

**The Lecture Contains:**

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### Understanding prejudice

- Prejudice is understood as the negative attitude toward the members of a group and this negative attitude is associated with the target person's membership in that group rather than his/her personal characteristics. Thus, prejudice becomes an important concept related to the inter-group relations. In our social lives, it may also provide some insights into the kind of inter-group relations prevailing in a social setting. Let us now try to understand some characteristics of prejudice.

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### **Salient aspects of prejudice**

1. Prejudice serves us the function of a schema or the cognitive frameworks that help us organize, interpret and recall information particularly about the members of a group.
2. An important feature of prejudice is that it involves stereotypes (that is, beliefs about all members of the group). Once again stereotypes help us save cognitive efforts but fuel some often unfounded conclusions about the people of some other group.
3. A prejudiced person often becomes evaluative about the person who are the target of prejudice. The person presents strong negative but often unfounded feelings about the target of prejudice.



### Understanding discrimination

- In social psychology, discrimination is understood the negative behaviours directed toward people who are the object of prejudice. The question that becomes relevant about prejudice is whether it has reduced with time. One may observe that in some form or the other, it still continues. As Baron and Byrne (1997, pp. 198-199) have highlighted the prevalence of what is termed as 'new racism' towards the African American population in the context of the American society. There are several features of 'new racism':
  - Denial: "Discrimination against African Americans is no longer a problem in the US"
  - Antagonism: "African Americans are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights"
  - Resentment about special favour: "Over the past few years, the government and news media have shown more respect to African Americans than they deserve"

### Tokenism and reverse discrimination

- Two other social processes associated with prejudice are 'tokenism' and 'reverse discrimination'.
  - Tokenism: It involves doing small favours to a target of prejudice and then using that subsequently as a justification to deny larger benefits to such a person.
  - Reverse discrimination: This is a tendency to show more favour towards an erstwhile target of prejudice than the members of some other group.

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### Origins of Prejudice: Impact of learning

- Social learning (conditioning and modelling): As noticed in formation of attitudes, learning may play also an important role in the formation of prejudice (which is actually a negative attitude towards another group members). As per the principles of classical conditioning, a neutral stimulus (people of another group) may begin to evoke negative thoughts or attitude when it is associated with an unconditioned stimulus (mother's or father's face showing disgust toward the other group members). According to the principles of operant conditioning, if showing negative behaviour towards a member of another group is rewarded, then the negative attitude towards the other group get formed or strengthened. Also, people tend to have role models who they try to imitate in their thoughts and actions. Thus, if our role models have a negative attitude towards another group, it may have an impact on the our learning of a negative attitude or prejudice towards the other group.



### Origins of prejudice: roles of social categorization and competition

- **Social categorization:** As observed in the social identity theory of inter-group relations, the origin of prejudice lies in the development of in-group positive and out-group negative bias when a simple or trivial categorization distinguishes one group from the other. As noticed earlier, a group member's self-esteem is associated with his/her membership to the group. In order to perceive one's own group to be better than (or in no way inferior than) the other group, people develop out-group negative bias that may be a significant source of prejudice towards the other group.
- **Competition (Direct Inter-group conflict):** As per the realistic conflict theory that we read under the theories of inter-group relations, inter-group conflicts and prejudice towards other groups may occur due a competition over scarce resources (e.g., money, physical space, status or power).



### Origins of prejudice: Cognitive factors

- Role of stereotypes: Stereotypes, which are the beliefs about all the members of a group may be operational in evoking certain negative thoughts and feelings about all the member of the other group. This may result in negative judgement or prejudice about the other group.
- Illusory correlation: A series of experiments conducted by social psychologists provide evidence for a phenomenon that a higher degree of prejudice is shown towards a smaller (minority) group in comparison with a larger (majority) group even when the proportion of the members showing negative behaviour is the same. This is illusory correlation because people tend to form a linkage between minority group and negative behaviour which is actually not true in a relative sense (in comparison with the majority group). Social psychologists have explained illusory correlation with the help of distinctiveness-based interpretation. It posits that even if the proportion of the members showing negative behaviour shown by smaller and larger group is same, the actual small number of people of the smaller group becomes distinct or easily identifiable in the eyes of the observers and thus, they attribute more negative behaviour to the smaller group.

