

Soft Skills
Dr. Binod Mishra
Department of Humanities & Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee

Lecture - 12
Haptics: The Language of Touch

Welcome back. You are listening to a series of lectures in Soft Skills. And in that continuation we had been discussing communication without words or nonverbal communication. In nonverbal communication we have talked about the way our body communicates.

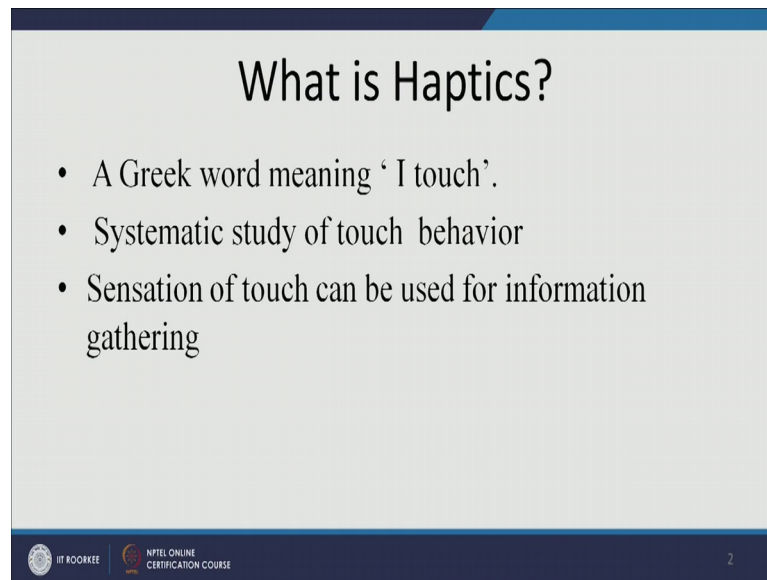
Several parts of the body communicate namely the appearance the hands the eyes the postures the gestures your voice and the way you can improve your voice in order to make yourself being heard being understood by the audience. And then we also talked about the nuances of proxemics or the meaning space communicates in communication whether you are having a conversation or giving a public speech or a part of group discussion panel discussion or even participating in meeting.

We also emphasized on the importance of time that plays a very significant role in communication. We also pointed it out how time generates meaning how time is perceived differently by different people in different contexts, and how you can utilize time to have proper communication. If time is important space is important equally important is your haptic behavior. Now you might all think what actually is haptic behavior or haptics

Let me ask you when you are communicating with people around whether they are people of your close circle or people who are strangers, have you ever felt that you have been touched at times and then have you also realized how attached generates feelings the way we discuss touch and the way we try to incorporate touch in our communication can be studied through haptics.

Hence haptics is the language of touch the word haptics or the term hap haptics has been taken from a Greek word that means I touch.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:31)



What is Haptics?

- A Greek word meaning ‘ I touch’.
- Systematic study of touch behavior
- Sensation of touch can be used for information gathering

IIT ROORKEE | NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE

Hence the knowledge of the study of touch in communication in various situations is called haptics. It is actually a systematic study of touch behavior sometimes though not intentionally, you touch people while you are communicating, but then you may also feel that if you have not touched by others you also generate some feelings. Especially in a global world today in global settings in workplaces a touch has got a meaning. And though most of us do not want to touch others, but sometimes either because of the congestion of space or because of our hurry we are willingly touched by others. Most often in crowded situations at crowded places you are touched, but then studies. So, that sometimes a casual touch may also generate very positive feelings.

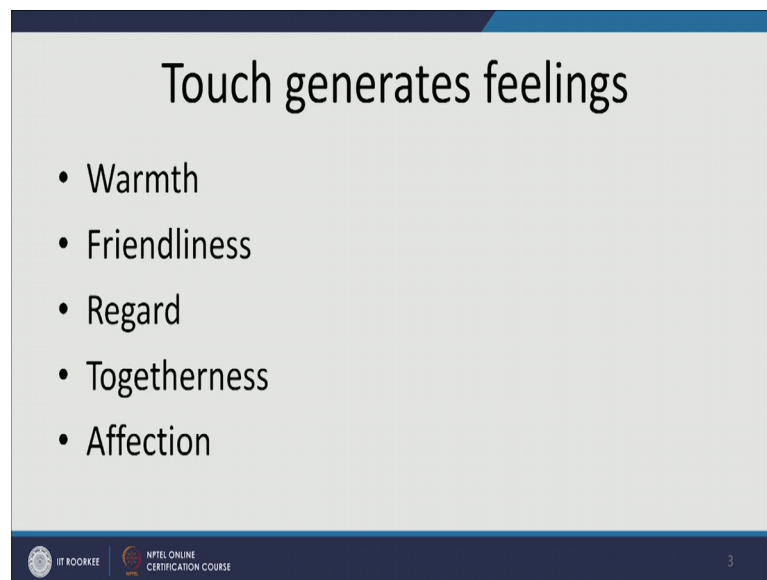
Sensation of touch can be used for information gathering in professional settings, but at the home front you may feel that touch can be interpreted in various situations, in different ways. The touch of a mother to a son shows a sort of reassurance. It shows a sort of commitment to the child and hence in many conditions, when you feel yourself deprived off are you feel yourself at low a touch by a closer relative or a touch by a person who is intimately related that generates a lot of feeling. Go another times when this touch was also based on caste based on differences, there is history replete with examples that based on classes.

The low class people were not allowed to touch the high class people. This is a very classic book by Mulk Raj Anand named untouchable, where you will find the protagonist

Baka since he was living in a world where the low class people had no allowance to touch high class people. Hence whenever he used to walk on the roads he used to announce hey an untouchable is coming.

But now in a world of today in a world of globalization, these things have taken different connotations. In general touch generates feelings of different sorts, attached by a closer relative or a friend or a touch by a near kinsman may generate warmth.

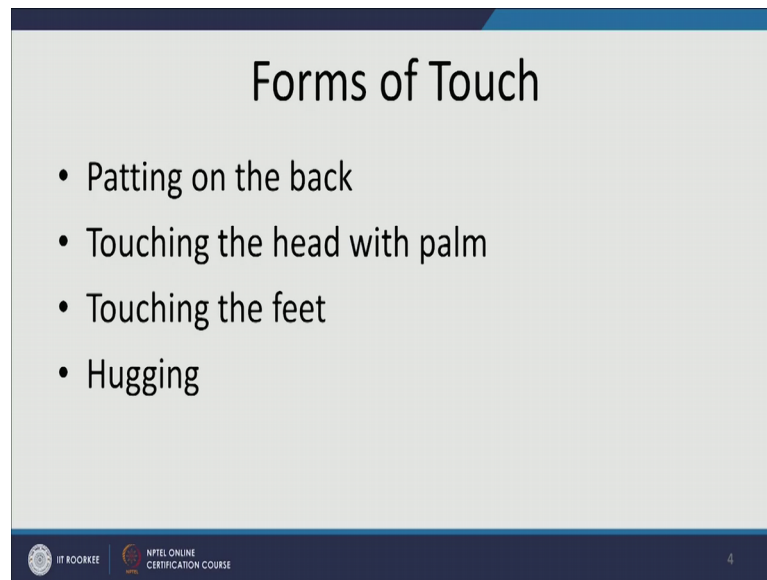
(Refer Slide Time: 07:26)



The slide features a light gray background with a dark blue header and footer. The title 'Touch generates feelings' is centered at the top in a large, black, sans-serif font. Below the title is a bulleted list of five items: 'Warmth', 'Friendliness', 'Regard', 'Togetherness', and 'Affection'. The footer contains the IIT ROORKEE logo on the left, the NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE logo in the center, and the number '3' on the right.

We can also find friendliness which can be reflected out of touch. In certain situations you will find touch is also considered as a sort of regard as a sort of togetherness as a sort of affection, you will also come across various people and in various communities the youngsters often touching the feet of elders especially in India touch is also a form of showing your regard as at the same time this touch by a younger to the elder in return brings a sort of blessing.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:15)



And this is shown either by putting the hand on the head of the younger or by patting him at times on the shoulders, but let us remember that there are situations there are times and specially in professional settings, touch can have different meanings. At times it may also create a sort of negative impact upon people. While patting on the back of a younger person by an elder person may be considered to encourage him, if the same is repeated to people or it is if the same it is shown to people who are strangers that may not be taken graciously.

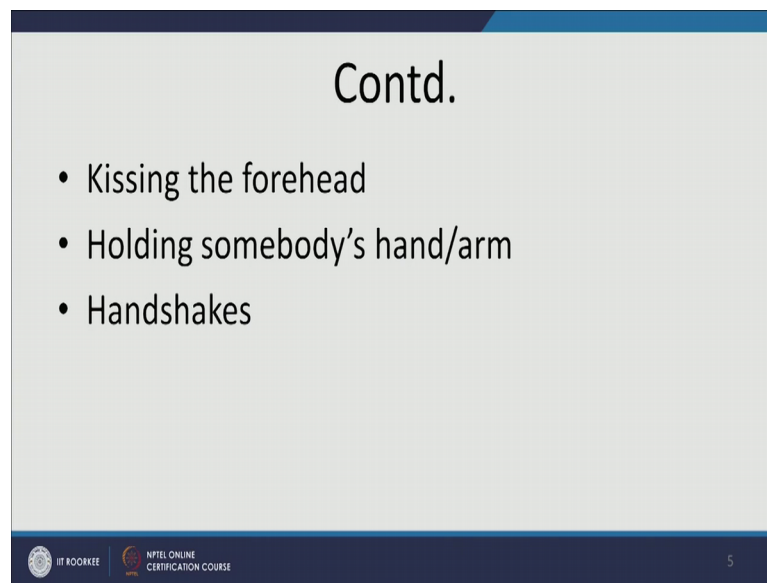
Another way of touching is hugging. You will find when close friends they meet each other either they hug each other they greet each other there are other ways, also of touching or bringing both of your palms together in order to greet in India while people greet each other they complement, their feelings not only by words, but by non words which is in the form of the folding of the hands, but since we are living in a world which is global and where people of all cultures meet there have been several occasions, where this touch has become very controversial. I will increase his time give you certain examples where touch had generated a lot of debate among people.

Now, in some cultures there is also a tradition of kissing especially in Latin American countries, kissing the forehead of the other person, but that may not ensure a sort of intimacy especially in countries, where people are reserved. Where feelings are considered to be very reserved we have perhaps talked about how especially in a country

like japan, certain display of feelings in public is considered inconsiderate. That is why when a Japanese woman smiles, she puts her hands or palms on the mouth. This actually because it is considered impolite to smile in public, whereas you will find that even Germans they are smile less, but that may be interpreted differently by people of other countries.

Sometimes we also touch other people by holding hands sometimes.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:38)



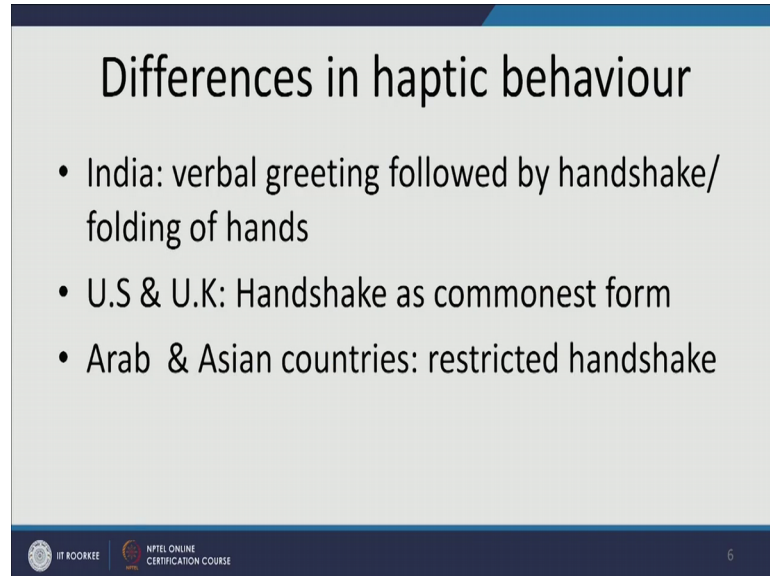
We take others hands in our hand or sometimes, we greet people by giving our arms to them or by touching them as their shoulders. Usually in most countries of the world the communists form of touch is handshakes, but remember it may also be explained and interpreted differently by people of different culture.

Sometimes the way or with the intention, that we extend our hand hands to others and if the others withdraw their hands that may have a different meaning. Either it may mean that the other person is not willing to cooperate not willing to interact or to communicate with us. Hence we have to be very particular when we talk about this touch behavior. There are differences as we have talked about in haptic behavior people all over the world.

In India, any form of verbal greeting is most often followed by handshake or holding of hands, but then it can also vary in terms of gender. While 2 men can shake hands with

each other, a men shaking hand with a woman in India and in some other countries also that had certain restrictions while in US and UK.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:32)



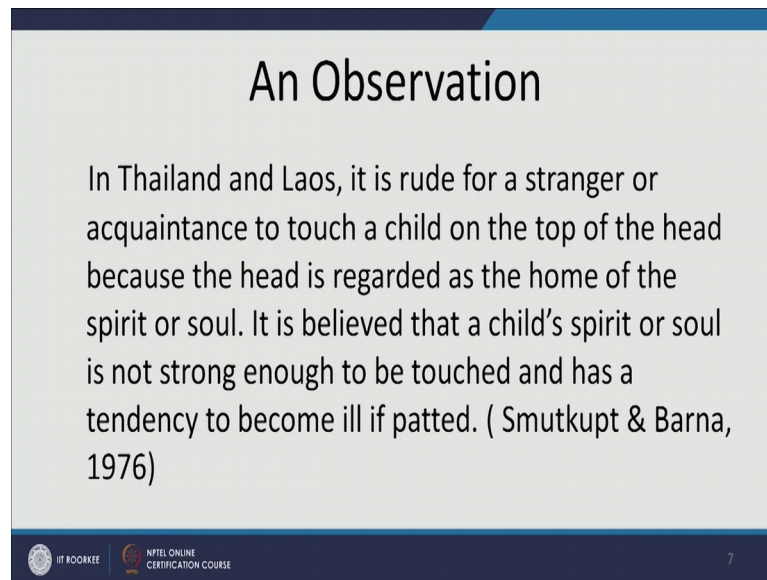
The slide is titled "Differences in haptic behaviour" and contains a bulleted list of three items. The first item is "India: verbal greeting followed by handshake/ folding of hands". The second item is "U.S & U.K: Handshake as commonest form". The third item is "Arab & Asian countries: restricted handshake". At the bottom of the slide, there are logos for "IIT ROORKEE" and "NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE", and the number "6" in the bottom right corner.

- India: verbal greeting followed by handshake/ folding of hands
- U.S & U.K: Handshake as commonest form
- Arab & Asian countries: restricted handshake

Handshake is the commonest form, but then it creates problem especially for Indian women in business settings, while they are culturally sensitive atmosphere and upbringing have not prepared or allowed them to shake hands with people of the opposite sex. This at times may have a different meaning an example in this regard can be given of how people in Spain.

When the question of handshakes come they believe that a handshake should last for at least 7 strokes. And if the other party withdraws or pulls, that has a different meaning that may be thought of as a sort of rejection. In a globalized world where most of the business transactions are finalized after communication, some of these forms may hinder the progress of certain transactions only because the people are either culturally considered backward or sometimes they are considered to extrovert. Especially in Arab and Asian countries as you will find and as the service have indicated that handshakes are restricted. We have earlier talked about how people while maintaining space, they see to it that while an Arab of dealing with an American they actually feel either the one is too willing the one is too close or the other is too distant. And this may hamper or hinder the growth of further talks.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:43)



An Observation

In Thailand and Laos, it is rude for a stranger or acquaintance to touch a child on the top of the head because the head is regarded as the home of the spirit or soul. It is believed that a child's spirit or soul is not strong enough to be touched and has a tendency to become ill if patted. (Smutkupt & Barna, 1976)

IIT ROORKEE | NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE

7

It is very important here to talk about an observation especially in Thailand. You know in Thailand and la Laos as the observation says it is rude for a stranger or acquaintance to touch a child on the top of the head. Because touching a child on the top of the head is not considered well, because they are of the opinion that head is the most sacrosanct part of the human body and it is the home of this spirit or the soul.

It is also believed that a child's spirit or soul is not strong enough to be touched and has a tendency to become ill if patted. Hence, while you are having a communication or an interaction or you have an opportunity to visit somebody in Thailand and Laos, please see to it that you do not repeat your own culture by or understanding that by putting your hand on the head of the child means blessing, because this may be considered differently by different people.

now you also might be aware how in different settings, these haptic behaviors create different meanings. You all might have come across one episode where one actress while she was kissed on the forehead this generated a lot of debate, and then everyone in and around started thinking about the differences in terms of haptic behavior. Moreover, there was another example where a senior official patted on the back of a junior colleague who happened to be a female and the matter also had to be carried to the court. Even though you have the best intentions to show your goodwill gesture the way you bring in the touch behavior or your haptic behavior may at times be interpreted differently. Hence

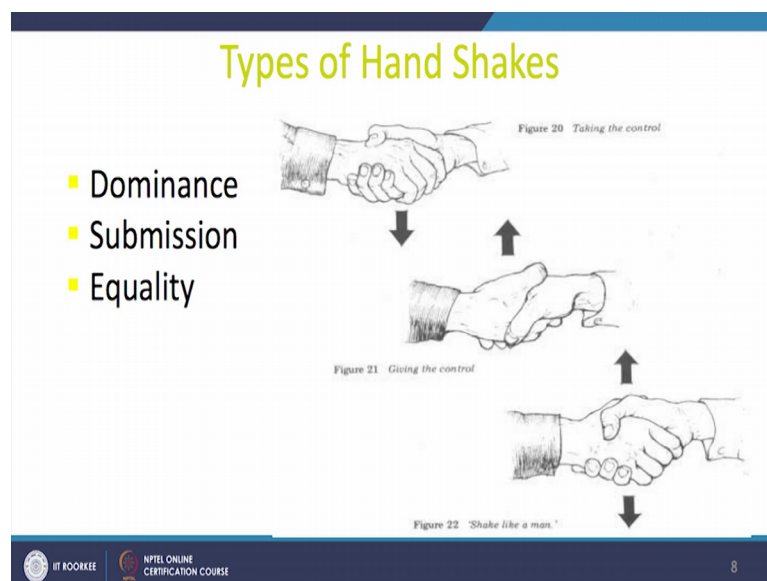
while you are interacting with people across the world, you have to understand their local cultures and since you do not understand the local cultures what is advisable is to restrict yourself from the touch behavior.

Here this another example where there is one form of greeting called honggi in newzealand, where 2 people come very close to each other and their noses touch, and this is considered as a sort of breath sharing. Since the world is divided into several cultural zones you have to understand that the way you touch others may have certain meanings.

As we have been talking about handshakes which are quite popular in every business setting, nowadays it is quite important to understand that there are usually 3 types of handshakes. Whenever you get an opportunity you will find that not everyone shakes their hands the same way. These handshakes can show dominance. Here in this picture in the very first one you can see how a person while shaking his hands takes the control by taking the hand of the other and pressing the upper portion of the palm, a little this shows a sort of dominance usually people at a higher position often shake hands doing this.

There is another way where we can also generate the feelings of submission. In this condition what is done is both the parties take their hand in each other and then it appears that it is giving the hand giving the control and it is a form of submission.

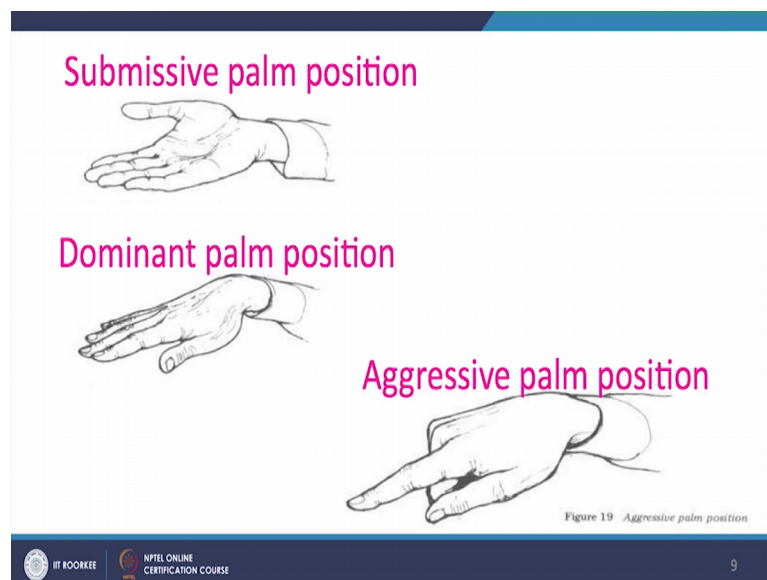
(Refer Slide Time: 21:02)



Whereas, people at the same position people especially the peers while they shake hands what they generally do is as they are equal not only in terms of their post, but also in terms of their edge and all they try to show equality. And while showing a equality they take their hands in each other and give them a shake by which they try to show that they are equal, but then there are other ways of shaking hands also and there are other ways also how you make or how you create language out of your palms.

For example, you might have you know if you watch movies regularly you will often find that while the hero he has to so feeling sometimes say of depression, sometimes say a feeling of neutrality or sometimes of nothingness. They actually by moving or by making their hands quite flat they actually try to convey the intended meaning.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:27)



Now palm positions also can be submissive, when you openly give your hands you are actually becoming very submissive, but when you try to show your dominance what you do is you actually put your hands you put your palm on the hand of the other person and try to show your dominance.

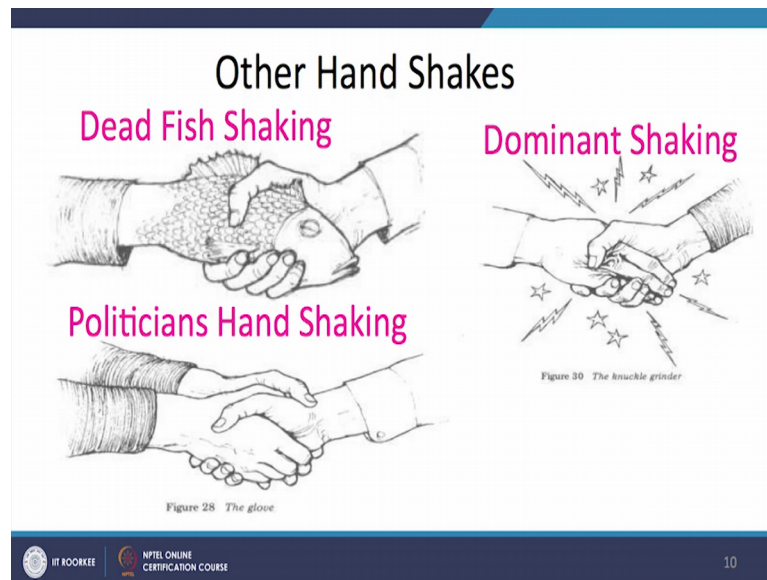
On other occasions, when you have a feeling of aggression, you know at times you might have come across situations where you suddenly become angry and that time what you do is you actually make use of your fingers. Sometimes you point fingers also and that may though it is not always welcome no we have in previous lectures talked about how you are showing your enumerative gesture. And when either you are trying to describe a

point or you are trying to locate an object. So, you use either enumerative or locative gesture, but in conversations or in some other group conversations if you raise your index finger or if you raise any of your fingers or if you point your finger that may be considered negative. And sometimes by making movements of your finger also you can give some meaning.

For example, if somebody draws a circle like thing with the help of the fingers or sometimes somebody brings a finger close to the thumbs he actually tries to convey the feeling of and all, but remember such a sort of gesture such a sort of the movement of the fingers that may also be taken in very insulting manner, that may also generate certain negative meanings, but sometimes by simply raising one of your fingers you are also trying to show aggression and your palm position becomes very aggressive. Since we have to deal with various situations in our lives, we find that we come across people who because of their differences in terms of their position their age and their status we have to shake hands. And by handshake you have to understand what sort of feeling is there.

You have to understand say for example, sometimes you can come across people who are not willing to convey a goodness or who are not that encouraging. They will actually give you a handshake which will be a dead face handshake. This may be done not only by you, but by the other party also you will find that such a handshake is a dead fish handshake, I mean there is no life into it I mean there is no encouragement and by that they have given you a message that if you are pursuing a business deal or you are talking about or if you are trying to negotiate perhaps this may not result fruitfully.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:19)



The second is a dominant shaking. Now look at this picture sometimes when people are representatives of 2 countries, they meet together and the discuss things and finally, either in the beginning or towards the end.

You know it also depends what was the way somebodies took hands in the beginning and what was the way somebodies took hands towards the end. So, timing of the handshake and the way that has been timed that also means a lot. So, a person or a country or a representative who considered himself dominant will give you a handshake in this way by taking only your fingers and not reaching the entire part of the palm.

So, this says that this is a sort of dominant handshake and you must try to understand the meaning involved in it. Now time and again you come across people who appear to be very gracious in terms of their greeting in terms of the verbal exchanges in terms of the words being used, but sometimes you may find that if you are going to shake hands with a politician, it may appear to be very cheerful and this handshake again has a meaning they actually take or they take your hand they give both of their hands to you and they symbolize something though they always try to be very friendly, but you can always understand what does it mean.

Dear friends, in today's world where we come across people from different faiths, different tastes, different genres, different occupations, different business purposes. All these touch behaviors they have different meanings. So, while you are conversing with

them with the help of non-verbal's, it becomes something very significant how their verbal messages are commingling with their nonverbal messages. Most of the time if the verbal message is positive and the nonverbal message is negative there appears to be a conflict. And then you may try to understand that the deal you are trying to finalize still requires something else or it is going to end in a failure. People around the world are sensitive and we also should see that while we are showing some of our gestures either in the form of hand gestures or handshakes, we are giving them some messages. Because any positive message if not offered any positive message if not send with proper intention may tend to end in a failure and business transaction may not be successful.

Hence, it is time we gave much importance to haptics, because haptics or the touch behavior has been neglected since long time. The time has come that we try to understand mold by peoples nonverbal behavior than their verbal behavior. It is also very important to note here that some other features like as we have discussed earlier the choice of your dress, the choice of how you are trying to show your demeanor through some other means they also go a long way in giving meaning to your verbal messages.

Messages are there not only verbal, but also nonverbal and successful is a person who tries to extract more from the nonverbal behavior because the nonverbal behavior or the nonverbal cues are going to say much about the verbal behavior. If the verbal behavior or if the verbal message is in cooperation with or if there is actually a sort of commingling or there is a sort of blend between the verbal and the nonverbal behavior the messages go straight and they have a positive effect.

We have previously emphasized how nonverbal behavior or nonverbal cues they complement and supplement our verbal behavior. As youngsters and as would be employees you need to give too much importance as to how you are going to provide meaning through your nonverbal behavior or through nonverbal cues, either in the form of extending your hands either in the form of giving a handshake either in the form of making use of time or in the way you make are you spread your body you slash, you attains glower your expressions, you attains try to hide your feelings all these go a long with end providing meaning to various successful business transactions.

As we cannot have a knowledge of most of the cultures of the world, but then there is nothing that can stop us from trying to understand. And the best way my dear friend is to

allow more room is to allow more space all this we should try to give preference to others we have as humans the tendency to speak more and we have as humans the tendency to consider our culture as more important, but it may at times appear to be a sort of our belligerent attitude.

Hence, we need to understand we need to respect other cultures as we respect ours and then perhaps is the way that we can communicate effectively and all business transactions may be successful. I do hope that all these communications that have been or that are there to be done with the help of nonverbal cues will go a long way in giving your personality and edge over others, and making yourself distinct in terms of meeting business presentation in terms of having group discussion in terms of having negotiations and in terms of overall reflecting your own style.

Thank you very much.