles.
.....
- 4) Both sociologists and social psychologists are interested in how people behave in societies and groups, they differ in what they focus on.
.....

2.3 LEVELS OF ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Social psychologists investigate human behaviour but their primary concern is human behaviour in a social context. Further, social psychology analyses human social behaviour at various levels, presented below:

2.3.1 Individual-Intrapersonal Level Analysis

Individuals involved are fundamental constituents in any social interaction. As conceptualised in psychology, every individual is unique in his or her biological inheritance, thought process, affect and behaviour. Therefore, the basic level analysis of social behaviour is individual-intrapersonal where the aspects like social cognition, values and attitudes, social deviance and violent behaviours are studies.

2.3.2 Interpersonal Interactions

Individuals are affected by others in many ways. In everyday life, communication from others may significantly influence a person’s understanding of the social world. Attempts by others at persuasion may change an individual’s beliefs about the world and his or her attitudes toward persons, groups or other objects. Social

psychologists also study many other interpersonal activities like cooperation and competition, altruism and aggression, prejudice and discrimination, etc.

2.3.3 Interaction between Individual and Group

Social psychology further analyses the impact of a group on the behaviours of its individual members. Every individual belongs to many different groups and these groups influence and regulate the behaviours of their members, typically by establishing norms or rules. One result of this is conformity, the process by which a group member adjusts his or her behaviour to bring it into line with group norms. Groups also exert substantial longterm influence on their members through socialization, a process that enables groups to regulate what their members learn. Socialization assumes that the members will be adequately trained to play roles in the group and in the larger society. Significant outcomes of socialization are acquiring language skills, forming political and religious beliefs and attitudes and our conception of self.

Just as any group influences the behaviour of its members, these members, in turn, may influence the group itself. For instance, individuals contribute to group productivity and group decision making. Moreover, some members may provide leadership, performing functions such as planning, organizing, and controlling, necessary for successful group performance. Without effective leadership, coordination among members will falter and the group will drift or fail.

2.3.4 Interaction between Groups

Another concern of social psychology is the impact of one group on the activities and structure of another group. Relations between two groups may be friendly or hostile, cooperative or competitive. These relationships, which are based in part on members' identities and may entail group stereotypes, can affect the structure and activities of each group. Intergroup conflict, with its accompanying tension and hostility, has been a core area of study in social psychology. Conflicts of this type affect the interpersonal relations between groups and within each group. Social psychologists have long studied the emergence, persistence and resolution of intergroup conflict.

2.4 THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Theory is a set of interrelated propositions that organizes and explains a set of observed phenomena. In social psychology, no single theory explains all phenomena of interest; rather, it includes many different theories. Various theoretical perspectives of social psychology offer general explanations for a wide array of social behaviours in a variety of situations. The fundamental value of any theoretical perspective lies in its applicability across many situations. It provides a frame of reference for interpreting and comparing a wide range of social situation and behaviour. There are two major theoretical approaches in social psychology: *learning theories and cognitive theories*.

2.4.1 Learning Theories

The central idea in learning theory is that a person's current behaviour is determined by his/her prior experience. In any given situation, a person learns

certain behaviours that, over time, may become habits. When presented with a similar situation, the person tends to behave in the same habitual way. For example, when a traffic light turns red, we typically stop, because that is how we have learned to respond in the past. As applied to social behaviour by Albert Bandura (1977) and others, this approach has been called social learning theory.

There are three general mechanisms by which learning occurs. *One* is association, or classical conditioning. Classical Conditioning presumes that when a neutral stimulus (conditioned stimulus, CS) is paired with a natural stimulus (unconditioned stimulus, UCS), neutral stimulus alone acquires the ability to elicit the response (conditioned response, CR) which naturally occurs (unconditioned response, UCR) after natural stimulus. Pavlov's dogs learned to salivate at the sound of a bell because they were presented with food every time. After a while, they would salivate to the sound of the bell even in the absence of the meat because they associated the bell with meat. Humans sometimes learn emotions by association (Pavlov, 1927). After a particularly painful visit to a particular place, the mere mention of the place may arouse anxiety.

A *second* learning mechanism is reinforcement, a principle studied by B. F. Skinner (1938) and others. People learn to perform a particular behaviour because it is followed by something that is pleasurable or that satisfies a need (or they learn to avoid behaviour that is followed by unpleasant consequences). A child may learn to help other people because his or her parents praise for sharing toys and smile approvingly when he or she offers to help. Or a student may learn not to contradict his teacher in class because each time he does so, the teacher frowns, looks angry and scolds him.

A *third* mechanism is observational learning. People often learn social attitudes and behaviours simply by watching other people, known technically as "models". Children learn regional and ethnic speech patterns by listening to the speakers around them. Adolescents may acquire their political attitudes by listening to their parents' conversations during election campaigns. In observational learning, other people are an important source of information. Observational learning can occur without any external reinforcement. However, whether people actually perform a behaviour that is learned through observation is influenced by the consequences of the action. For example, a little boy may learn a lot about baby dolls from watching his sisters but may be discouraged from playing with them himself because his traditional parents say, "Dolls aren't for boys". Imitation or modelling occurs when a person not only observes but actually copies the behaviour of a model. The learning approach seeks the causes of behaviour in the past learning history of the individual.

Another important process based on the principle of reinforcement is social exchange. Social exchange theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) uses the concept of reinforcement to explain stability and change in relations between individuals. This theory assumes that individuals have freedom of choice and often face social situations in which they must choose among alternative actions. Any action provides some rewards and entails some costs. There are many kinds of socially mediated rewards, such as money, goods, services, prestige or status, approval by others, etc. The theory presumes that individuals are hedonistic and they try to maximize rewards and minimize costs. Consequently, they choose actions that produce good profits and avoid actions that produce poor profits. Thus, social exchange theory primarily views social interactions as exchanges of goods and

services among persons. If they find that a particular interaction is providing profitable outcomes, they happily participate in the relationship. Furthermore, the attractiveness of a relationship is compared on the basis of the profits it provides against the profits available in other alternative relationships. If a person is participating in a social relationship and receiving certain outcomes, the level of outcomes available in the best alternative relationship is termed that person's comparison level for alternatives. Concepts of this type apply not only to work relations but also to personal relations. People are more likely to stay with a social relationship when the rewards are high, the costs are low, and the alternatives are unpromising.

Despite its usefulness in illuminating why relationships change and how people learn, learning theories have been criticized on various grounds. *One criticism* is that learning theories portrays individuals primarily as reacting to or imitating environmental stimuli. The theory does not account easily for creativity, innovation, or invention. *A second criticism* is that reinforcement theory largely ignores or downplays other motivations. It characterizes social behaviour as hedonistic, with individuals striving to maximize profits from outcomes. Thus, it cannot easily explain selfless behaviour such as altruism and martyrdom. Despite its limitations, reinforcement theory has enjoyed substantial success in explaining why individuals persist in emitting certain behaviours, how they learn new behaviours and how they influence the behaviour of others through exchange.

2.4.2 Cognitive Theories

Another theoretical perspective in social psychology is cognitive theory. Cognitive theory presumes that the mental activities of the individual are important determinants of social behaviour. These mental activities are called *cognitive processes* which include perception, memory, judgment, problem solving and decision making. Cognitive theory does not deny the importance of external stimuli, but it maintains that the link between stimulus and response is not mechanical or automatic. Rather, the individual's cognitive processes intervene between external stimuli and behavioural responses. Individuals not only actively interpret the meaning of stimuli but also select the actions to be made in response.

Historically, the cognitive approach to social psychology has been influenced by the ideas of Koffka, Kohler and other theorists in the Gestalt movement of psychology. Central to Gestalt psychology is the principle that people respond to configurations of stimuli rather than to a single, discrete stimulus. In other words, people understand the meaning of a stimulus only by viewing it in the context of an entire system of elements (the gestalt) in which it is embedded. To comprehend the meaning of any element, we must look at the whole of which it is a part.

Modern cognitive theorists depict humans as active in selecting and interpreting stimuli. According to this view, people do more than merely reacting to their environment; they actively structure their world cognitively. Firstly, because they cannot possibly attend to all the complex stimuli that surround them, they select only those stimuli that are important or useful to them and ignore the others. Second, they actively control which categories or concepts they use to interpret the stimuli in the environment.

Central to the cognitive perspective is the concept of cognitive structure, which refers broadly to any form of organization among cognitions, concepts and beliefs.

Because a person's cognitions are interrelated, cognitive theory gives special emphasis to exactly how they are structured and organized in memory and to how they affect a person's judgments.

Social psychologists have proposed that individuals use specific cognitive structures called *schemata* to make sense of complex information about other persons, groups and situations. The term *schema* refers to the form or basic sketch of what we know about people and things. Whenever we encounter a person for the first time, we usually form an impression of what he or she is like. In doing this, we not only observe the person's behaviour but also rely on our knowledge of similar persons we have met in the past; that is, we use our schema regarding this type of person. Schemas help us process information by enabling us to recognize which personal characteristics are important in the interaction and which are not. They structure and organize information about the person, and they help us remember information better and process it more quickly. Sometimes they fill gaps in knowledge and enable us to make inferences and judgments about others.

One way to study cognitive structure is to observe changes that occur in a person's cognitions when he or she is under challenge or attack. The changes will reveal facts about the underlying structure or organization of his or her cognitions. An important idea emerging from this approach is the principle of cognitive consistency which maintains that individuals strive to hold ideas that are consistent or congruous with one another, rather than ideas that are inconsistent or incongruous. If a person holds several ideas that are incongruous or inconsistent, he or she will experience internal conflict. In reaction, he or she will likely change one or more ideas, thereby making them consistent and resolving this conflict.

Cognitive theory has made many important contributions to social psychology. It treats such diverse phenomena as self-concept, perception of persons and attribution of causes, attitude change, impression management, and group stereotypes. In these contexts, cognitive theory has produced many insights and striking predictions regarding individual and social behaviour. One limitation of cognitive theory is that it simplifies, and sometimes oversimplifies, the way in which people process information, an inherently complex phenomenon. Another limitation is that cognitive phenomena are not directly observable; they must be inferred from what people say and do. This means that compelling and definitive tests of theoretical predictions from cognitive theory are sometimes difficult to conduct. However, the cognitive perspective is among the more popular and productive approaches in social psychology.

2.5 RESEARCH METHODS IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Every scientific investigation begins with a question. The question can be dictated by a practical problem or grow out of theoretical interest. The difference between theoretical and applied research is not a qualitative one but rather a matter of degree (Feldman, 1985: 21). Pure theoretical work in social psychology is aimed at the building of a basic body of knowledge and facts about the social world. While applied research is meant to provide immediate solutions to immediate problems. But both researches have relevance for each other. Results of even the most applied studies are invariably used not only for their immediate applications

to the problem at hand but also for their implication for theory. On the other hand, theories are able to suggest new approaches and strategies for dealing with the problems of society. But there is a difference of methods in theoretical and applied research. Theoretical studies are mostly conducted in laboratories using experiment and applied researches are based on natural field settings. But the goal for both of them is same, “building knowledge, a concern regarding the quality of life and an interest in how knowledge of social psychology is ultimately utilised” (Feldman).

While the paths to these goals may differ, depending on the orientation of a particular social psychologist, the interaction between theory and research is well recognised today. “Many psychologists working in an applied field are keenly aware of the need for close cooperation between theoretical and applied psychology. This can be accomplished in psychology.....if the theorist does not look toward applied problems with high brow aversion or with a fear of social problems, and if the applied psychologist realizes that there is nothing so practical as a good theory” (Lewin, 1951: 169).

Our discussion will be limited to following research methods:

2.5.1 Observational Method

Observation is the old method of social psychology. Many writers have used different terms and categories for this method like method of systematic observation (Morgan and King), direct observation (Hilgard and Atkinson) and Feldman has included it in field study. Observation is to simply observe the phenomena under study as it occur naturally (Hilgard and Atkinson, 2003: 21) This method plays a very important role in the collection of data on overt behaviour and the actions of individuals. The main problem involved in the application of this method include, what to observe? How to fixate the observations? How to structure observation? What should be the units of observation in social psychological research, and the definite interval of time for observation? This method proceeds in following two stages:

- *Describing behaviour:* This methods starts with the observation of behaviours in natural setting that is relevant for the research. The observation may be based on the questions like what do people do? Can various behaviours be classified in systematic ways? How do people differ in their behaviours?
- *From description to causes:* The method of systematic observation tells us what do people do and how they differ in their behaviours. It may also be used to find out what caused the observed behaviours. But one should to be cautious in inferring causes from observation as;

A behaviour may have many causes:

The fact that an event comes before another event do not show that the first event is the cause of the latter one.

To establish likely causes of even simple behaviour, a number of observations would be required.

For more complex behaviours, establishing likely cause is much more difficult. Thus to find out the course of a particular behaviours, we must look carefully at the result of many observations, noting the effects of a particular factor.

Observational method can be relatively informal and unstructured or it can be formal and structured. But the object in each case is the same, “to abstract information from the complex flux of social behaviours that are of potential significance to the research questions; and to record each instance of such actions over some period” (Manstead A.S. R. Semin G.R., 2001: 97). The nature of research setting or topic dictates that observation is conducted in a relatively informal and unstructured manner with the researcher posing as a member of the group being observed. A Classical example of research employing this method is Festinger, Riecken and Schachter’s (1956) study of the consequences of blatant disconfirmation of strongly held beliefs. The investigators identified a religious sect which predicted that the northern hemisphere would be destroyed by flood on a certain date. By joining that sect, members of the research team were able to observe what happened when the predicted events failed to materialise?

This is called *participant observation*. In such observation researcher participate in the ongoing activities of the people being observed. Formal methods of observation can be used when it is possible to record actions relevant to the research question without disturbing the occurrence of behaviour. In *non-participant observation* observers record people’s behaviour but do not actually participate in their activities. The most formal type of observational methods is one in which the researcher uses a predetermined category system for scoring social behaviours.

Observational methods of data collection have two main advantages over the self report methods. They can often be made without disturbing the naturally occurring behaviours. Even where people know that they are being observed, enacting behaviour may be quite engrossing.

Nevertheless, there are some types of behaviours that are either impossible to observe directly (because they took place in the past) or difficult to observe directly (because they are normally enacted in private). Moreover, social psychologists are often interested in measuring people’s perceptions, cognitions or evaluations, none of which can be directly assessed simply through observation. For these self-report measures or other techniques are often used.

2.5.2 Experimental Method

Experimentation has been the dominant research method in social psychology, mainly because it is without equal as a method for testing theories that predict causal relationships between variables. The goal of an experiment is to see what happens to a phenomenon, such as obedience, when the researcher deliberately modifies some features of the environment in which the phenomenon occurs (that is, if variable A is changed, will there be resulting changes in B). We can see the meanings of some basic concepts

Methods of Social Psychology of the experimental research in the table given below:

Table: Terminology in Experimental Research

Experiment	A well controlled test of hypothesis about cause and effect.
Hypothesis	A statement about cause and effect that can be tested.
Variable	Something that can occur with different values and can be measured.
Independent Variable	A variable that represents the hypothesised cause that is precisely controlled by the experimenter and independent of what the participant does.
Dependent Variable	A variable that represents the hypothesised effect whose values ultimately depend on the value of the independent variable.
Experimental Group	A group in which the hypothesised cause is present.
Control Group	A group in which the hypothesised effect is present.
Statistics	Mathematical techniques for determining the certainty with which a sample of data can be used to draw generalisations or inferences
Measurement	A system for assigning numbers to different values of variables.
Random Assignment	A system for assigning participants to experimental and control groups so that each participant has as equal chance of being assigned to any group.

Source: Atkinson & Hilgard et al (2003) Introduction to Psychology 14th edition. Wadsworth Asia Pvt. Ltd.

There are two basic types of experiments in social psychology laboratory and natural laboratory and natural experiments have their particular rules. The laboratory experiment is of particular interest in social psychological discussions.

Social psychologists use some variations. Two of the most common of these variations are the quasi-experiments and the true randomized experiments. These two methods differ with respect to realism of the setting in which data are collected, and the degree of control that the researcher has over that setting.

2.5.2.1 Quasi-experimental Method

Quasi-experiment is conducted in a natural, everyday life setting, over which the researcher has less than complete control. The lack of control over the setting arises from the very fact that it is an everyday life setting. Here the realism of the setting is relatively high, the control relatively low. The true randomized experiment by contrast is one in which the researcher has complete control over key features of the setting. However, this degree of control often involves a loss

of realism. It is sometimes possible to conduct a true randomized experiment in an everyday setting; this is called a field experiment.

2.5.2.2 Experimental Designs

In an experiment, it is important that (1) the experimenter keep all theoretically irrelevant features of the experimental setting constant, manipulating just the key independent variable; and (2) that participants are allocated randomly to the different conditions of an experiment. A true experimental design is known as *Post test only control group design*. In this type of design participants are allocated randomly to one of the two groups. One group is exposed to the independent variable (experimental group) and the other is not (control group). Both groups are assessed on the independent variable and the comparison of the two groups on this measure indicates whether or not the independent variable had an effect.

There are many types of experimental designs used in social psychology, more sophisticated and complex than the above. Each design represents a more complete attempt to rule out the possibility that observed difference between conditions result from something other than the manipulation of independent variable. A common design in social psychological experiment is the *factorial experiment*, in which two or more independent variables are manipulated within the same study. The main benefit of a factorial design is that it allows the researcher to examine the separate and combined effects of two or more independent variables. The separate effects of each of the independent variable are known as main effects. Interaction effect is a term used when combined effects of two (or more) independent variables in a factorial experiment yield a pattern that differs from the sum of the main effects.

2.5.3 Ethical Issues in Research Methods

There are certain ethics which a researcher needs to take care while conducting research. Few of them can be pointed out as follows:

- **Informed Consent:** It is the duty of the researcher to inform the participants about whatever experiment or test will be administered upon them and they can carry upon the research only if the participants give their consent after getting the detailed information.
- **Debrief:** It is a process which is done after the experiment or research has been conducted upon participants. The researcher conducts a structured or semi structured interview and discusses the details of the research as well as gives the participants an opportunity to ask questions from them.
- **Protection of Participants:** The security and safety are the prior concern of a researcher. No personal harm or violation of the rights of the participants should take place.
- **Deception:** The researcher should clearly specify the method, investigation, analysis and interpretation of research. No information or method can be deceived from the participants.
- **Confidentiality:** The personal information and other details of the participants should be kept completely confidential and can not be disclosed, unless it involves any legal issues.

State whether the following are 'True' or 'False':

- 1) The primary concern of social psychologists is to study human behaviour in a social context.
- 2) Social psychology does not examines the impact of a group on the behaviours of its individual members.
- 3) Cognitive theory presumes that the mental activities of the individual are not important determinants of social behaviour.
- 4) The central idea in learning theory is that a person's current behaviour is deter-mined by his/her prior experience.

2.6 LET US SUM UP

It can be summed up from the above discussion that social psychology is a field which analyses our thoughts, feelings and behaviour toward the people around us. It also explains how others have an influence on our behaviour in the social context.

Social psychologists investigate human social behaviour at various levels. Primarily, these levels are intrapersonal social behaviours, interactions between individuals, interactions between individual and group and interactions between group and group. The two major theoretical approaches in social psychology are learning theories and cognitive theories. Learning theories believe that social behaviour is governed by external events. Its central proposition is that people will be more likely to perform a specific behaviour if it is followed by something pleasurable. Likewise, people will more likely refrain from performing a particular behaviour if it is followed by something aversive. The cognitive approach emphasizes that a person's behaviour depends on the way he or she perceives the social situation. Cognitive theories argue that the mental activities called cognitive processes, of the individual are important determinants of social behaviour. These mental activities include perception, memory, judgment, problem solving and decision making.

2.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Explain that how social psychology is related with other disciplines of social sciences and other branches of psychology.
- 2) Elucidate the levels of analysis of social behaviour in social psychology.
- 3) Discuss learning theories as an approach to study social behaviour.
- 4) Discuss cognitive theories as an approach to study social behaviour.

2.8 GLOSSARY

Social Psychology: Social psychology is defined as the scientific study of how we feel about, think about and behave toward the people around us and how our

feelings, thoughts, and behaviours are influenced by those people in the social context.

Social Neuroscience: Social neuroscience is the study of how our social behaviour both influences and is influenced by the activities of our brain.

Classical Conditioning: Classical conditioning presumes that when a neutral stimulus (conditioned stimulus, CS) is paired with a natural stimulus (unconditioned stimulus, UCS), neutral stimulus alone acquires the ability to elicit the response (conditioned response, CR) which naturally occurs (unconditioned response, UCR) after natural stimulus.

Reinforcement: Reinforcement is the mechanism by which people learn to perform a particular behaviour because it is followed by something that is pleasurable or that satisfies a need (or they learn to avoid behaviour that is followed by unpleasant consequences).

Observational Learning: Observational learning presumes that people often learn social attitudes and behaviours simply by watching other people, known technically as “models”.

Social Exchange Theory: Social exchange theory uses the concept of reinforcement to explain stability and change in social interactions and relations between individuals.

Social Cognitive Theories: Social cognitive theories emphasise that a person’s behaviour depends on the way he or she perceives the social situation.

Schema: Schema is a mental representation capturing the general characteristics of a particular class of episodes, events or individuals.

Principle of Cognitive Consistency: Principle of cognitive consistency maintains that individuals strive to hold ideas that are consistent or congruous with one another, rather than ideas that are inconsistent or incongruous.

2.9 ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Self Assessment Question I

- 1) True
- 2) False
- 3) False
- 4) True

Self Assessment Question II

- 1) True
- 2) False
- 3) False
- 4) True

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