Prejudice and Discrimination: Barriers of Social Cohesion

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Abstract

We as the citizens of democratic country have the privilege to enjoy all the fundamental rights given to us by our constitution without any discrimination on the basis of caste, cr4ed, gender, religion etc. But, still there are many among us who are looked down as "strangers" or "outsiders". This is the clear expression of discrimination or prejudice. When prejudice develops its effect can be very damaging both to the victims of prejudice and to the person who holds it. For example, many persons hold prejudice towards overweight individuals. Such persons receive lower ratings in job interviews or marriage prospects. We consider the effects of prejudice and discrimination on the subordinate group as the effects are more serious for them. The effects of prejudice are disparaging and wide ranging. We should consider that no one approach is going to solve the problem; we need to apply multimodal schemes for removing prejudice.

KEYWORDS:- Prejudice, Discrimination, Social Cohesion

Introduction

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the India emphasises the "indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity" and prohibits discrimination "based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation".

Intolerance threatens the social cohesion of plural and democratic societies. It reflects the extent to which we respect or reject social, ethnic, cultural and religious minorities. It marks out those who are "strange", "other" or "outsiders", who are not equal, less worthy. The most visible expression of intolerance and discrimination is prejudice. Indicators of intolerance such as prejudice, anti-democratic attitudes and the prevalence of discrimination consequently represent sensitive measures of social cohesion.

Prejudice is a negative attitude towards the members of some group, based solely on their membership in that group. In other words, a person who is prejudiced toward some social group tends to evaluate its members in a specific manner, merely because they belong to that group (McLeod, 2008). **Prejudice** is a baseless and usually negative attitude toward members of a group. Common features of prejudice include negative feelings, stereotyped beliefs and a tendency to discriminate against members of the group (Cherry, 2015). When prejudice develops its effect can be very damaging both to the victims of prejudice and to the person who holds it. For example, many persons hold prejudice towards overweight individuals. Such persons receive lower ratings in job interviews or marriage prospects.

Discrimination is the differential treatment of individuals considered to belong to a particular social group. (Wolff, 1948) . It is an overt behaviour, while prejudice is an attitude. Both these terms are closely related and both are often present in same interaction.

A prejudiced person may not act on their attitude. Therefore, someone can be prejudiced towards a certain group but not discriminate against them. Also, prejudice includes all three components of an attitude (affective, behavioural and cognitive), whereas discrimination just involves behaviour. An extreme example of prejudice and discrimination would be the Nazi's mass murder of Jews in the Second World War, or the killings of Catholics by Protestants and Protestants by Catholics (McLeod, 2008). Prejudice is also sometimes depended on the social context. (Minard,1952) investigated how social norms influence prejudice and discrimination. The behaviour of black and white miners in a town in the southern United States was observed, both above and below ground. It was found that below ground, where the social norm was friendly behaviour towards work colleagues, 80 of the white miners were friendly towards the black miners. Above ground, where the social norm was prejudiced behaviour by whites to blacks, this dropped to 20, which clearly stated that the white miners were conforming to different norms above and below ground. Whether or not prejudice is shown depends on the social context within which behaviour takes place.

Three Steps to Prejudice

There are many sources for determining the prejudice which are broadly categorized in to three i.e. social, cognitive and psychological sources.

SOCIAL SOURCES	COGNITIVE SOURCES	PSYCHOLOGICAL SOURCES
• Competition • Social Learning • Social Categorization • Social Identity Theory	• The Role of Stereotypes • Illusory Correlation	• Frustration • Projection • Authoritarian Personality • Need for Status and Belonging

Three Steps to Prejudice

1. **Social sources: The elements of social sources are explained below:**
   - **Competition:** - According to the view of realistic conflict theory by Bobo (1983), prejudice stems from competition among the social groups, overvalued commodities or opportunities. Prejudice develops out of the struggle over job, housing, good schools and other desirable outcomes.
   The theory further suggest that as such competition continues, the members of the groups involved view each other in increasingly negative terms , they label each other as inferior, morally and drawn the boundaries between themselves and their opponents. The result is that hatred gradually develops into emotion laden prejudice.
   - **Social Learning**
   According to this view, children acquire negative attitude towards various social groups because they hear such views expressed by their

parents, teachers, friends and others. The mass media also plays a role in the development of prejudice.

- **Social Categorization**

  People generally divide the social world into distinct categories- us and them or in- group and out- group. They view other persons as belonging to either their own group or to another group. Such distinctions are based on many criteria like race, religion, gender, age, occupation, income etc. Categorization simplifies perception and cognition related to the social world by detecting inherent similarity relationships or by imposing structure on it (or both).

- **Social Identity Theory**

  According to this theory, each of us strives to enhance the self esteem, which has two components- a personal identity and social identities. By this, people can boost their self esteem through their own personal achievements or through affiliation with successful groups (Tajfel, 1979)

2. **Cognitive Sources: H**ere, the sources which are related to mind set of people are given below:

   - **The Role of Stereotypes**

     It refers to cognitive framework consisting of knowledge and beliefs about specific social groups. It involves generalization about the typical characteristics of members of various social groups. Once a stereotype is activated the traits come readily to mind.

   - **Illusory Correlation**

     It is referred to as the tendency to overestimate the rate of negative behaviours in relatively small group. This involves perceiving links between variables that are not really there. It helps to understand how negative behaviours are often attributed by majority group members to the members of minority groups.

3. **Psychological Sources:** Following elements are related to psychological sources

   - **Frustration**

     Psychodynamic theory treats prejudice as displaced aggression**.** When people are unable to express their anger and aggression resulted by frustration on the real source of frustration, it is directed at a safer and convenient target.

   - **Projection**

     Many people have traits which they perceive as undesirable. When they cannot always rid themselves of these traits, they may relieve themselves by attributing the unwanted traits to someone else, often to some other group in society.

   - **Authoritarian Personality**

     The theory proposed by Adorno et al (1950) treats prejudice as a personality disorder. The emotional needs that contribute to prejudice are said to dominate in the authoritarian personality.

   - **Need for Status and Belonging**

     To perceive ourselves as having status, we need people around us. Thus one psychological benefit of prejudice is a feeling of superiority. Prejudice is often greater among those low on the socio economic status and among those whose positive self image is being threatened.

**Consequences of Prejudice**

The harmful effects of prejudice and discrimination are not limited to the minorities. Even the lives of the dominant group are also affected. We consider the effects of prejudice and discrimination on the subordinate group as the effects are more serious for them. The effects of prejudice are destructive and wide ranging.

- The primary effects of prejudice are on the ***individual's personality***. They develop protective reactions like riots, strikes etc against the prejudice. Minority protests sometimes take violent form. A person may join organizations to help fight against discrimination and get involved in marches, protest and media exposure (Quiquero , 2013)

- Prejudice influences ***interpretations of incoming information***. For example, it influences attributions about a group's success and failures. Biases lead people to attribute internal factors for an in group's success and external factors for its failures and vice versa for the opposite group.

- It often leads to ***prevalence of unemployment***, ***growing economic barriers*** and ***low growth rate.***
  - ***Skills and abilities*** which are useful to the society remains hidden and are not utilized to its best.

Ways to reduce prejudice

As prejudice seems to be learned fairly early in life, another approach to change prejudice is to change socialization. Parents and other adults must be discouraged who serve as models for children to develop prejudice. Main step is to convince parents that they need to modify their words and behaviour so they can reduce the levels of prejudice. Formal education is also one form of socialization where intervention of schools can be very effective in reduction of prejudice.

- Some prejudice reduction strategies rely on creating a sense of internal conflict. One such strategy involves holding people accountable for their prejudice. Prejudice has been shown to decrease when people are asked to provide concrete reasons for prejudiced beliefs. The process of generating these reasons gets people to consider the irrational nature of their prejudiced beliefs (Bodenhausen et al 1994)

- There are several strategies that attempt to recondition or retrain implicit prejudiced attitudes – attitudes that exist outside of a person's conscious awareness. One way of reconditioning implicit attitudes is through classical conditioning, whereby you pair a representation of a stigmatized group with positive images or positive words (Kawakami et al, 2000)

- When people are told that experts believe personality traits are changeable and learned, they decrease in their stereotyping of stigmatized groups.(Levy, 1998)

- (Allport 1954) proposed classic contact theory in which four specific conditions were identified that might help in reducing prejudice.
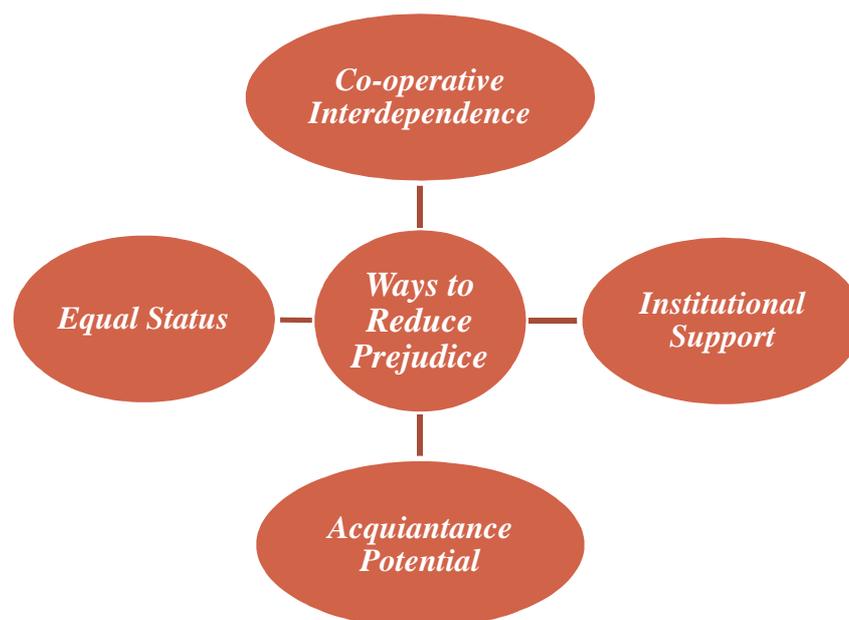
Ways to Reduce Prejudice

> **Co-operative interdependence:-**
>> Members of two groups need to be working together for common goals. They need to be depending on each other's efforts rather than to compete for scarce resources

> **Equal Status:-**
>> Contact must be between individuals with equal status. If the traditional status imbalance is maintained , prejudice cannot easily be broken down. Lower level of contact often simply continues traditional stereotypes and prejudice.

> **Acquaintance Potential:-**
>> The contact must have acquaintance potential. It should be of sufficient frequency, duration and closeness to allow for the development of friendship. Occasional contact is not that much helpful

> **Institutional Support:-**
>> There should be institutional support for the contact. Authorities like states school and social associations should endorse against prejudice.

Final Words

Prejudice is a negative attitude towards the members of some group, based solely on their membership in that group. The sources of prejudice are many relating to socializing cognitive and psychological factors. The effects of prejudice are very destructive and wide ranging. When prejudice takes place its effects can be very damaging to the victims of prejudice and to the person who holds it. Several cognitive techniques seem to be very effective in reducing prejudice. One must remember that no one approach is going to solve the problem; we need to apply multimodal strategies for reducing prejudice.

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