Advance Course in Social Psychology

Lecture 01 : Introduction to Social Psychology- Part I

Hello friends, I am Professor Pooja Garg, Associate Professor of Psychology, Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee.

I will be running a course titled Advanced Course in Social Psychology. Today, I am here on this platform of NPTEL to start with the first module and lecture first with the title Introduction to Social Psychology. So, in this module I am going to discuss about the meaning definition of this field of psychology that is social psychology, what are the historical roots which evolved social psychology and its scope and applications. So, first I will start with defining and introducing what is social psychology. So, it is a scientific field that seeks to understand the nature and causes of individual behavior and thoughts in social situations.

This entails that whatever we experience in any social situation when we interact with a particular person, with a particular member of the group, what kind of feelings, what kind of thoughts and what kind of psychological factors evolved during that particular social situation will help to identify and understand the behavior of oneself and others. So, this is the scientific study of human behavior in any social situation. So, the terms like thoughts, feelings and behaviors include all the psychological variables that are measurable in a human being. It can be about a conflict between two person or may be more than two people.

It can be about attitude that how we perceive a particular situation of person in a particular manner. It can be about competition that how people compete with each other to achieve their own goal. It can be about cooperation that how people in a particular social situation tend to cooperate with each other specifically in a group to achieve a common objective. It can be about how a person can tend to exhibit altruistic behavior while not expecting anything in return. It can be about convincing the other members of the group to attain a particular objective by persuading the other members of the group.

So, there can be number of psychological process which involve it can be about one's own identity. It can be about social cognition that how we perceive the social information. It can be about self-concept. It can be about social comparisons when we tend to compare our attitude and behavior with the other person or the group in order to enhance us our own self-esteem. So, there can be a number of psychological social processes that tend to evolve in any situation and how we tend to understand those processes and behavior.

So, social psychology typically explains human behavior as a result of the interaction of mental states and immediate social situation. That means, how any particular situation will influence the person to behave in a particular manner. So, we can say that social psychology is concerned with the way feelings, thoughts, beliefs, intentions and goals are constructed and how such psychological factors in turn influence interaction with others. Next comes some specific and important definitions of social psychology. According to Gordon and Alport in the year 1954, he defined social psychology as a discipline that uses scientific methods in an attempt to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings and behavior of individual are influenced by the actual imagined and implied presence of other human beings.

Now, here the term scientific method tends to entail about any correlational research, it can be about experimental or laboratory research, it can be about any case, it can be about any field study, it can be about any qualitative method where a particular case or any situation is being interpreted by collecting all the information available pertaining to that situation and how people tend to understand behavior from different point of views. So, this definition entails that it is a scientific study of human behavior or understanding of human behavior based on scientific methods or methodology. According to Myers and Spencer, social psychology is the scientific study of how people think about influence and relate to one another. It can be about in terms of compliance, it can be about obedience, it can be about conformity, it can be about cohesiveness or it can be about attitude formation and change in the attitude of a particular situation or group of people. But definitely this study entails scientific study based on experiments, based on case studies, based on observations, based on field studies and based on cases.

And the last is the definition given by Barron and Byrne that the social psychology is the scientific field that sets to understand the nature and cause of individual behavior and thoughts in social situation. Individual behavior and thoughts here entails that whenever a person tends to differ from the other person, it can either lead to compliance or it can lead to conflict, it can also lead to cooperation, it can also lead to competition, it can also lead to altruism, it can also lead to violence or aggression. There can be number of psychological processes that can exist or evolve in any social situation. So, these are the definitions important definitions of social psychology given by accomplished social psychologist in the area of this field. Next comes the historical background that how this field of psychology has evolved in years and how this area has covered the various aspects of human behavior as per the situation.

So, the scientific discipline of social psychology formally began in the late 19th century to early 20th century. So, if we talk about late back, so this evolution took place in 19th century which began and emerged as a larger field of psychology and at that time it was concerned with developing concrete explanations for the different aspects of human nature. They attempted to discover concrete cause and effect relationship that explains social interactions. That means two people who are interacting either they decide to comply or either they tend to engage in conflict. So, what are those factors that tend two people to engage in a conflicting situation or indulge in a conflicting situation or what factors supported two people to cooperate with each other or to persuade each other.

So, there can be a cause-and-effect relationship in any particular social situation. So, in the late 19th century the first published study was in the field was given by a normal triplet in 1898 experiment on the phenomenon of social facilitation. So, this evolution started with the concept of social facilitation which is a social phenomenon in which an individual in the presence of others improves his or her own performance. That is people tend to perform better task when they are with other people rather than when they are doing the task alone. This implies that when people any one particular person is surrounded by people and he or she is getting support to perform a particular task then definitely the performance will be enhanced rather than the person who is performing the same task all alone maybe the performance will go down.

So, this entails that social facilitation is much more supported by the presence of others and how a person tend to elicit enhanced performance or responses in the presence of others. So,

situations that elicit social facilitation include coaction or performing for an audience and appears to depend on task complexity. So, the more the person is surrounded by different people in the environment in any social situation the person tends to engage in coaction. That means when all the people are doing the similar task then individual person also tend to perform well during that situation. For instance performing for an audience a person or any young boy who is performing guitar on the stage then he is very much facilitated by the audience who are encouraging him to enhance his performance.

So, this is social facilitation. Now under such circumstances even a complex task can also be performed better as the situation is facilitating that particular performer. So, this is social facilitation. At the same time when this phenomenon evolved that is social facilitation some other developments or studies also evolved which actually backed the notion of social psychology. Some other developments include the study of Zizong in the year 1965 and it was stated that some tasks are easier to learn and perform than others because they require dominant responses.

Here the dominant responses means that any task that is easy to perform then those dominant responses will be in terms of being less effortful and it is easier to be compared to tasks which are eliciting non-dominant responses. That means any task which is simple to perform have better chances to be performed better than the complex task to be performed. Now here the dominant responses are in form of putting less efforts while performing better. So, dominant responses are the behavioral responses at the top of an organism's behavioral repertoire. RippertoR means a number of responses that evolve in any particular situation and making them readily available or dominant above all other responses.

So, tasks that elicit dominant responses are typically simpler they are less effortful and easier to perform compared to task eliciting non-dominant responses. So, here non-dominant responses are the responses which are harder to carry out. In some simple tasks require dominant responses because the responses to that particular task or any situation is easy to go. Whereas in any complex task the non-dominant response can be there can be a hesitation to or there can be some inhibition to perform that task because the behaviors are not are supporting an individual or facilitating an individual to perform in a effortless manner. So, here non-dominant responses are harder to carry out in some simple tasks require dominant responses whereas complex tasks require non-dominant responses.

So, when performing task in groups then simple task will be associated with social facilitation. The more you are performing a simple task in the group the more you have facilitation. Whereas if you are even if you are performing a difficult task then it becomes difficult to get that facilitation and perform in a effortless manner. However, complex task will not because the presence of others becomes distracting when attempting to elicit non-dominant responses that require more effort to use. It is very clear in one's own experiences also that whenever we are performing a difficult task we require lot of efforts, we require lot of knowledge, we require lot of skills and information to perform that task.

And as soon as we are performing that particular difficult task in the presence of others there is lot of distraction, there can be a feedback which can either facilitate or not facilitate that performance. So, those situations will actually elicit non-dominant behaviors to perform that particular task. So, this was the Zazong's contribution to the notion of social facilitation. Similarly, Yerkes and Dodson also propounded a law related to social facilitation and stated

that the mere presence of other people will enhance the performance in speed and accuracy of well practiced tasks but will degrade in the performance of less familiar task. Now here Yerkes and Dodson has talked about accuracy, speed and precision in performing a task.

So, the more there is presence of others, the more the speed and accuracy will be precise, very much measurable because the performance is been facilitated than performing but will degrade the performance of less familiar task. Whereas if any new task is been performed then definitely the performance will go low. So, compared to the performance when alone when in the presence of others they tend to perform better on simple or well rehearsed task and worse on complex or new ones. Definitely when you are performing a complex task then speed and accuracy will be very much distorted. But if the simpler task is performed in the presence of others then the speed and accuracy is very much in alignment with each other.

So, when we are talking about evolution of social psychology then various kind of developments took place and in 19th century itself the whole developments started with the phenomena of social facilitation and explained by various social psychologists such as Zezong or Triplett and Yerkes and Dodson in form of a particular law that measures speed and accuracy of the performance based on social facilitation. Next comes in the early 20th century during World War II social psychologists were much concerned with studies of persuasion and propaganda for the US military and following the war researchers. Researchers became interested in a variety of social problems including issues of gender and racial prejudice. Now this was the impact of World War II on society and human behavior that how stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, persuasion all different kind of psychological process were evolving in the society which became a social problem as well and how social psychologists started identifying these psychological process or social issues or how to handle these issues in a very precise manner. So, this was the development of social psychology in the early 20th century and in the late 20th century and till date the growing interest in topics such as cognitive dissonance, bystander intervention and aggression and violence also took place.

Now here the cognitive dissonance is a particular theory given by Festinger that how what a person thinks has an idea or belief and it contradicts with the available information and there is a sort of dissonance or discomfort within the person and how the person engages himself in the mechanism to cope with that kind of distortion or dissonance. So, this is cognitive dissonance that what idea we have and it is failing to align with the present situation then it leads to cognitive dissonance. It can be bystander intervention for instance we are on road and accident took place and person who has met an accident is surrounded by a number of people on the road, but to what extent one particular person will take initiative as a bystander to help that person who has met the accident and how other people on the road will also take initiative to help the person who is in need. So, this is the bystander intervention that became so much highlighted during late 20th century or it can be aggression and violence that what can be the role of media, television and role of parenting practices within families and society that how aggression and violence can aggravate within a social situation. So, these factors were taken into consideration in late 20th century and modernity that means till date that how social psychology has evolved in understanding human behavior based on different social aspects.

So, in the 1970s a number of conceptual challenges to social psychology emerged over issues such as ethical concerns about laboratory experimentation whether attitudes could accurately be measured and predict behavior and to what extent science could be done in a cultural

context. So, cultural factors also were taken into consideration while considering the ethical concerns about laboratory experiments. So, ethical concerns also became a major focus of social psychology in late 20th century and till date. So, according to social psychologists it was during this period only that situationism was very much intact that is the theory that human behavior changes based on situational factors and emerge and challenge the relevance of self and personality in psychology. So, this is how various psychological factors even in terms of self and personality also evolved to understand human behavior based on its interaction with any social situation.

So, we can say that social psychologists in addition were also concerned in terms of its application in the area of health, education, law and the workplace. It can be in form of informal groups in the workplaces that how people across the any particular organization irrespective of their designation and authority tend to come together and experience a sense of belongingness form an informal group and share their grievances with each other. So, this can be a role an important role of social psychology even at the workplaces. It can be in terms of health and education that how social factors or psychological factors in the area of health can enhance human behavior or improve human behavior by understanding the psychological processes. It can be in terms of education while in relationship with between teacher and student and how that education policies can enhance the mental state of the students and it can be law that how different kind of laws can help in the upliftment of society in different manner.

So, this is how the field of social psychology has its significant development from late 19th century to till date. Next comes the historical development of social psychology in much more detail that what kind of conceptualization has taken place since its evolution. So, if we talk about the early 1908 to 1939 it was found that social behavior stems from innate tendencies and instincts definitely social behavior or human behavior if we talk about the behaviors are very much innate we do not acquire them. It is a natural process that how a person will respond to any situation. So, during this time some emphasis was made by Alport while emphasizing on the value of experimentation based on social facilitation effect which we have already discussed that how social facilitation as a phenomenon evolved in the area of psychology.

During this era only Sherriff also focused on other psychological factors such as social norms and conformity that is how certain rules and regulations people abide and follow to maintain the membership of any group or society and at the same time people have this tendency to comply with the rules. So, that they tend to continue the membership of the group and also experience a sense of belongingness in terms of the relation with the other group members. And later on there was another development a major and significant development by Curtin level at all which emphasized on leadership and group process that how leadership in any group can enhance and modulate human behavior based on different kinds of leadership and identifying the situation that means which situation will fit which kind of leadership style. So, in the in the late 1940s to 1960s there was again an expansion of scope that every aspect of social behavior was included in the research. In 1948 a revolution got underway favoring human behavior as thoughtful and purposive rather than guided by instincts.

So, Curt level's experimental work was put up in a advantageous position and fully came of age and the study of the influence of groups and group membership of an individual behavior in relation to personality traits was also very much focused. So, this is how the development took place in late 1940s to 1960 that how personality also became a major factor in the area of social psychology along with Curt level's theory and how individual behavior and personality traits work in relation to enhance or identify social behavior of an individual. At the same time Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance also came into existence. So, this is how this development of cognitive dissonance theory also came into existence during this time. Next comes that how social psychology evolved as a matured field of psychology in the late 1970s and 80s and it was observed that the rapid pace of change of the last decade accelerated and new topics and perspectives emerged such as attribution which is again a very important factor to be discussed in social psychology that how we infer causes in respect of human behavior that what reason can be ascertained to an individual's behavior or it can be a to an individual's one's own behavior that why a person behaved or responded in a particular situation.

So, one needs to attribute certain reasons to understand human behavior that why a person is behaving in a particular manner. So, attribution theory was a major focus during this time. It refers to how to infer the causes of others behavior, the gender differences and environmental psychology, the growing influence of cognitive perspective that is how we collect information and interpret social information based on a particular situation and its growing emphasis on personal health, legal process, work settings, education and population studies. So, this was another acceleration in the area of social psychology in the year 1970s to 1980s. And next comes in 1990 and beyond two major trends from the past decade continued namely cognitive perspectives and its increasing interest in application, the study of effective states in determining social behavior and multicultural perspectives that means the study of universal and cultural social behaviors also came into limelight.

And the current trends that deals with evolutionary social psychology, the changing world technology and human social behavior, neuro cognitive perspective and social behavior. The third the most important thing to identify is the neuro cognitive perspective. This aims to understand how structure and function of brain relates to specific social and psychological process that means what kind of information an individual interprets in a particular social situation, how the brain interprets that particular information and how human behavior is again processed in that particular social situation. This is a neuro cognitive perspective of social psychology which is a recent trend of researches that are being conducted in this area. So, this is how gradually social psychology has evolved till date and how each and every development has established social psychology as a major branch of psychology.

Next comes scope of social psychology. So, how we can understand human behavior in any social situation? So, what are the perspectives that are taken into consideration when we talk about the scope of social psychology? The most important perspective is attitude that means the evaluation of various aspects of the social world. It can be personal life, it can be professional life, it can be any personal domain, professional domain or any area where the

person tend to evaluate his own situation or evaluate the particular situation and then try to create a best fit for himself or herself. So, attitudes are defined as learned global evaluation of a person, object, place or issue that influence thoughts and actions. If it is positive evaluation the behavioral response will be positive. If the evaluation is negative then the action decision making will also be negative.

If it is neutral the person would collect more information to evaluate the situation and then come to a particular decision or action. So, this is attitude. So, attitudes are the basic expression of approval or disapproval or favorableness or unfavorableness or likes or dislikes. For example, liking a chocolate or liking a particular chocolate. Anybody would say that I like normal chocolate but people have specific liking for dark chocolate.

So, this is attitude where you are evaluating either chocolate or dark chocolate. So, people have favorableness or unfavorableness or liking or disliking with every minute detail of the object or situation or person and then only the person will respond to any situation. So, based on attitudes social psychologists have also studied attitude formation based on social learning. For instance attitude can be changed or modulated or regulated based on punishment, based on rewards, based on parental practices. For example, any mother or child going to the market and every time when the mother is giving a frowning expression to a particular shopkeeper in the market with the gradual process of observation the child will also understand and learn that frowning expression towards that particular shopkeeper.

So, this is actually attitude formation based on social learning or parental practices and how people tend to form different kind of attitudes. Now, these attitudes can be in form of observation, it can be in form of punishment, it can be in form of rewards as well. So, this requires lot of conditioning, long term process where the person is interacting with a particular situation and how person tends to evaluate the person and situation and then come to its own action. In the same example with the continuous observation of the child that whenever I am going to a particular market my mother gives a frowning expression to this particular shopkeeper. Now based on this understanding the child also learns to give a frowning expression to the same shopkeeper and this can be an attitude to discriminate or to have a stereotypical response towards that shopkeeper.

So, this is how attitudes are being formed, changed or regulated. At the same time this can also entails the study of conformity that is adjusting one's own behavior to align with the norms of the group. So as the membership of the group can be maintained, this is conformity. Even if 10 people in the group are giving wrong answer to one particular object then people will follow or make it a point to give only the wrong responses so that they are aligning with the norms of the group while knowing the correct answer. Interpersonal attraction that is based on regular interactions how people tend to develop similarity and in their attitude, preferences in their attitudes and how similarity and preferences will lead to liking or even getting into a loving relationship that is the scope of interpersonal attraction that is one's attitude towards another person and this interpersonal evaluation fall along a dimension that ranges from dislike and starts with initial contacts and is concerned with emotional responses, similarities and present interactions.

Then it also entails the study of social perception that is seeking to know and understand other persons in a particular situation that means when we are interacting with different people in a group how we perceive other person based on their personality, based on their information they are providing, based on the feedback we give to them or they receive from us and how the person is being perceived by the other person. It can be in terms of discrimination, it can be in terms of stereotypes, it can be in terms of prejudice as well. When we have a certain evaluation of person that he or she is coming from a particular group or category then we tend to have a very specific evaluation of that person and we tend to maintain either maintain a distance or maintain relation with that person. So prejudice that is an attitude which is usually negative towards the members of the same group based solely on their members in that group. So these are the various aspects of social perception in terms of discrimination, stereotypes and prejudice.

The other scope is interpersonal relationships which questions that why people sometimes act in pro-social way that is helping the other person in a way that the person also does not require something in return. It is something that they do it for the sake of others. Others often look at why people help others as well as why they sometimes refuse to help or cooperate. It is not only about pro-social behavior, it is also about cooperation, it is also about competition that why people indulge in competition and why people tend to refrain from cooperating to other person. It can also deal with the bystander effect and reciprocal altruism are related topics of social phenomenon in the subject area of pro-social behavior.

It also focuses on aggression and violence which can be defined as any behavior that is intended to harm another human being. So this is the scope of social psychology when it comes to interpersonal relationships which entails not only liking, disliking or exhibiting range of emotional responses. It also talks about being altruistic, it also talks about being pro-social, it also talks about being a bystander and how you are being influenced to help the other person on the road itself. It can be an example, it can be about aggression and it can be about violence.

And the other scope is interpersonal attraction. This is the major area in the study of people's relations to each other which is interpersonal attraction that when people are attracted to each other then that attraction can have different kind of degrees. It can be only a distant attraction, it can be about belongingness, it can be about absolute merger in terms of complete unity and how people tend to continue that relationship. So this entails forces that lead people to like each other, establish relationships and in some cases also fall in love. Therefore we can say that social psychologists focus on areas of physical attraction, love in terms of intimacy, passion and commitment and social exchanges. Now here social exchanges can be in form of liking each other and saying hi and hello in a hallway.

It can be at workplaces as well that two people tend to enjoy each other's company and there are social exchanges. So these are the different aspects of interpersonal attraction in any social situation that a person encounters and how a person deals with the situation based on these aspects. It can be interpersonal attraction, it can be interpersonal relationships, it can be about being social, it can be about altruistic, being altruistic, it can be about violence, aggression or it can be about attitude formation. So this is the scope of social psychology in different areas

and which we will take up further to discuss these issues in detail. So I will end my discussion here and we will continue in the next class. Thank you.