

Research Paper

Social Contact, Perceived Discrimination and Inter-group Attitude of Adolescents in Traditional and Modern Schools

Bapi Biswas^{1*}, Shabana Bano²

ABSTRACT

Social contact, perceived discrimination and inter-group attitude were investigated in the present study. A sample of 232 Hindu and Muslim adolescents was taken from modern and traditional schools age-ranged 14-20 years (mean age=16.77, SD=1.46). They were examined using social contact, perceived discrimination and inter-group attitude scales. Result reported that both Hindu and Muslim adolescents of traditional schools have less social contact, felt more perceived discrimination and showed negative attitude towards the out-group as compared to those Hindu and Muslim adolescents who attend modern schools. It also revealed that Muslim adolescents have more out-group favourable attitude than Hindu adolescents both in modern and traditional schools.

Keywords: Attitude, Perceived Discrimination, Social Contact, Social Distance, Schools

The world is meeting with various challenges in the society of multiculturalism. India is one amongst those countries where diverse culture flourished and nurtured since ages. There are probably no more serious challenges to social stability and cohesion in the contemporary world than the management of inter-group relations within culturally plural societies. Ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity are common place in most of countries. Successful management of inter-group relation depends on many factors including a research-based understanding of psychological features of the groups that are in contact for example Hindu and Muslim groups in our cultural context (Mishra, Bano & Tripathi, 2017).

One theme has remained consistent throughout in social psychological research of inter-group relations how we think and predict about the social world? Social identity of people in this country is largely conceptualized both in terms of their original roots (e.g., homeland) and cultural characteristics (language, religion). One offshoot of social identity is prejudiced that learnt through socializing agents, for instance, family, parents, schools (Bano & Mishra, 2014). According to Tajfel, Billing, Bundy and Flament (1971), mere categorization is sufficient to elicit in-group bias and inter-group discrimination. Tajfel's minimal group paradigm (Tajfel, Billing, Bundy and Flament (1971) suggests that mere categorization into in-group and out-group to oneself is enough to differentiate the own-group (i.e., 'us') from

¹Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India

²Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India

*Corresponding Author

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other group (i.e., 'them') and can also lead to own group bias. Therefore, category differentiation can satisfy the motivation to clarify and simplify the social world, whereas social identity theory can provide the motivational explanation for the in-group favouring over the out-group as a desire for positive distinctiveness. It was assumed that people prefer to have positive self-concept (i.e., positive self-esteem) that derived from the group belongingness (i.e., social identity). They generally favour their in-group and derogate out group in order to enhance their self-esteem and maintain positive distinctiveness from out group (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Augoustinos & Walker, 1995). In order to maintain positive social identity, individuals are more prone to make biased attribution to explain the behaviour of the members of in-group and out-group (DeRidder, Schrujjer & Tripathi, 1992; Jackson, 2002; Hogg, Abrams, Otten & Hinkle, 2004; Bano & Mishra, 2014).

Perceived threat and discrimination determine which emotion elicits behaviour that adequately deals with the situation (Kamans, Otten & Gordijn, 2010). When confronted with a physically threatening out group, fear elicits avoidance reactions in powerless groups, when valuable resources are threatened, anger makes powerless group members to confront the out group, at least when they strongly identify with their group. Perceived threat is a function of economic conditions and of the size of subordinate group relative to the dominant group (Quillian, 1995). It was demonstrated the importance of perceived inter-group threat and discrimination in explaining most of the variation in prejudice (Quillian, 1995). The meta-analysis, involving 95 samples related five different threat types (realistic threat, symbolic threat, inter-group anxiety, negative stereotype, and group esteem threat, distinctive threat) showed positive relationship between threat and negative out-group attitudes (Reik, Mania & Gaertner, 2006). It was found that perceived threat to social identity and valued resource increase ethnocentrism (Grant, 1992).

However, the knowledge about the out group influences the attitude of the individual towards the that group (Stephan & Stephan, 1985).

Social contact is an important tool to know about the members of out-group. The contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Hewstone, Cairns, Voci, hamberger, & Niens, 2006; Pettigrew, 1997, 1998), proposed that contact is an important strategy to reduce prejudice and improve positive inter-group relation. Optimal contact for improved inter-group relation consists long term conversation between different group members beyond the superficial interaction. People exchange personal information or talk about each other's identities, spend some time together, share a common goal or share an interest and participate or attend family function and celebrate ceremonies of each other (Hewstone, Cairns, Voci, hamberger, & Niens, 2006; Mishra, Bano & Tripathi, 2017). Individuals are able to exchange information, thoughts and feelings through close interaction with out-group members, that can lead them to realize commonalities with out-group members and facilitate re-categorization (Welker, Slatcher, Baker & Aron, 2014). Thus, the present study is designed to examine the social contact, perceived discrimination and inter-group attitude of adolescents in traditional and modern schools.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The study was carried out in West Bengals' Nadia and Hooghly district. A purposive sample of 232 participants (Hindu=114 and Muslim=118), age ranged 14-20 years (Mean age=

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16.77, SD= 1.46) and belong to grade 9th to 12th were taken from modern and traditional schools. Traditional/religious schools (*Sanskrit/Matha* and *Arabic/Madarassa*) represent those where the students and teacher belong to a particular religion. The main focus of teaching on the learning of religious text, religious law and religious history along with the teaching mathematics, science, language etc. While modern schools are those which follow the pattern of Western education system, where the students and teachers came from diverse cultural background.

Measures

The following measures were used in this present study:

1. **Perceived Discrimination Scale** (Berry, 2005, Mishra, Bano & Tripathi, 2017): It has 5 items that measured perceived discrimination in reference to out-group. The participants were asked to rate their answer on 5-point scale for each statement i.e., 1= Strongly disagree, 2= Somewhat disagree, 3= Neutral/ Not sure, 4= Somewhat agree, 5= Strongly agree,
2. **Social Contact Scale** (Berry, 2005, Mishra, Bano & Tripathi, 2017): It consisted of 6 items which were divided in two category (a) “How many close friends do you have”? (b) “how often do you meet with”? The participants rated their response with reference to their close friends on five-point scale i.e., 1= None, 2= Only one, 3= A few, 4= Some, 5= Many; They were also rated their response using 5-point scale for the question “how often the subject meet his/her friends” as 1= Never, 2= Rarely, 3= Sometimes, 4= Often, 5= Always.
3. **Attitude Scale** (Berry, 2005, Mishra, Bano & Tripathi, 2017): This attitude scale has a single item to assess participants’ in-group and out-group attitude using 0 degree to 100 degrees rating scale. Higher number denotes the favourable attitudes toward the member of a group while lower number denotes unfavourable attitude. The participants were asked to evaluate the members of in-group and out-group using 0–100-degree thermometer.

Table 1: Sample items

Scale	Sample items	Total item	Score range	α -value
Perceived Discrimination Scale	I think that Muslims have behaved in an unfair or negative way (for Hindu participants)	5	5-25	.71 (Hindu sample)
	I think that Hindu have behaved in an unfair or negative way (for Muslim participants)			.78 (Muslim sample)
Social Contact Scale	Close Muslim friends	6	6-30	.73 (Hindu sample)
	Close Hindu friends			.87 (Muslim sample)
Attitude Scale	Provide a number between 0 and 100 to indicate your attitude toward the member of in-group and out-group	1	0-100	.76 (Hindu sample) .77 (Muslim sample)

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RESULTS

The data was analysed using the 2 (Hindu, Muslim) x 2(traditional, modern) ANOVA in order to examine the difference between religion and schools.

Table 2: ANOVA summary on the measures of Perceived Discrimination

Variables	Groups				F-ratios
	Hindu		Muslim		
	Modern School	Traditional School	Modern School	Traditional School	
Perceived Discrimination Mean	9.85	10.08	10.08	15.54	Religion= 26.92** Schooling= 26.92**
SD	(3.05)	(4.63)	(5.05)	(3.57)	Religion×Schooling= 22.74**

**p<0.01, *p<0.05, df= 1, 232

Table 2 revealed significant difference between Hindus and Muslims ($F_{1, 232} = 26.92, p < 0.01$), indicating that Muslim adolescents (mean=12.81, SD=5.14) had more perceived discrimination rather than Hindu adolescents (mean= 9.97, SD= 3.93). Significant difference between schools ($F_{1, 232} = 26.92, p < 0.01$) reported that adolescents of traditional schools (mean=12.81, SD=4.94) had stronger perceived discrimination as compared to those who were studying in modern schools (mean=9.97, SD=4.19). Interaction effect was significant between religion and schools ($F_{1, 232} = 22.74, p < 0.01$), suggesting that Muslim students of traditional schools (mean=15.54, SD=3.57) felt more perceived discrimination as compared to Hindus of traditional (mean=10.08, SD=4.63) and modern schools (mean=9.85, SD=3.05) as well as Muslims of modern schools (mean=10.08, SD=5.05).

Table 3: ANOVA summary on the measures of in-group Social Contact

Variables	Groups				F-ratios
	Hindu		Muslim		
	Modern School	Traditional School	Modern School	Traditional School	
In-group Social Contact Mean	9.40	9.88	9.40	9.30	Religion= 4.46* Schooling= 1.98
SD	(0.94)	(0.49)	(1.00)	(1.42)	Religion×Schooling=4.67*

**p<0.01, *p<0.05, df= 1, 232

Table 3 shows significant difference between Hindus and Muslims ($F_{1, 232} = 4.46, p < 0.05$), shows that Muslim adolescents had less in-group social contact (mean=9.35, SD=1.23) than

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Hindu adolescents (mean=9.64, SD=0.78). No significant effect is reported between schools (F1, 232=1.98, p>0.05) for in-group social contact of adolescents of traditional schools (mean=9.57, SD=1.12) and modern schools (mean=9.40, SD=0.97). Result shows that the interaction effect of religion and schools (F1, 232=4.67, p<0.05) was significant, suggesting that Hindus of traditional schools (mean=9.88, SD=0.49) had more in-group social contact as compared to Muslims of traditional (mean=9.88, SD=0.49) and modern schools (mean=9.40, SD=1.00) as well as Hindus of modern schools (mean=9.40, SD=0.94).

Table 4: ANOVA summary on the measures of out-group Social Contact

Variables	Groups				F-ratios
	Hindu		Muslim		
	Modern School	Traditional School	Modern School	Traditional School	
Out-group Social Contact Mean	7.09	4.42	8.45	5.16	Religion= 12.90** Schooling= 102.58**
SD	(2.07)	(2.40)	(1.61)	(2.69)	Religion×Schooling=1.11

**p<0.01, *p<0.05, df= 1, 232

Reported result in Table 4 also shows a significant difference between Hindus and Muslims (F1, 232 = 12.90, p<0.01) for out-group social contact, suggesting that Muslim adolescents (mean = 6.81, SD = 2.76) are more likely to have out-group social contact as compared to Hindu adolescents (mean = 5.71, SD = 2.61). Significant difference between schools (F1, 232 = 102.58, p<0.01) reported that adolescents in traditional schools (mean = 4.79, SD=2.57) had lesser out-group social contact compared to those attending modern schools (mean = 7.79, SD = 1.96). Though the interaction effect between religion and schools was not significant (F1, 232 = 1.11, p>0.05), revealed that Muslim students in modern schools (mean= 8.45, SD = 1.61) had more out-group social contact than Hindus in modern (mean = 7.09, SD = 2.07) and traditional schools (mean = 4.42, SD = 2.40) as well as Muslims in traditional schools (mean = 5.16, SD = 2.69).

Table 5: ANOVA summary on the measures of in-group Attitude

Variables	Groups				F-ratios
	Hindu		Muslim		
	Modern School	Traditional School	Modern School	Traditional School	
In-group attitude					Religion=6.98** Schooling=0.004

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Mean	95.10	90.33	94.56	99.64	Religion×Schooling=8.47**
SD	(15.58)	(15.50)	(13.12)	(1.82)	

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, $df = 1, 232$

Findings of Table 5 denotes that there is significant difference between Hindus and Muslims ($F_{1, 232} = 6.78, p < 0.01$) for in-group favourable attitude, suggests that Muslim adolescents (mean = 97.15, SD = 9.59) have more in-group favourable attitude compared to Hindus (mean = 92.64, SD = 15.65). Effect of schooling was not significant between Hindus and Muslims ($F_{1, 232} = 0.04, p > 0.05$) as well as adolescents of traditional schools (mean = 94.99, SD = 11.94) and of modern schools (mean = 94.87, SD = 14.25). Though the interaction effect of religion and school ($F_{1, 232} = 8.47, p < 0.01$) was significant, suggesting that Muslim adolescents of traditional schools (Mean = 99.64, SD = 1.82) had greater in-group favourable attitude as compared to Hindus of traditional (Mean = 90.33, SD = 15.50) and modern schools (Mean = 95.10, SD = 15.58) as well as Muslims of modern schools (Mean = 94.56, SD = 13.12).

Table 6: ANOVA summary on the measures of out-group Attitude

Variables	Groups				F-ratios
	Hindu		Muslim		
	Modern School	Traditional School	Modern School	Traditional School	
Out-group attitude Mean SD	52.43 (27.53)	48.84 (26.08)	64.46 (22.12)	44.57 (26.93)	Religion=1.12 Schooling=11.42** Religion×Schooling=5.38*

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, $df = 1, 232$

In Table 6, though significant difference was not reported between Hindus and Muslims ($F_{1, 232} = 1.12, p > 0.05$) for attitude towards out-group, Muslim adolescents (mean = 54.22, SD = 26.49) are likely to have more out-group social contact as compared to Hindu adolescents (mean = 50.72, SD = 26.33). Significant difference between schools ($F_{1, 232} = 11.42, p < 0.01$) reported that adolescents in traditional schools (mean = 46.71, SD = 26.48) had lesser out-group social contact compared to those attending modern schools (mean = 58.35, SD = 25.54). The interaction effect between religion and schools was significant ($F_{1, 232} = 5.38, p < 0.05$), reported that Muslim students in modern schools (mean = 64.46, SD = 22.12) had more favourable out-group attitude than Hindus in modern (mean = 52.43, SD = 27.53) and traditional schools (mean = 48.84, SD = 26.08) as well as Muslim adolescents in traditional schools (mean = 44.57, SD = 26.93).

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study indicated that traditional Hindu and Muslim adolescents had less out-group social contact than Hindu and Muslim adolescents of modern schools. With respect to schooling, traditional Hindu adolescents had less out-group social contact than traditional Muslim students. It also revealed that traditional Hindu and Muslim adolescents

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have more perceived discrimination in comparison to modern Hindu and Muslim adolescents. Also, it was found that traditional Hindu and Muslim adolescents had less favourable attitude towards out group; whereas Muslim adolescents of modern schools had more favourable attitude toward out-group than Hindu adolescents of modern schools. Both Hindu and Muslim groups had strong in-group favoritism, more in-group social contact and less perceived discrimination irrespective of their schooling.

Findings revealed that Hindu adolescents had less social contact and almost indifferent or negative attitude towards Muslim. The reason behind this may be that of misinformation or biased information about Muslim through social media (Van Bavel et al., 2021). Less social contact of Hindu adolescents of traditional schools may be due to the fact that Hindu population is more easily available because majority of the population is Hindu (70.54%) but Muslim (27.01%) population is not that easily available (West Bengal Census, 2011). Hence, there are limited opportunities available for traditional Hindu students for out group social contact. This may be the reason for their biased attitude (Festinger & Kelley, 1951; Sakal, N. & Ugurlu, O., 2002;) as out-group contact facilitated mutual acceptance (Bano, Mishra & Tripathi, 2022).

A greater perceived discrimination of Muslim students of traditional schools can be interpreted as their fear from contemporary incidences of mob-lynching in India. Muslim adolescents of Modern schools had more social out-group contact, behind this phenomenon there might be reason that majority of the population are Hindu, hence, Hindu friends are easily available They may not feel threaten from other Hindus. There is enough evidence that suggests groups approached separation in few contexts as well as wished to live together by borrowing the strength of each other's culture (Bano & Mishra, 2011). Traditional school's students perceived more discrimination than modern school's students, suggested that modern school students have more exposure with out-group members hence increased interaction may lessen the prejudice and many false perceptions about the opposite group members (Allport, 1954). It can be concluded that both Hindu and Muslim adolescents, who had out-group contact, showed positive out-group attitude and less perceived discrimination as compared to those who had less out-group contact.

Implication of the study

The findings of this study suggests that optimal out-group social contact has potential to reduce biases toward other group and promote harmonious inter-group relations.

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Conflict of Interest

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