

The Lecture Contains:

- ☰ Early developments
- ☰ 1920s and 40s
- ☰ 1940s to 60s
- ☰ 1960s onwards

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Early developments

- Social psychology as a sub-discipline of psychology began to be thought of as a viable academic discipline since the late 19th century.
- Writing on *Volkerpsychologie* (psychology of people) through the study of aspects of collective thinking by Wilhelm Wundt and crowd psychology by Italian and French psychologists (especially Gustav Le Bon) marked the beginning of an interest in the behaviours and the experiences of people in social situations and contexts.
- Triplett's study (1898) on the task of winding fishing reels being performed by children alone and in the presence of others marked one of the first few experiments conducted in the discipline of social psychology.

Early developments (continued...)

- The year 1908: Two books on social psychology: William McDougall on psychological social psychology and E. A. Ross on sociological social psychology.
 - McDougall's approach largely based on the instinct theory focusing on innate characteristics unfolding in social situations
- World War I: with the influence of the World War I, the focus of the social psychologists shifted to concrete observable behaviours through which individual's future behaviour could be predicted. The book, Social Psychology by Floyd Allport in 1924 based on the behaviourist principles.
- 1920s: L. L. Thurstone and his associates developed attitude scales that marked the beginning of the measurement of attitudes as an important research activity within social psychology.



1920s and 40s

- The period of 1920s through 1940s was marked by a momentum created by social psychologists to test hypothesis about human social behaviour which they carried out primarily through experiments:
 - Works by Gestalt-inspired psychologists such as Muzafer Sherif, Kurt Lewin and Solomon Asch saw merit in focusing on the group rather than individuals alone as a unit of analysis (as emphasized in the Gestalt psychology based on the assumption that something as a whole is more than sum of its parts in terms of properties; as an example, in a game of football, individual skills of players may amount to a failure if timing of collective defence and offence is not appropriate).

1920s and 40s (continued...)

- Work on nature and impact of social norms (conformity) by Muzafer Sherif (1935) that was later developed further by Solomon Asch.
- Work on group processes by Kurt Lewin and colleagues (1939): Lewin et al.: The impact of contrasting styles of leadership (autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire) on
 - Time spent working with and without the leader: Work time decreased when the autocratic leader was absent from his group
 - Leader-dependent action: It was maximum in case of the group with autocratic
 - Aggressive demands for attention: It was maximum in case of the group with autocratic leader.

1940s to 60s

- As an impact of the World War II, social psychologists got more oriented towards understanding the impact of group membership on individual behaviour including the prejudice towards the other groups.
- The theory of cognitive dissonance (attitude change) by Leon Festinger became an important one in the light of inducing positive attitude or countering prejudice.
- 1960s: studies on all the mainstream topics (e.g. social influence, interpersonal attraction, attribution, social perception etc.) gained momentum.



1960s onwards

- Following were the major developments in the field of social psychology during the period of 1960s to 90s:

– ‘Crisis’ in social psychology: Several social psychologists became reflexive about the social relevance of the existing theories and paradigms of sciences following in the discipline. They agreed on one of the biggest limitations of social psychology being a gross insensitivity towards and non-incorporation of socio-cultural or historical contexts in which human beings live their lives.

– Rise of European social psychology (with the initiative of social psychologists such as Henri Tajfel and Serge Moscovici) where social psychologists brought in methodological pluralism to explore the impact of context of human life on their experiences and worldview.

– Attribution theory also became a frequently used perspective in understanding social psychological phenomena.

– Critical traditions such as social constructionism by Kenneth Gergen came to the fore in 1960s and 1970s as a response to the crisis in social psychology.



1960s onwards (continued...)

- 2000 onwards :
- Along with an incorporation of multiple paradigms of science and innovation methodologies (at least among some social psychologist who do not blindly follow the tenets of mainstream social psychology), the information process model of human social behaviour continues to gain ground in research in theorizing. Besides, there is an increase in studies that adopt multicultural perspectives.

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The first book on social psychology authored by Indians was published in 1928. The authors were N. N. Sengupta and Radhakamal Mukherjee. Prof. Sengupta was a trained experimental psychologist but he collaborated with Prof. Mukherjee, a sociologist, to study Indian society. Another important contribution to the field of social psychology in the first half of the 20th century was done by Jamuna Prasad who studied rumours associated with an earthquake in Bihar in 1934. His work was published in the British Journal of Psychology. It is important to note that Leon Festinger's idea (that he later developed into a theory of social psychology) of cognitive dissonance as an important process in attitude change was based on Prof. Prasad's and Prof. Durganand Sinha (1952). Currently, in India, social psychology has developed into an important sub-discipline of psychology where multiple paradigms are used to understand and explain human behaviour and experiences in their socio-cultural context.

