Due to increased immigration, emigration and social mobility, there is now a wide diversity in many societies. Though diversity has many advantages, it has a lot of pitfalls too.

Although the terms stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination are used interchangeably, there are clear differences between them. Whereas stereotypes are the cognitive component of attitude towards a social group, prejudice is the affective component and discrimination the behavioral component. When studying these concepts, it is very important to include the target's perspective because it helps us in understanding interpersonal and intergroup aspects of prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination.

**What is a Stereotype?**

**Stereotype** - A conventional, formulaic, and oversimplified conception, opinion, or image. A partiality that prevents objective consideration of an issue or situation. A preconceived opinion; bias; sentence passed before proper examination of the circumstances.

Stereotypes can be either positive ("black men are good at basketball") or negative ("women are bad drivers"). But most stereotypes tend to make us feel superior in some way to the person or group being stereotyped. Stereotypes ignore uniqueness of individuals by painting all members of a group with the same brush.

Stereotypes function as **schemes** – the cognitive frameworks for perceiving and organizing information. Schemes relating to stereotypes organize and simplify information and provide a **framework** for prejudiced individuals to view others’ behaviour (Macrae, Milne, & Bodenhausen, 1994).

Stereotypes working like schemes mean that information consistent with the scheme is more conspicuous to the prejudiced individual or group and is remembered more easily than other information.

However, information inconsistent with the stereotype is **ignored and readily forgotten**. In addition, stereotypes determine how information is interpreted, to that even when people are exposed to data
contrary to their stereotype, they may interpret the information in a way that supports their prejudice (e.g., Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). Hence, a stereotype is the cognitive framework that maintains prejudice.

**Prejudice** – A prejudice evolves from a stereotype. Prejudices can be positive as well as negative. Positive stereotypes can also lead to discrimination but largely not as harmful as negative. Based on our stereotypes if we start forming hostile or negative opinions of others or when a person dislikes another for no good reason, or has formed a hostile opinion of someone before even getting to know them it is prejudice. It is in other words a negative judgment or opinion formed about an individual or group without knowledge of the facts.

Few Definitions of Prejudice

- **Allport (1954):** Ethnic prejudice is an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed towards a group as a whole or towards an individual because he is a member of that group.

- **Worchel et al. (1988):** An unjustified negative attitude toward an individual based solely on that individual's membership in a group.

**Discrimination** -- Treating people in a less favorable way because they are members of a particular group. Discrimination is prejudice in action. Discrimination involves behaviors such as in-group favoritism, intergroup violence, verbal abuse, name calling, and genocide etc. In a study by Eagly & Chaiken (1993) on attitude-behavior, it was found that people’s attitudes and their behavior do not often correspond very closely. Absence of overt discrimination thus does not mean the absence of underlying negative intergroup sentiments. Therefore, social categorization may be a necessary but is not the sufficient condition for intergroup discrimination.

U.S. Institutes of Medicine reviewed more than 100 studies and found that discrimination causes racial disparities in health care and causes higher death rates among minorities suffering from diabetes, and H.I.V. infection, cancer and heart disease (Smedley, Stith, & Nelson, 2002). It was also found that women earn an average of $.76 for every male dollar (Bowler, 1999) and face employment discrimination (Molotsky, 2000; Truell, 1997). There are many common characteristics of stereotypes and discrimination:
Both involve depersonalization – both stereotypes and prejudice involve a depersonalized view of the members of the out-group. Individuals are viewed only as members of a social category and not as unique individuals.

Both are socially shared – intergroup attitudes are shared within and across social groups (Banaji & Greenwald, 1994) and the content of stereotypes and prejudices becomes embedded in the culture of the society (Allport, 1994).

According to Brewer & Kramer (1985), prejudice involves an affective or emotional response to a particular group of people. On the other hand, discrimination involves specific behaviors toward members of a group which are unfair in comparison with behavior toward members of other groups. As a result, we tend to negatively evaluate the members of the out-group.

The perception of prejudice depends on whether we are a member of a group which is being unfairly treated or a member of the group who is doing the unfair treatment. Discrimination is one of the behavioral aspects of intergroup relations. Hence, one may be present without the other. On the other hand, the presence of discrimination is a fairly good indication that prejudice also exists. But not always.

Possible prejudicial effects of stereotypes are:
• Justification of ill-founded prejudices or ignorance.
• Unwillingness to rethink one's attitudes and behavior towards stereotyped group.
• Negative attitudes towards different social groups resulting in hatred, alienation.
• Preventing some people of stereotyped groups from entering or succeeding in activities or fields.

In simple words stereotypes distort our perceptions. Once a stereotype is activated, these traits come easily to the mind and will affect the way we perceive things. Another important ill effect is we will tend to attend more to stereotype–consistent information and reject information that does not confirm to the stereotype we have.

Thus, stereotypes obviously influence social judgments we make about the other group, they influence how much we like or dislike a person or a given group.

A prejudice is an extreme stereotype. The cognitive component is the stereotype; the affective component is a feeling of liking or disliking; the behavioural component is the various types of discriminatory action. Feelings and actions towards the social
groups can progress, according to Allport, in five stages:

(1) *Anti-locution* comprising such things as malicious gossips, verbal putdowns and nasty jokes;

(2) *avoidance*;

(3) *discrimination*—when the object of the stereotype is excluded from certain rights;

(4) *physical attack*;

(5) *extermination*.

Feelings and actions towards different social groups are fairly stable over time, which means that once you have a prejudice then you will keep it. Many research studies demonstrate that people often recall those facts that support their stereotype. Thus, a filtering process reinforces and sustains the prejudice.

**Why Do Stereotypes leading to Prejudice and discrimination persist?**

**Confirmation bias :**

- People look for confirming evidence to support the stereotype they hold

**Ethnocentrism :**

- The belief that one’s own ethnic group, nation, or religion, region or language is superior to all others and a corresponding disdain for all other groups.

- Aids survival by making people feel attached to their own group and willing to work on their group’s behalf.

**Intergroup conflict :**

- People favour ingroups over outgroups in order to enhance their self-esteem

- Our self-esteem has 2 components: 1) personal identity 2) social identities (based on the groups we belong to)

- People belittle “them” in order to feel secure about “us”.

**Roots of Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination**

1. **Social Sources of Prejudice**
Unequal Status: People’s perceptions always have to be analyzed carefully and critically and there can be several reasons why the society may be considered unequal. First of all, the inequality may be structurally reproduced. This means that the existing system in a society does not guarantee people justice principles that are promised by the state and expected by the people. It means that people’s basic needs in a society are not satisfied, equal liberties are not guaranteed, there is discrimination, no equal opportunity to get ahead in life and the input of people is not fairly rewarded. If structural inequality exists then everybody should notice that. Empirically it means that all or at least the majority of people in a society should perceive high inequality – independent of their own socio-economic position. The perceived inequality is often influenced by personal experiences. People who have a higher socio-economic position usually think they have achieved their status in a fair competition. On the other hand, people in a lower position in a society tend to think that the reasons for them to be unsuccessful are restrictions created by the society and the structural system. Generally it can be seen that people from the lower socio-economic status perceive more inequality and vice versa. So an assumption can be made that perceived inequality depends on the individual’s position in a society. There are many types of inequality that leads one group to perceive the other group as less equal. E.g. Racial inequality. Racial group – a category of people who have been singled out, by others or themselves, as inferior or superior, on the basis of subjectively selected physical characteristics such as skin color, hair texture and eye shape. E.g. White or non-white. Racism is a set of attitudes, beliefs and practices used to justify the superior treatment of one racial or ethnic group and the inferior treatment of another racial or ethnic group. Another very old and strong inequality that exists is gender inequality. Gender inequality leads to gender prejudice called sexism. It is a term coined in the mid-20th century, refers to the belief or attitude that one gender or sex
is inferior to, less competent, or less valuable than the other. Gender Prejudice is a universal phenomenon though more rampant in less advanced countries. India is a good example of rampant gender prejudice. In addition, today we have perceived regional and caste inequalities, religion, etc., all reasons for perceived inequalities to come into play. We see people from other religions as different and begin to associate negative characteristics with them.

- **The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy**
  - negative beliefs predict negative behavior (or problems in life)
  - If a person thinks we are clever or stupid or whatever, they will treat us that way.
  - If we are treated as if we are clever, stupid or whatever, we will act, and even become, this way.
  - The person has thus had their prophecy about us fulfilled!
  - This is also known as the **Pygmalion Effect**.

- **Direct inter-group conflict (competition as a source of Prejudice)**: It is sad but true that people want and value most good jobs, nice homes, high status, which is always in short supply. This fact serves as the oldest explanation for stereotypes and prejudice. This is the realistic conflict theory, the view that prejudice stems from direct competition between various social groups over valued commodities and opportunities.

- **The social learning view**: A second explanation for the origins of stereotype and prejudice is straightforward. It suggests that prejudice is learned and that it develops in the same manner and through the same basic mechanisms as other attitudes towards social groups because we hear such views expressed by parents, teachers and others and because they are directly rewarded for adopting such views. Children acquire negative attitudes toward various social groups through association, observational learning, operant conditioning, and direct and vicarious learning experiences. Parents, teachers, friends, the mass media all play roles in the development of prejudice. Consider how minority groups or the two genders have been portrayed in the media. Some even argue that we are "born" with a bias to perceive dark stimuli as more fearful than lighter stimuli or fair color.
Another reason is also conformity with social norms or with groups to which they belong. The development of stereotype and prejudice comes from this tendency. “If the members of my group dislike them, then so should I.”

- **Social categorization:** Us versus–Them Effect: Another perspective on the origins of stereotyping and prejudice begins with this basic fact that people generally divide the social world into two distinct categories Us and Them—social categorization.

  **Ingroup** is *us* and the **Outgroup** is *them*. Persons in the Ingroup are perceived favorably while those in the latter are perceived more negatively. This tendency to make more favorable and flattering attributions about members of one’s group than members about the other group is known as the ultimate attribution error. Research evidence shows that individuals seek to enhance their self-esteem by identifying with some special groups. And so the final result is inevitable, each group seeks to view itself better than the rivals. Thus, one of the important source of stereotyping and prejudice is to divide our world into two opposing camps.

- **Social Identity Theory: The Self – Esteem of Group Membership:**

  According to Tajfel (1982) and John Turner (1987), the groups to which we belong play a crucial role in maintaining our personal self-esteem. According to social identity theory, we use group membership as a source of self-worth and pride. Tajfel hypothesized that ingroup biases arise from our need for self-esteem. We often assume that our group is superior to others just to feel pride. As a result of which, our quest for a positive social identity leads us to inflate the positive aspects of the group to which we belong and belittle groups to which we do not belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Tajfel, 1974).

  As members of a group we evaluate our group positively. However, when we perceive a threat to our group, we respond by being derogatory to the source of the threat. Also, in such a situation we tend to identify more with our group and show increased prejudice towards members of the out-group. Some researchers have also shown that when men feel threatened by women their actions are affected by this (for e.g Rudman & Fairchild, 2004).
Social categorization plays a very important role in the origin of prejudice. Tajfel et al., (1971) showed that people could be divided into categories on almost any basis and this causes differing perceptions and actions towards one’s own and out-group.

Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood and Sherif (1961) conducted a study to see how prejudice develops between groups. The study began with boys arriving at the camp called Robbers Cave. These boys were then assigned to two groups and put in separate cabins. The boys in each of the cabins engaged in enjoyable activities unaware about the presence of the other group. Soon the boys developed strong attachment towards their group. In the second phase, a series of competitions were organized between the two groups. Very soon, tension between the groups started to rise from starting from name calling in the beginning to burning each other’s flags and wreaking havoc. In the final phase, the researchers tried to reduce the negative reactions which had developed due to the competitions. This was achieved when both the groups worked together to achieve super-ordinate goals. This led to reduction in tension between the groups.

- **Outgroup Homogeneity Effect:** Tendency for social perceivers to assume there is greater similarity among members of outgroups than among members of ingroups.

Sometimes we come across statements like you know what they are like? “They are all the same if you have met one you have met all”

this means members of out group are more similar than the ingroup.

2. **Emotional Sources of Prejudice**

- **Frustration and Aggression (The Scapegoat Theory)**
  - Pain and frustration (a blocking of a goal) often evoke hostility.
  - When the cause of our frustration is intimidating or unknown, we often redirect our hostility (displaced aggression)
  - Scapegoating is a hostile social - psychological discrediting routine by which people move blame and responsibility away from themselves and towards a target person or group.
  - It is also a practice by which angry feelings and feelings of hostility may be projected, via inappropriate accusation, towards others.
The target feels wrongly persecuted and receives misplaced vilification, blame and criticism; he is likely to suffer rejection from those who the perpetrator seeks to influence.

**Personality Dynamics**

Need for status, self-regard and belonging

- To perceive ourselves as having status, we need people below us.
- Psychological benefit of status is superiority

The authoritarian personality:

Adorno identified the authoritarian personality type as having these characteristics:

- The authoritarian personality does not want to take orders, their personality type wants to give orders.
- People with this type of personality seek conformity, security, stability.
- They become anxious and insecure when events or circumstances upset their previously existing world view.
- They are very intolerant of any divergence from what they consider to be the normal (which is usually conceptualized in terms of their religion, race, history, nationality, culture, language, etc.)

3. Cognitive Sources

Fundamental Attribution Error

In explaining others’ actions, we frequently commit the fundamental attribution error.

- We attribute people’s behavior so much to their inner dispositions that we discount important situational forces.
- The error occurs partly because our attention focuses on the persons, and not the situation.
- Essentially, the fundamental attribution error involves placing a heavy emphasis on internal personality characteristics to explain someone's behavior in a given situation, rather than thinking about external situational factors.

**Example**

- On a specific day a waitress is talking rude to her customers. The customers now think that she is a really bad person. What the customers don't realize is that usually most people find the waitress friendly but today the waitress is experiencing one of the hardest days in her life. Her husband just left her for another woman, and she just
lost her son in a car wreck. If the customers were aware of the problems the waitress just had, they actually wouldn't mind her negative attitude as much considering her current state.

➢ **Just-World Phenomenon**

- the belief that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get (Melvin Lerner, 1977)
- Attributing failures to dispositional causes rather than situational causes, which are unchangeable and uncontrollable, satisfies our need to believe that the world is fair and we have control over our life.
- We are motivated to see a just world because this reduces our perceived threats, gives us a sense of security, helps us find meaning in difficult and unsettling circumstances, and benefits us psychologically.
- Unfortunately, the just world hypothesis also results in a tendency for people to blame and disparage victims of a tragedy or an accident, such as victims of rape and domestic abuse to reassure themselves of their insusceptibility to such events.
- People may even go to such extremes as the victim's faults in "past life" to pursue justification for their bad outcome.

**Reducing Prejudice and Discrimination**

Given that prejudice is common in all human societies and exerts damaging effects both on the victims and on those who hold such views, the important question to address is ‘Is it possible to remove prejudice? What steps can be taken to do this? Considering the growing prejudice among people over religion, region, language, race, it seems almost like prejudice is inevitable.

But stereotyping and prejudice can be definitely reduced to a large extent by becoming aware and educating ourselves. And with concentrated multi-pronged approach we can do many things to counter prejudice.

1. **Teaching children Acceptance Instead of Bigotry (narrow mindedness)**

Homes and schools are places where children learn to get their generalizations leading to stereotypes. It is the responsibility of parents, teachers to bring their children up with acceptance and positive attitudes towards other groups and be role models. Because often the attitudes and prejudiced notions are not necessarily taught but ‘caught’ from adults and the
environment the children operate in. There is sufficient evidence, today that teachers can be victims of bias and prejudice and can reflect in their classrooms.

2. **Teaching children from an early age to respect all groups:**
We must teach children, including ones very different from their own - prejudice can be nipped in the bud or at least curbed.

Valuing Diversity is very important. Ethnocentrism should be discouraged. The education of young children should promote respect for a multicultural society and tolerance and acceptance virtues that need to be developed quite consciously.

3. **Increased Intergroup Contact:** This is based on the **Contact hypothesis:** the theory that direct contact between hostile groups will reduce prejudice. In ‘The Nature of Prejudice’, Gordon Allport (1954) hypothesized that prejudice may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports i.e., by law, custom or local atmosphere, and leads to the perception of common interests between members of the two groups. This contention is known as **contact hypothesis.** According to contact hypothesis, contact between hostile groups will reduce prejudice only when there is contact between people who have relatively equal status; who have close and intimate contact; and who cooperate with or are dependent on one another.

Recent findings indicate that if people merely know that friendly contacts between members of their own group and members of various **out groups** (groups in which we do not belong) is possible, their prejudice towards these groups can be sharply reduced.

4. **Recategorization: redrawing the boundary between ‘Us and Them’:** Once individuals mentally include people, they once excluded from their **ingroup** (groups in which we belong) within it, prejudice toward them may disappear. Reminding people that they are part of large groups - for instance, that they are all Indians, Americans Canadians or even human beings - can help accomplish this kind of recategorization.

5. **Undermining-Stereotypes:** Stereotypes suggest that all persons belonging to specific social groups alike - they share the same characteristics. Such beliefs can be weakened if people are encouraged to think about others as individuals not simply as members of social groups. Also, some evidence suggests that affirmative action programs in schools and colleges, offices may actually encourage positive perceptions and the persons who benefit from them will look at people and events more objectively. This will serve to counter prejudice by undermining(deflating) stereotypes. There must be an effort to look down upon people with prejudiced attitudes.
6. Reducing Prejudice through Cognitive interventions:

Weakening stereotypes: Stereotypes involve category-driven processing -- thinking about others in terms of their membership in social categories or groups. Stereotypes can be reduced if persons can be made to engage in attribute-driven processing-- thinking about the unique characteristics of individuals and objective judgment.

7. Cooperative activities: Cooperative activities such as team building exercises, workshops involving games that help to remove bias and prejudice should be carried out in schools, colleges, work places, etc. It is a good way to reduce animosity and bitterness that stems from low self esteem and stereotyped attitudes. Thus, non-competitive contact between in and out groups on terms of equal status and the pursuit of common, superordinate goals which are attainable by cooperation is the way forward.

8. Media responsibility: Instead of perpetuating stereotypes the media should take responsibility to remove prejudices and negative attitudes. It is the responsibility of every individual to be aware of the stereotypes and take care so as to not to discriminate and create a more equitable society.

9. Role of educational institutions: Educational inequality leads to bias and discrimination. High standards of educational experience, should be available to every student. In addition schools and colleges have to deal with so many other situations that cause prejudice and hatred. Efforts to address bias, prejudice and discrimination should be comprehensive in nature.

10. Empathy training: According to researches done on empathy and role-playing, a reversal in perspective can reduce prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination (Batson et al., 1997).

11. Making Humanitarian values more conspicuous: This is a more direct approach in which efforts are made to make salient values regarding equality and fair treatment. According to the theory of cognitive dissonanace, people try to avoid or reduce feelings of dissonance whenever possible (Festinger, 1957). Many researchers have used dissonance-related techniques to reduce antigay, anti-Asian, and anti-Black prejudice (eg. Hing, Li,& Zanna, 2002).

Conclusion:

There is no single correct way to eliminate stereotypes. And indeed it is not possible to eliminate all stereotypes. In fact sometimes stereotypes help to add humor in our lives. It is only when the stereotypes result in harmful, negative attitudes that leads to hatred and
discrimination and takes away the ability to see reason then the stereotype becomes detrimental to society.