

## Socialization of prejudice in Hindu and Muslim children

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### Abstract

The present study was designed to analyze the role of mother in the development of prejudice. The study was carried out with 100 Hindu and 100 Muslim children, aged 3 to 12 years. In order to examine the role of mother on the development of prejudice, mothers of 50 Hindu and 50 Muslim children were also studied by using Model Identification Task (MIT), Projective Prejudice Task (PPT) and Prejudice scale. Results indicated that children of both Hindu and Muslim groups become aware of their own group identity as well as that of others at an early age. It also suggests that the development of prejudice in Hindu and Muslim children tends to be significantly linked with the prejudice of their mothers.

**KEYWORDS:** Social identity, inter-group, schooling, categorization, prejudice.

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### Introduction

Very early in our lives, we begin to learn who we are. We develop a social identity, or a self-definition that includes how we conceptualize ourselves, including how we evaluate ourselves (Deaux, 1993; Ellemers, Wilke & VanKnippenberg, 1993). Social identity seems to evolve from the knowledge of one's membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Tajfel, 1982). The social identification model considers social categorization as a cognitive process, which produces stereotypical perceptions. An important facet of stereotyping is an enhancement of the contrast between groups as the basic consequence of categorization (Campbell, 1956).

One offshoot of social identification is prejudice, which is reflected in a low preference and interpersonal attraction among the members of different groups. Many theorists view prejudice as a natural and inevitable consequences of the functional need to categorize individuals into their respective social groups. Prejudice is an expression of unfavourable attitudes towards an individual or individuals because of their membership of particular group (Augoustious & Walker, 1995; Brown, 1995). It is believed that prejudice is a part of the social heritage of the developing child, and it is transmitted across generations as an important component of the accumulated knowledge of society through family, school, neighborhood, community and religious institutions.

Studies carried out in western countries have thrown light mainly on the origin of racial identity and prejudice. Development of identity and prejudice in India seems to follow a different pattern because of certain peculiar features of the social context in which the groups are nurtured. Studies have generally compared Hindu and Muslim groups, using the majority-minority dimension of group categorization. It is indicated that

Muslims constitute the largest single minority group where ethnicity and religion seems to be fused together (Bano & Mishra, 2006).

Singh and Khan (1979) suggest that development of religious prejudice in children involves two over-lapping stages: (a) Religious identity formation and (b) Religious prejudice formation. Religious identity formation refers to the awareness of belonging to a particular religious group. This stage appears at an early age in childhood. At this stage, children not only display the knowledge of their own and others' religious identity, but also display awareness of some of the ethnic biases (e. g., words and concepts used to describe the members of other groups).

Lambert and Klineberg (1967) found that the ethnic attitudes of younger children (6 years) were focused on clearly observable external or physical features (e. g., clothing, language, social customs). By the age 10, there was a shift to less observable internal or psychological features (e.g., ideologies, personality characteristics). Much differentiation in the responses of older children was also noted, perhaps due to their enhanced and refined language skills.

Indian studies indicate that children generally pick up a large part of their knowledge about social identity and prejudice from their parents. Singh (1979) found that socialization of prejudice took place mainly in the family and largely through parental models. It was suggested that prejudice is learned and it develops in much the same manner and through the same basic mechanism as other attitudes (Allport, 1954; Bandura, 1977 & Mischel, 1966). According to the social learning view, children acquire negative attitudes toward various social groups because they hear such views expressed by parents, teachers and others, and because they are directly rewarded for adopting these views. "Prejudice was not taught by the parent, but was caught by the child from the infected environment" (Allport, 1954, 300p). Such a thing is quite possible because home is the place where frustrated and prejudice-prone personality is initially shaped. Social learning theory also focuses on individual differences. Hence its developmental pattern is likely to vary among children depending upon their specific experiences in the family, school, or the community at large.

In spite of interest in the childhood origin of prejudice, very little research has been done in this important area. The study reported here has been designed to analyze the role of socialization variables (e. g., parents) in the development of prejudice. The role of mother in the development of ethnic bias has been particularly in the focus of studies.

### **Sample**

The study was carried out with 100 Hindu and 100 Muslim children, aged 3 to 12 years. They were selected from some schools of Varanasi city using a quasi-randomization method. In order to study the development trend, children were divided into five age groups: 3-4 years, 5-6 years, 7-8 years, 9-10 years, 11-12 years. To fulfill the requirements of the sample design the schools in which Hindu and Muslim children were available, were identified. Twenty children of both Hindu and Muslim groups in each age group were selected randomly from the available lists. To assess the influence of mother on the development of social identity and prejudice, mothers of 50 Hindu and 50 Muslim children were also studied.

## Tools

Each child was tested with the help of a **Model Identification Task (MIT)** and a **Projective Prejudice Task (PPT)**.

**Model Identification Task (MIT)** was designed to elicit ethnic responses without directly asking children about their ethnic affiliation. By highlighting the traditional features and dressing styles two toy models were used to represent the members of the Hindu and Muslim groups. Children were administered the tasks individually. They were shown the models and asked to identify the individuals represented by them. The identification was attempted a second time by interchanging the dress of the models. Likings and preferences of children for these models and several behavioral characteristics of individuals represented by the models were also examined by asking a series of questions.

**Projective Prejudice Task (PPT)** consisted of 8 pictures, each depicting Hindu and Muslim children in situations that involved some degree of ambiguity. The children were shown the pictures and told a background story about each one of them. Children described in each story were given either a Muslim or a Hindu name. The children were described as the initiators of an action that led either to a positive or a negative consequence in each story. After listening to the story, children were asked to guess the child who might have initiated the action in the picture, and also tell who should be rewarded or punished for the outcome. Four of the pictures depicted negative outcome situations (e.g., stealing); the other four pictures depicted positive outcome situations (e.g., winning a trophy). Children in the picture were given a name (Hindu or Muslim) and the questions were always asked by referring to their names.

**Prejudice Scale** This scale was developed by Jahan, Bhardwaj and Saeeduzzafar (1986). In the present study, it was used to assess the magnitude of communal prejudice of the mothers. For each item the participant had to choose one of the five alternatives that ranged from "too much" (score = 5) to "the least" (scores = 1). A prejudiced response always received a higher weight, whereas a non-prejudiced response received a lower weight. Thus, the higher was the score on the scale, more prejudiced the individual would be. The total score for a subject was the sum of the weights obtained on various statements.

## Results

In this study, prejudice was measured in terms of liking and preference, positive evaluation of one's own group members, negative evaluation of other group members and the expression of hostile feelings toward the member of the outer group. The chi-square and t-test were used to examine the significance of difference in the pattern of responses. In order to examine the relationship between children's and mothers prejudice scores, an overall prejudice score was derived on MIT and PPT and correlation were computed.

Table 1 presents the response of Hindu and Muslim children on the MIT. No significant difference between Hindu and Muslim children on these measures (e.g., social awareness, basis of awareness, sources of awareness and preference) was noted. Most of the Hindu and Muslim children were aware of their own social identity as well as of others. They identified the model of their own and other group member more often on the basis of internal features than on the basis of external features. In both the Hindu and Muslim group, parents/family appeared to be the main source of knowledge of their

social identity. An overall preference for own group model over the other group model was evident in both the group.

Results obtained on the PPT are given in Table 2. although both the Hindu and Muslim children generally considered that positive outcome of the situation (reward) should go to their own group members, the tendency was significantly stronger in Hindu than Muslim children ( $t = 2.43, p < .01$ ). The mean score of Hindu children (mean = 8.94) was higher in comparison to that of the Muslim children (mean = 8.24). a significant difference ( $t = 3.88, p < .01$ ) between Hindu and Muslim children was noted on negative outcome stories suggesting that the tendency to prevent own group from negative outcome (punishment) was slightly more compelling among Muslim (mean = 8.64) than Hindu children (mean = 7.60).

Tables 3 and 4 present the distribution of Hindu and Muslim children respectively according to their own and their mothers' prejudice scores (both based on median split). The correlation turned out to be positive and the value indicated that children of highly prejudiced mothers also displayed high level of prejudice, whereas those of the less prejudiced mothers were less prejudiced.

### **Discussion**

The main focus of the present study was on those processes by which children come to know about their social identity and prejudice and a related objective was also to analyze the role of mother on it.

The findings of the study demonstrated that both Hindu and Muslim children were not only aware of their own social identity, but also of the other group quite from an early age. Even at the age of 3-4 years, they had learnt some of the words and concepts generally used to describe the members of the other group. For example, children had developed the idea that they were good because they belonged to one (e.g., Hindu) group, whereas others were bad, because they belonged to another (e.g., Muslim) group and visa-versa. Thus, a clear "us-them" distinction was present in the cognition of children at this early age. Children had also developed a liking for the members of their own social group, and a disliking for those who belonged to the other group. They generally preferred to live and interact with model representing their own group. Our finding suggests that in identifying groups, children's emphasis was more on internal than external features of the representative model. The basis of awareness, however, showed considerable variation according to age. This finding is similar to those reported in other studies. In a study on the development of religious identity, for example, Singh (1985) had found that religious identity began to take shape in the nursery schools, and got crystallized fairly early in childhood.

The findings of the present study suggested a positive relationship between social identity and prejudice. This relationship suggested that children of both Hindu and Muslim groups tended to have great admiration for their own social identity, which also possibly engaged them in "own group glorification". Berry, Kalin and Taylor (1977) have suggested that confidence in one's own individual identity can provide a basis for respect for others' identity. However, if this confidence in one's ethnic identity leads to "own group glorification", then the outcome is a subtle form of prejudice expressed in strong positive attitude towards the in-group and strong negative attitude towards the out-group (LeVine & Campbell, 1972).

Results obtained on the PPT revealed that both Hindu and Muslim children generally mentioned that positive outcomes of the situation should go to their own group members, suggesting that a tendency for "tokenism" was evident among them from an early age. Similarly, the tendency to prevent one's own group from negative outcomes (i.e., punishment) was also present among children from the same early age. It was also noted that tendency for "tokenism" was slightly more dominant among Hindu than Muslim children, whereas tendency to prevent own group from negative outcomes was slightly more compelling among Muslim than Hindu children. This may be explained on the basis of the power dynamics of the groups. DeRidder and Tripathi (1992) have indicated that in the case of co-existing groups, two general classes of power, called "resource power" and "retaliation power", are distinguished. The Hindu and Muslim are the co-existing groups in our country. As a majority group, Hindus generally perceive themselves as resourceful and want to offer any token to own group members. On the other hand, Muslims perceive themselves as a relatively deprived group and find unable to provide beneficial opportunities to their own group members. In this state of affairs, they try their best to prevent own group against any negative outcome. Others have also indicated that the salience of numerical minority status is aversive, and it motivates individuals to protect the validity of their in-group membership in an inter-group context (Brewer, 1991; Kenworthy & Miller, 2001). Our findings suggested that these tendencies developed quite early in the life of children, but Muslim children seemed to be more concerned with preventing their own group from negative outcomes at an early age (i.e., 3-4 years) than Hindu children. It was largely due to the feeling of insecurity and perceived threats to identity that Muslim children became more defensive of negative outcome for their group than Hindu children.

The results of the study showed that mothers played an important role in the development of prejudice in both Hindu and Muslim children. Since younger children stay close to mothers during the early years of life, their pervasive role in the acquisition of prejudice by children seems to be quite in place. A positive correlation obtained between children's and their mothers' prejudice scores in both Hindu and Muslim groups empirically attests the role of mother's in the development of prejudice. Spencer (1983) had found some relationship between Black children's ethnocentrism and their mothers' knowledge and beliefs.

The present study suggests that children of both Hindu and Muslim groups become aware of their own group identity as well as that of others at an early age. They prefer their own group and express negative feeling towards the outer group. Socialization of prejudice takes place in the family and largely through parental models. It also indicates that the development of prejudice in Hindu and Muslim children tends to be significantly linked with the prejudice of their mothers.

#### **Implication**

These findings seem to have several implications for understanding and managing inter-group relations in a culturally plural society of India. The findings suggest that ethnic/religious identity develops primarily during the early childhood years. Hence, intervention for prejudice should be introduced early in childhood, starting from preschool years. The period of 6- 7 years is more crucial for the development of social identity and prejudice; the findings suggest that children's identities become more internalized around this age that. This warrants the need for their cognitive modification

through appropriate exposure prior to this age. The findings bring out that parents are the main source of knowledge about social identity and its assertion in diverse ways. Hence, a correctional program for parents seems to be important.

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**Table1:** Distribution of responses of Hindu and Muslim children on awareness measures of the MIT.

| No | Variables                   | Responses in frequency |                         | Chi square |
|----|-----------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|------------|
|    |                             | Hindu children (N=100) | Muslim children (N=100) |            |
| 1. | <b>Ethnic Awareness</b>     |                        |                         |            |
|    | a. Yes                      | 92                     | 100                     | 0.24       |
|    | b. No                       | 08                     | -                       | -          |
| 2. | <b>Basis of Awareness</b>   |                        |                         |            |
|    | a. External features        | 32                     | 34                      | 0.00       |
|    | b. Internal features        | 60                     | 66                      | 0.38       |
|    | c. No response              | 08                     | -                       | -          |
| 3. | <b>Sources of Awareness</b> |                        |                         |            |
|    | a. Parents\Family           | 89                     | 92                      | 0.02       |
|    | b. Others                   | 11                     | 08                      | -          |
|    | c. No response              |                        |                         |            |
| 4. | <b>Preference</b>           |                        |                         |            |
|    | a. Own-group                | 89                     | 92                      | 0.02       |
|    | b. Other-group              | 11                     | 08                      | -          |

**Table 2:** Mean, SD, significance of difference (t-value) of Hindu and Muslim children on the PPT measures.

| Responses               | Hindu |      | Muslim |      | t-value |
|-------------------------|-------|------|--------|------|---------|
|                         | mean  | SD   | mean   | SD   |         |
| <b>Positive outcome</b> | 8.94  | 2.04 | 8.24   | 2.04 | 2.04**  |
| <b>Negative outcome</b> | 7.60  | 1.93 | 8.64   | 1.87 | 3.88**  |

\*\* p<.01

**Table 3:** Correlation between the prejudice level of Hindu mothers and their children.

| Children's Prejudice Scores | Mothers' Prejudice Level |            |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|------------|
|                             | Low Level                | High Level |
| Above Median                | 06                       | 10         |
| Below Median                | 19                       | 15         |

$r_t=.30$

**Table 3:** Correlation between the prejudice level of Muslim mothers and their children.

| Children's Prejudice Scores | Mothers' Prejudice Level |            |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|------------|
|                             | Low Level                | High Level |
| Above Median                | 06                       | 07         |
| Below Median                | 20                       | 10         |

$r_t=.14$

