

1.2.2 Social Psychology: Focus on individual Behaviour :

The social thoughts and actions are taken by individuals. They might be influenced by the society. But the thought and actions are of the individuals, and not groups. The social psychology has a very strong focus on individuals, and tries to understand the behaviour of individuals. It also tries to understand various environmental influences on social thought and actions, viz., Culture, social norms, etc. Still the focus of the social psychology enquiry is individual.

1.2.3 Understand Causes of Social Behaviour and Thought :

Human social behaviour and thoughts are caused by many things. Social psychology would try to understand them. Let's see some of the important ones:

Actions and Characteristics of Other Persons :

We are affected by various actions of others. For example, you are standing in the queue for a local train ticket and somebody tries to break the queue. In no time, you would get upset with the person and shout at him. This and many other instances would help you to understand that your behaviour is affected by the actions of other individuals. Similarly, certain characteristics of people also change your behaviour. For example, you are waiting at bus-stop, and you realize that a blind man wants to cross a road. You would quickly move ahead and help him. These and many other physical psychological and social characteristics of people are responsible for our actions.

- **Cognitive Process :**

Our thinking determines what we do in social circumstances. This is studied in the area of social cognitions. Cognition is our thinking process. Our behaviour is determined by what we think. That is one reason why two people do not respond to the same situation identically. Since two different people think differently about the situations and social realities, they respond differently.

- **Environment :**

The physical world around us to a great extent determines our behaviour. Researchers have shown that the temperature is negatively related with individual aggression and irritability. Similar types of questions are also asked in social psychology.

- **Cultural Context :**

The culture in which we stay or are born and brought up determines our behaviour. Culture is sum of values, beliefs, practices, art, language, etc. Every culture has a different belief

and value system. For example our decisions would depend on whether we belong to individualistic culture or collectivistic culture. For instance, marriage would be decided by individual in individualistic cultures and they are decided by a process of mutual agreement among the family members in collectivistic cultures.

- **Biological Factors :**

The biological factors influence our social behaviour. They can be understood as physiological factors and neurological factors, genetic factors, and evolutionary factors.

The physiological factors contain hormones, functions of various glands, immune system, motor system, etc. The neurological factors include the brain structures, the neural cells (neurons), the neurotransmitters, etc. The genetic factor would contain the study of influence of genes on human behaviour. The evolutionary psychology focuses on explaining the social behaviour as a function of process of evolution.

- **Physiological and Neurological Factors :**

These factors focus on the physiological and neural substrates of social psychological processes of mind. Typically, it studies the impact of brain and biology on social behaviour. Brain waves (electroencephalography, EEG), fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging), measures of skin conductance (galvanic skin response, GSR), cardiovascular measures (heart rate, HR; BPM; HRV; vasomotor activity), muscle activity (electromyography, EMG), changes in pupil diameter with thought and emotion (pupillometry) and eye movements, etc., are commonly used methods of measurement in this area. The details of neuroscience are provided in the next section.

- **Behaviour Genetics :**

Behaviour genetics approach is used in social psychology to understand variation in social behaviour of human beings as a function of two components: genetic and environmental. The research methods used are family studies, twin studies, and adoption studies. **Family studies** are based on the idea that children share 50 percent of their genes with each parent. If genes have to influence social behaviour, the trait in question must run in families. **Twin Studies** : Monozygotic twins share 100% genetic information, whereas dizygotic share 50% (similar to non-twin siblings). Similarities and differences between them indicate the genetic and environmental influence. **Adoption Studies** : The sibling reared in the same family should show similar social behaviour similar to the behaviour of siblings reared apart (because of adoptions most of the times), such a behaviour indicates the influence of environment.

- **Evolutionary Social Psychology :**

When we think of evolution, we tend to think of biological evolution. The same process would hold true for psychological processes. In last one decade, the evolutionary psychology has grown up as a discipline. David Buss is one of the pioneer psychologists in this field. Evolutionary psychology tries to explain the traits and social behaviours as a function of evolutionary process. The evolutionary process is based on key process known as natural selection (sexual selection). In addition to natural selection, kin selection and parental involvement are important components of evolutionary social psychology. If certain trait has evolutionary benefits, then that social trait will become part of human psyche. Buss has stated three important conditions of evolution of social behaviour. They are variation, inheritance and selection. *Variation* refers to the fact that members of specific species vary (are different) on various traits. For example, Intelligence, everybody has different intelligence. At least, part of this variation in the specific trait is inherited i.e., *inheritance*. For example, some part of intelligence is contributed by genes. If this trait gives an advantage in reproductive success, then this trait is *selected* and it develops as a process of evolution. For example, intelligent people are more likely to be resourceful; hence the reproductive success would be high for intelligent people.

Our ancestors, some thousand years back, have gone through the same process and so we have the set of traits and social behaviours and preferences. For example, evolutionary psychology has a principle of sexual selection. One of the prediction is the sex that invests more in parenting is more choosy in mate selection. Several studies all over the world have provided evidence to this hypothesis. These studies have shown that males prefer more partners than women, over any period of time (For example, Schmitt, 2004).

In this section we have learned that the social psychology is the science. It qualifies for the definition of science. It focuses on individual behaviour. The social psychology seeks to understand the causes of human social behaviour. These causes are characteristics and actions of others, cognitive processes, environmental variables, culture, and biological causes.

1.2.4 Brief History of Social Psychology :

Social psychology has an interesting history. It can be traced back to 1895 when Le Bon theorized crowd behaviour. Triplett's (1897) experiment on "social facilitation" effects, Ross and McDougall's (1908) first textbook of social psychology, were the early events. Social psychology started as "Experimental" science.

Sherif (1936) studies on development of norms, Lewin's field theory (1935), and Lewin, Lippitt, and White's (1939) three leadership styles test were early important studies. Lewin trained many famous social psychologists, like, Festinger, Schachter, Deutsch, Kelley, Thibault, etc. Three Influential Gestalt Psychologists are Kurt Lewin, Solomon Asch, Fritz Heider.

The World War II was a major event in the history of social psychology. Many social psychologists fled Europe and went to USA. They have started working in the auspicious funding atmosphere. The topics they chose were related to American problems, e.g., to combat moral warfare strategies during the time of war. Then studies by Milgram on obedience, Festinger studies on cognitive dissonance and social comparisons, Heider's work on balance theory and attribution theory dominated 1940's and late 1950's. In the decade of 1960's Stereotyping and Prejudice, School Desegregation, Aggression, Altruism, Bystander Intervention, Interpersonal Relations, Attraction, became topics of modern research. The decade of 1970's saw the emergence of Kahneman-Tversky model of heuristics, models of schemas and increasing cognitive trends.

There are many other disciplines that have emerged in the social psychology. Evolutionary social psychology, neuroscience perspective in social psychology, studies on implicit processes, cross-cultural research, are the new methods that lead to the development of modern social psychology.

The history of social psychology also teaches us interesting lessons. Because of the World War II, most of the social psychology initially developed in USA. Most of the social psychologists at the time were white, men, upper-middle class, Americans dealing with the problems of America. So the field initially was subservient to American social problems. In last three decades the picture is changing. Social constructivism, and feminism have also made a mark in changing this picture. Similarly, in India, social psychologist, partly, have studied phenomenon that cannot be considered as science because of their political, religious preferences. Indeed, science and religion are two different epistemological views, and both can't be done together. On the positive note, Indian psychologist have also studied issues of poverty, discrimination, deprivation, religious tensions, gender issues, etc.