
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
 - 1.2.2.2 Social Psychology Studies Individuals' Thought, Feeling and Behaviour
 - 1.2.2.3 Social Psychology Studies Individuals' Behaviour in Social Contexts
 - 1.2.3 Scope of Social Psychology
- 1.3 Historical Development of Social Psychology
 - 1.3.1 Early Years of Social Psychology
 - 1.3.2 Formational Years of Social Psychology
 - 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.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

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

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

3) Describe the nature of social psychology.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

4) Give an account of scope of social psychology.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

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

Kassin, S., Fein, S., & Markus, H. R. (2017). *Social Psychology (10th ed.)*. Cengage Learning.

Baron, R. A., & Branscombe, N. R. (2016). *Social Psychology (14th ed.)*. Boston: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon.

References

Adinarayan, S. P. (1953). Before and after Independence—A study of racial and communal attitudes in India. *British Journal of Psychology*, 44, 108-115.

Adinarayan, S.P. (1957). A study of racial attitudes in India. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 45, 211-216.

Allport, F. H. (1924). *Social Psychology*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Allport, G. W. (1985). The historical background of social psychology. In G. Lindzey & E. Aronson (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology* (3rd ed., Vol. I, pp. 1-46). New York: Random House.

Asch, S. E. (1952). *Social Psychology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

- B. F. Skinner (1938). *The Behavior of Organisms: An Experimental Analysis*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: B. F. Skinner Foundation.
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bartlett, F. C. (1932). *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Berkowitz, L. (1962). *Aggression: A Social Psychological Analysis*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Dalal, A. K., & Mishra, G. (2001). Social Psychology in India: Evolution and emerging trends. In A. K. Dalal & G. Misra (Eds.), *New Directions in Indian Psychology* (vol. 1: Social Psychology), New Delhi: Sage.
- Darley, J. M., & Latané, B. (1968). Bystander intervention in emergencies: Diffusion of responsibility. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 8, 377-383.
- Eagly, A. H., & Chaiken, S. (1993). *The Psychology of Attitudes*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations*, 7, 117-140.
- Festinger, L. (1957). *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson.
- Fiske, S. T., & Taylor, S. E. (2008). *Social Cognition: From Brains to Culture*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.
- Haney, C., Banks, C., & Zimbardo, P. (1973). Interpersonal dynamics in a simulated prison. *International Journal of Criminology and Penology*, 1, 69-97.
- Hovland, C. I., Janis, I. L., & Kelley, H. H. (1963). *Communication and Persuasion*. Oxford, England: Yale University Press.
- Janis, I. L. (1972). *Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign Policy Decisions and Fiascos*. Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin.
- Kahneman, D., Slovic, P., & Tversky, A. (1982). *Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Kassin, S., Fein, S., & Markus, H. R. (2017). *Social Psychology (10th ed.)*. Cengage Learning.
- Kelley, H. H., & Thibaut, J. W. (1978). *Interpersonal Relations: A Theory of Interdependence*. New York: Wiley.
- LeBon, G. (1908). *The crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. London: Unwin (original work published 1896). Online: <http://cupid.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/het/lebon/crowds.pdf>
- Lewin, K. (1936). *A Dynamic Theory of Personality*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Lieberman, M. D. (2010). Social cognitive neuroscience. In S. T. Fiske, D. T. Gilbert, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology* (5th ed., Vol. 1, pp. 143–193). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

McDougall, W. (1908). *An Introduction to Social Psychology*. London: Methuen.

McDougall, W. (1920). *The Group Mind*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Milgram, S. (1974). *Obedience to Authority*. London: Tavistock.

Misra, G. (1982). Deprivation and development : A review of Indian studies. *Indian Educational Review*, 18, 12-33.

Murphy, G., & Murphy, L. B. (1931). *Experimental Social Psychology*. New York: Harper (rev. ed published with T. M. Newcomb in 1937).

Pandey, J. (1986). Social-cultural perspectives on ingratiation. In B.A. Mahar & W.B. Mahar (Ed.), *Progress in Experimental Personality Research* (Vol. 14). New York: Academic Press.

Pavlov, I.P. (1927). *Conditioned Reflexes: An Investigation of the Physiological Activity of the Cerebral Cortex* (translated by G.V. Anrep). London: Oxford University Press.

Ross, E. A. (1908). *Social Psychology*. New York: Macmillan.

Sherif, M. (1936). *The Psychology of social norms*. New York: Harper.

Singh, A. K. (1981). Development of religious identity and prejudice in Indian children. In D. Sinha (Ed.), *Socialization of the Indian Child* (pp.87-100). New Delhi: Concept.

Sinha, D. (1952). Behaviour in a catastrophic situation: A psychological study of reports and rumours. *British Journal of Psychology*, 43, 200-209.

Sinha, J. B. P. (1980). *Nurturant Task Leader*. New Delhi: Concept.

Triplett, N. (1898). The dynamogenic factors in pacemaking and competition. *American Journal of Psychology*, 9, 507-533.