

## Internal Conflicts in Muslim Societies

**Ashiq Ali Shah\***

*Abstract: An analysis of psychological theories and the social dynamics of the society help identify salient attributes and processes relevant to conflict among Muslims. The psychodynamic concept of personality and frustration-aggression hypothesis account for the socialization practices in the Muslim societies, emotional instability, unfavourable evaluation of those holding a different viewpoint and venting out one's aggression on the weaker. The tendency of the Muslims to praise their sect/tribe/religious group leads to a groupthink situation that polarizes intergroup relationships. The acts of categorization in ingroup and outgroup, as postulated by the social identity theory, contribute towards the distorted perception of each other. The Islamic notions of brotherhood, unity and ethnic identity as means of personal identification and social interaction seems to have been forgotten by the Muslims. Though the Western social-psychological constructs are helpful in understanding the causes of conflict among Muslims, they are not germane to Muslim societies. The group belongingness and group favouritism is not necessarily a tool of discrimination and conflict but is an essential component of one's survival in a collectivist society. The Western theories also do not address the economic and political circumstances responsible for the multitude of conflicts among Muslims.*

Muslim countries, in general, are racked by cleavages between various interest and class groups. The major problem faced by the Muslims nowadays is the deepening division between different ethnic, religious, political and tribal groups. The conflict between these groups is not a random phenomenon but is a product of historical, political, sociological, psychological and situational factors. In some cases, the causes of these conflicts are so banal that these do not require a complex theoretical analysis, whereas in other cases either a single or a combination of social, psychological and intergroup factors is the underlying causes.

---

\* Ashiq Ali Shah is Professor of Psychology in the International Islamic University Malaysia. E- mail: [ashiq213@yahoo.com](mailto:ashiq213@yahoo.com)

An ongoing and unresolved conflict is deleterious for the society. It affects not only the social harmony and internal peace of the society, but may also seriously undermine its overall economic development. The emotional and psychological development of the individuals might not follow a healthy course in the wake of an ongoing conflict. The more intense and longer is a conflict within a society, the more are the reasons to believe in the inability and a lack of rationality of the people to resolve it.

Fisher suggests that conflict is a fact of human existence and intergroup conflict can be good or bad depending on whether it is handled constructively or destructively.<sup>1</sup> An amicable solution to any conflict reflects the degree of rationality and tolerance behind it. Islam as a religion and a way of life stresses rationality, the use of argument and tolerance in the case of social strife.

### **Definition of conflict**

Conflict has been defined by Fisher as “a social situation involving perceived incompatibilities in goals or values between two or more parties, attempts by the parties to control each other, and antagonistic feelings by the parties toward each other.”<sup>2</sup> This means that conflict has elements of both subjectivity and objectivity varying over different situations. It is based on the perceptions, cognition, communications, motivation, valuing and emotions. Hence, it may involve a decision making with limited rationality.

According to Mack and Snyder conflict is for the most part an elastic concept, being stretched and moulded for the purpose at hand. In its broadest sense, it seems to cover everything from war to choices between ice cream sodas or sundaes.<sup>3</sup>

Fink sees conflict as a social situation or process in which the parties are linked at least by one form of antagonistic relation (e.g., incompatible goals, emotional hostility) and by one form of antagonistic interaction (e.g., violent struggle, indirect interface).<sup>4</sup> In Deutsch's view, conflict exists whenever incompatible activities occur between person, groups or nations.<sup>5</sup> In essence conflict is the result of misperceptions, misattributions, miscommunications, and other phenomenological processes that create conflict, where no basic incompatibilities exist.

Some authors have identified three major sources, and thereby types, of conflict: economic, value and power.<sup>6</sup> Economic conflict

involves competing motives to obtain scarce resources, including territory, and is therefore one of the clearest forms of realistic conflict. Each party wishes to acquire the most of the resources that it can without perceptible limits, and therefore directs its behaviour toward maximising its gain at the expense of the other party.

Value conflict revolves around incompatible preferences, principles, or practices that people believe in with reference to their group identity. Differences may arise in such areas as culture, religion, politics, or ideology. At base, it is difficult to compromise or accommodate value conflicts because they lie at the centre of peoples' identities. In successful multicultural societies, however, respect for differences and valuing of basic human rights take precedence over the value preference of any particular group. One such example is the multiethnic Malaysian society. A mutual regard for each other's values and a principle of non-interference in others' affairs have maintained the racial harmony despite minimum contact between different ethnic groups.

Power conflict exists when each party wants to maximise its influence over the other - a possibility that is rendered impossible by the very definition. In other words, it is not possible for one party to be stronger in terms of reciprocal influence without the other being weaker. Power conflict is particularly prone to escalation and typically ends with victory by one party and capitulation by the other. Political struggle for power and coup d'etat are some examples of power conflict.

There is consensus among researchers that most conflicts do not represent one pure type, but involve a mixture of economic, value or power differences combined with an unrealistic ingredient of misperception and miscommunication. It is not uncommon for conflict to originate from one source and then proliferate to include other sources and issues and to escalate through a combination of realistic and unrealistic factors.

The understanding of conflict depends upon the underlying theoretical framework used in its explanation. Different theories have been advanced to explain conflict in the field of psychology. We will discuss some major theoretical concepts and then try to analyse the current conflict among Muslims from these theoretical perspectives.

### **Psychodynamic-Personality Approach**

The psychodynamic personality approach to explain conflict draws upon Freud's idea, who regarded ethnocentrism (originally used by Sumner) as a form of narcissism at the group level.<sup>7</sup> Self-love of the individual is expressed as antipathies and aversions toward strangers. However, when a group is formed this intolerance toward others vanishes as the individual equates himself/herself with the other members of the group. Freud contended that this group narcissism then serves the purpose of facilitating the displacement of aggression from the ingroup onto outgroup hatred. Ethnocentrism may be a redirected expression of individual narcissism, thus providing individual group members with narcissistic gratification.<sup>8</sup>

The "authoritarian personality" approach by Adorno and his colleagues is an extension of the idea of "ethnocentrism" in social psychology which is viewed as a generalised prejudice rooted in the personality dynamics of the individual and can be traced back to the early life of the child.<sup>9</sup> Such children are exposed to harsh autocratic discipline by their parents, who are over concerned about the social status and power and want to rear socially acceptable children. This treatment, however, results in the repression of both, aggression toward the parents and child's shortcomings. Through displacement, the aggression is redirected toward outgroups in the form of antagonism and hostility. Through several studies, Adorno and his colleagues developed the Fascism scale (F-scale) to measure the attitudes of ethnocentric individuals. The individuals who score high on this scale were regarded as antidemocratic. These individuals generally rejected the outgroups, looked with contempt on outsiders, tended to glorify and were loyal to the ingroup, nourished their own pride and vanity and boasted themselves as superior. The authors explained this phenomenon on the basis of personality dynamics of the individuals as discussed above. According to this approach ethnocentric individuals will be prone to conflict and hostility toward others.

Another psychodynamic explanation of conflict has been proposed in the form of "frustration-aggression hypothesis". It states that frustration always leads to aggression of some kind; and that the aggression is always the result of some frustration. Frustration refers to the blocking of goal directed behaviour. The hypothesis is based on Freudian assumption that when a person is prevented from satisfying her/his needs, s/he is likely to engage in aggressive behaviour.<sup>10</sup>

### **Social-Psychological Approach**

The social-psychological approach is based on the philosophy of phenomenology, which maintains that we develop our picture of the world through our senses and that our subjective experience thereby provides the reality out of which we operate. Thus, the perceptions, cognition, attitudes, and values held by individual actors in intergroup conflict are seen as important influences on their behaviour in relation to the other party and the conflict. Deutsch maintains that parties in conflict respond to each other in terms of their perceptions and cognition of each other and that their behaviour is influenced by their expectations of each other.<sup>11</sup> On a broader scale, the social-psychological study of intergroup relations generally takes the perspective that perceptions, motivations and actions of individuals influence and, in turn, are affected by the interaction between groups.<sup>12</sup> Since intergroup conflict is a collective phenomenon, the focus is on collective social perception, cognition and motivation. The social-psychological approach sees conflict as involving considerable subjectivity, both in the experiencing of the situation and in the valuing of alternative outcomes. Although conflict is not regarded as unrealistic, it is seen as having an unrealistic component, the extent of which will vary in any given situation. The subjective side of conflict thus enters in through the processes of perception, cognition, communication, motivation, valuing and emotion. Subjectivity also enters the process of decision making that the parties engage in with respect to the conflict. Again, this is seen as a predominantly, but not exclusively, rational activity; that is, decision making is seen as involving a limited rationality, with the mix of objectivity and subjectivity varying over different situations.

Social-psychological approach also emphasises on the behavioural interaction between the parties. Deutsch suggests that interaction is initiated by motives and in turn generates new motives. The interplay between interaction and the subjective side of conflict is therefore paramount to understanding the phenomenon. How parties perceive and interpret each other's actions will be a prime determinant of how they will respond and thereby the conflict interaction will unfold<sup>13</sup>

A number of studies of intergroup conflict have been carried out by different social psychologists. The classic field studies by Sherif and colleagues and the training laboratory studies by Blake & Mouton depict simulated but complex situations of intergroup conflict with an

emphasis on causative factors, common processes and typical outcomes.<sup>14</sup>

The Sherif studies demonstrated that a range of individual level, but more importantly, group-level factors intertwine with intergroup variables in the development and resolution of intergroup conflict. In addition, the studies clearly show how a combination of realistic and unrealistic sources is typically involved in intergroup conflict. However, an important outcome of their studies was that superordinate goals are the path to conflict resolution.

The studies of Blake and Mouton demonstrated that it was much easier to develop and escalate intergroup conflict than it was to de-escalate it through mutual problem solving. Their studies also highlighted the power of the role of expectations with regard to the negotiator.

Both of these studies indicate that functional interdependence (in this case, negative) between groups for the achievement of their goal leads to competitive interaction, which produces cohesion in the groups and antagonism between them.

In the social-psychological study of intergroup conflict, the cohesion hypothesis is given a central place by Sherif, who hypothesised that conflict between two groups tends to increase solidarity within the groups.<sup>15</sup> The field study data indicated that cooperativeness and solidarity within groups were at their peak when the intergroup conflict was most severe. He also documented that groups tend to overestimate their own performance while underestimating that of their rival.

A component in the social-psychological approach to conflict pertains to decision making process in the group. The work of Janis on "*groupthink*" describes the process by which a cohesive and insulated group fosters concurrence seeking to the point where it overrides the realistic appraisal of alternative courses of action.<sup>16</sup> The term *groupthink* was chosen for its simplicity, as well as its negative connotation, in serving as a concise label for a mode of thinking that occurs when people are deeply involved in a cohesive group in which strivings for unanimity override the realistic, efficient, and moral appraisal of alternatives. The decision making in a *groupthink* situation is mostly characterised by the well known social

psychological process of conformity and polarisation in a situation of conflict.

Janis's analysis specifies the observable causes of groupthink in the form of "antecedent conditions" that facilitate the occurrence of the phenomenon. The primary antecedent condition is the degree of cohesiveness of the group, which is seen as a necessary yet not sufficient condition of groupthink. That is, the symptoms are not likely to occur strongly enough to interfere with decision making unless specified additional conditions are met. These include the insulation of the policy-making group, the lack of a tradition of impartial leadership, and a lack of norms requiring methodical procedures for decision making.

### **Social Identity Theory**

Although social identity theory belongs to social psychological approach, it has established its separate identity because of its unique theoretical approach to conflict.

This theory is based on the work of European social psychologists who's initial research involved experiments indicating that the mere perception of belonging to a group (social categorisation) called *minimal group paradigm* is sufficient by itself to produce intergroup discrimination, favouring the ingroup.<sup>17</sup> Since minimal intergroup discrimination is not based on incompatible group interests and occurs with simple social categorisation, Tajfel and his colleagues suspected that they were dealing with a process that was inherent in the basic intergroup situation by itself. This led them to consider the link between the individual and the group in ways that had implications for intergroup behaviour. Thus, social categorisations are seen as creating and defining an individual's place in the society and thereby providing for self-reference. Social groups provide their members with identifications that define their social identity, that is, those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which s/he belongs and the emotional and value significance of such membership. It is then assumed that individuals strive to maintain or enhance self-esteem and a positive self-concept that social categories are evaluated in ways that contribute to social identity and thereby self-esteem, and the social comparison with other groups help determine the evaluation of one's own group. The basic hypothesis of social identity theory is that pressures to gain distinctiveness for and to evaluate one's own group positively through social comparison lead to

intergroup discrimination in the ingroup's favour. In cases where the intergroup comparison is unfavourable, a negative social identity and dissatisfaction with one's group result.

American social psychologists have focused on other aspects of social categorisation; namely the stereotypes and the attributional processes. Stereotypes are beliefs about the personal attributes shared by people in a particular group or social category.<sup>18</sup> As a cognitive component of group antagonism, the stereotypes are regarded as "expectations that a set of traits is associated with membership in a particular social group."<sup>19</sup> There is much evidence that these expectations influence perceptions of individual group member and cause biases in attention, encoding and retrieval of information such that these stereotypic expectancies are confirmed.<sup>20</sup> Specifically, attention is influenced by these expectancies so that knowing someone as a member of a particular group results in a perceiver searching for information that will confirm that the person can be characterised by stereotype attributes and selectively attending to this information when it is found.<sup>21</sup> Some researchers have found that group stereotypes can influence expectations even when they are not based on reality.<sup>22</sup>

In the attributional process in social categorization, the members of one group attribute specific causes to explain the behaviour of other group members. The research finding summarised by Wilder show that when people are perceived to be members of a group, their behaviour tends to be explained in terms of group rather than individual characteristics.<sup>23</sup>

Some other studies have focused on what has been called the "ultimate attribution error", or "ethnocentric bias". This bias occurs when internal attributions are used to explain socially desirable actions by ingroup members and socially undesirable actions by outgroup members.<sup>24</sup> This means that the desirable behaviours of the ingroup members are explained in terms of their traits or abilities, whereas, the desirable behaviours of outgroup members are explained in terms of situational factors.

Some of the early researches of European social psychologists have indicated a link between cognitive attributional processes and stereotyping showing shifts and biases in the judgement of physical stimuli. The theories advanced by these researchers postulate that we use the same cognitive processes in the judgement of ingroup and outgroup members as those we employ to make physical judgement.<sup>25</sup>



A number of studies show that when individual are categorised as members of a particular social group they are assumed to be similar to each other and different from members of another outgroup, even though if this categorisation has no direct personal relevance and is only arbitrary.<sup>26</sup> The outcomes of these various studies have led to the formulation of the concept of "illusion of outgroup homogeneity."<sup>27</sup> The outgroup members are perceived as being more alike than the members of the ingroup and are often disliked.<sup>28</sup> The mirror image of this tendency is known as "ingroup differentiation" i.e., the tendency to perceive members of our own group as more heterogeneous than those of other groups.<sup>29</sup> Stephen has reviewed several studies that demonstrated that evaluations of the outgroup are more differentiated than evaluations of ingroup.<sup>30</sup>

#### **Analytic View of the Causes of Conflict in Muslim Societies**

Muslim societies are spread from South East Asia to the African continent. The central Asian states and some newly independent former East European states also have a large Muslim population. A wide range of geo-political diversity of the Muslim communities makes the understanding of the causes of conflict more complex and varied. However, there are some common dimensions that offer a suitable context to analyse the causes of conflict in the Muslim societies. The authoritarian personality syndrome, the social-psychological approach and social identity theory discussed earlier seem to be relevant theoretical constructs for this analysis. The personality characteristics of majority of Muslims and their socio-cultural dynamism provide much of psychological and behavioural concomitants of social conflict.

The social context and the predominant socialisation practices lay down the personality of an individual. The socialisation practices in the society contribute toward moulding the personalities and behaviour of the individuals. The majority of the Muslim societies is patriarchal and follows, to a varying extent, an authoritative way of socialisation. The father is mostly the authority figure and plays a dominant role in the everyday affairs of the family. He enjoys the authority of making major decisions within and outside the family. The maintaining of discipline either through induction or coercion may have an impact upon the personality development of the children.<sup>31</sup> The majority of the fathers in Muslim societies used coercion as a common method of discipline. The children exposed to excessive punishment develop

aggressive tendencies. The father mostly acts as a role model for the children. A direct experience of punishment and observing of aggression both in and outside family foster aggressive and authoritarian tendencies in the adolescents.<sup>32</sup> In a study by Shah and Aziz on the perception of father's personality some of the traits used by the adolescents to describe their fathers' personalities were "dominating", "authoritative", "abusive", "narrow minded" and "disciplined".<sup>33</sup> The findings of this study indicate that adolescents in Muslim societies perceive their fathers as harsh and punitive. The trait adjectives used by the adolescent to describe their father's personality are typical of an authoritarian personality.

One of the factors of preponderance of authoritarian personality in the Muslim societies may be the availability of authoritarianism related themes in the literature and the children's stories. A study conducted by Bano thematically analyzed 250 Urdu short stories published in children magazines during 1947-1982 for three major themes, namely achievement, affiliation and power.<sup>34</sup> The power motive was found to be the dominant theme followed by affiliation and achievement in majority of the stories,  $F(2, 747) = 69.13; p < .0001$ . The themes in the stories related to the power motive were 53.12% followed by affiliation 30.43% and achievement 16.45%. Studies on authoritarian personality have found power motive as one of the characteristics of an authoritarian personality.<sup>35</sup> Some researchers have argued that the availability of the type of themes in children's literature is correlated with the developmental trends and the social structure of the society 20-30 years later.<sup>36</sup> An increasing tendency of militarism and violence during the last couple of years in the Pakistani society may be the outcome of an overwhelming power motive in the stories of the children.<sup>37</sup>

The "authoritarian personality" is also the dominant personality type among the leaders in Muslim societies. The majority of the people submit themselves to authority but for their part they suppress those who are weak. Their treatment of the dissimilar others is harsh and aims at dominating them. The authoritarian type people show little respect for others' viewpoint and mostly, behave in an intolerant manner. This constellation of attributes often invites retaliation from others leading to interpersonal conflict.

An authoritarian person is usually emotional in interpersonal behaviour. The daily disputes and differences of opinion are handled

in an emotional manner rather than using reason and argument. This makes the issues and disputes more complicated. Consequently, the majority of the issues linger on without any hope of an amicable settlement. The preponderance of emotion overrides reason and affects the ability to think logically. An excessive degree of emotionality is detrimental to constructive dialogue and the ability to persuade and may be regarded as a sign of “*intellectual backwardness*.”

Instead of using “ignorance” I prefer to adopt the term “intellectual backwardness” as an indicator of irrationality demonstrated by even people with reasonable intellectual background. Ignorance may be an excuse for a number of ills including conflict, violence and aggression, however, the same cannot be justified in the case of an educated person unless the person is intellectually backward. The intellectual backwardness is characterised by a lack of reason and argument in the verbal behaviour and aggressive tendencies in the overt behaviour of the person. Such a person is mostly dominated by sentiments and emotions and insults others in his/her quest for dominance. The person shows intransigence and intolerance towards others’ viewpoint. The leaders of various Muslim groups in conflict have demonstrated these characteristics on many occasions.<sup>38</sup> The emergence of new issues in conflict and its escalation are also partly due to the intellectual backwardness.

A characteristic phenomenon of the majority of the developing countries (to which many Muslim countries belong) that distinguishes them from the developed countries is the political, economic and social instability and turmoil. The corrupt political leadership, the economic woes and the deteriorating law and order situation impinge upon the life of a common man piling up frustration in the society and leading to aggression.<sup>39</sup> There are many instances in which this piled up frustration was given vent on a scapegoat, usually a weak outgroup, in the form of aggression and violence.<sup>40</sup>

The understanding of the socio-economic set up of the majority of the Muslim societies and its functioning is germane to many kinds of current conflicts in Muslim societies. The social psychological theory<sup>41</sup> and social identity theory<sup>42</sup> provide sound bases to analyse conflict from social psychological perspective. In addition the parameters of authoritarian personality could be understood against the backdrop of this dimension.

The Muslim societies are morphologically and functionally collectivist in nature and exhibit collectivist values, norms, beliefs and behaviours that can be accounted for by the social-psychological and social identity theories while explaining conflict. Some of these collectivist characteristics listed by Triandis are components of authoritarian personality as well, such as interdependency with others, identification with the ingroup goals, adhering to the norms and rules of the social behaviour, and unconditional relatedness to (or following of) authority.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, it is a matter of research to ascertain whether the Western criteria of authoritarianism is equally applicable to the collectivist societies.

The majority of the Muslim societies exhibit cleavages along ethnic, communal, sectarian, linguistic and religious lines which has resulted in the formation of different groups with distinctive labels such as Pathan, Punjabi, Sindi, Balochi (communal/linguistic); Syed, Qureshī, Siddiqī, Ansārī, Farūqī etc (sectarian) and Sunnī-Shī'ah, (religious). These labels are assigned specific characteristics that are mostly pejorative in nature and highlight the negative traits of other group members. This social categorisation is sufficient by itself to produce intergroup discrimination favouring the ingroup. The social identity processes of categorisation and labelling serve some important psychological needs of individuals. The labels maintain distance between the groups and serve the self-identity and self esteem functions for the members of ingroup. The group members are motivated to maintain or achieve evaluatively positive distinctiveness for their own group over the other groups, because in intergroup contexts group evaluation is self-evaluation.<sup>44</sup>

The group belongingness and group identification also serve a utilitarian function. Individuals in the collectivist societies depend upon the group for their need fulfillment. The authoritarian personality type is characterised by a high need for group dependency. The social categorisation, besides providing for self-reference to the individual, serves another psychological function in an intergroup situation. The process of social identification is instrumental in "subjective uncertainty reduction". People have a fundamental need to feel certain about their world and their place in it – "subjective certainty" renders existence meaningful and thus gives one confidence about how to behave, and what to expect from the physical and social environment – within which one finds oneself.<sup>45</sup> The social identity theory is a useful construct to account for some of the socio-psychological

variables of conflict in the Muslim societies. Though, its relevance to explain the intergroup conflict has been well-documented,<sup>46</sup> studies are required to test the relevance of its theoretical constructs to the Muslims societies.

The cognitive aspects of conflict in Muslim societies are addressed also by the social-psychological approach. It postulates that perceptions, cognition, attitudes and values held by the individuals influence their behaviour in intergroup conflict.<sup>47</sup> Based upon their subjective experiences various groups in Muslim societies have distorted perceptions of each other and misattribute negative and factually incorrect characteristics to other groups. They regard others as holding suspicious, hostile and exploitative attitudes. Different groups have many types of hidden fears about the outgroups and attribute to them all sorts of horrible acts. This generates a sense of mistrust and insecurity and individuals ground themselves increasingly within ingroup that increases the solidarity and cooperativeness within group and leads to a groupthink situation.<sup>48</sup> Under these circumstances the groups severe communication with each other that further feeds into misperceptions and misattributions. The outgroup is imaginatively portrayed as cruel and deserving punishment.

The distorted perceptions, misattributions and negative expectations about the outgroup members lead to hostile tendencies causing intergroup conflict.<sup>49</sup> The dominant intergroup behaviour between different ethnic, sectarian and religious groups is competitive<sup>50</sup> and typically involves the demonstration and the use of power. The use of rational means such as talks, negotiations and the confidence building measures are regarded as weakness in settling the disputes. The groups follow a win-lose strategy in which each party tries to inflict maximum harm upon others, thus escalating the conflict. A vicious circle of retaliation and counter-retaliation ensues ad infinitum.

The social-psychological variables discussed so far and the instances of social categorisation provide a fertile ground of social interaction for the authoritarian personality type people. This means that the dynamics of authoritarian personality can best unfold itself in a socio-cultural context congenial to its manifestation. This shows a link between the authoritarian personality and the social set up – it is developed and shaped through the socialisation process and it also operates within the same socio-cultural context. As discussed earlier a high sense of group belongingness, a feeling of one's own group's

superiority over others, unconditional subjugation to the authority and the use of power and a lack of tolerance and emotional stability are major menaces that plague Muslim societies. These characteristics of authoritarian personality and other social-psychological variables of conflict discussed above have been supported, to some extent, in an empirical study conducted by Shah at the International Islamic University Malaysia.<sup>51</sup> Approximately 44% of the respondents indicated the sense of group belongingness and the belief about the superiority of one's own group as the major causes of internal conflict among Muslims. The lack of tolerance of others' viewpoint and a general mistrust about others were reported by 21% of the respondents as the cause of internal conflict. About 20% of the respondents regarded an overall lack of sense of Islamic brotherhood and cooperation with others as the cause of conflict. The preponderance of materialistic pursuits and neglect of religious practices and spirituality were regarded by 18% of the respondents as important factors. About 15% of the respondents regarded prejudice toward each other as the cause of conflict. A small percentage of respondents also indicated lack of communication or miscommunication and struggle for power and wealth as the causes of internal conflict. These findings support our assumptions that group related variables as postulated by social psychological and social identity theories and the characteristics of authoritarianism have a significant contribution in conflict among Muslims.

### **Limitations of Psychological Theories in Explaining Conflict Among Muslims**

We have discussed various theories and concepts from three perspectives namely psychodynamic-personality, social-psychological, and social identity in order to understand the psycho-social sources of conflict. These theories take into account several individual, group and intergroup variables characteristic of conflict situations. These serve as explanatory bases to understand a situation of conflict. Some of these theories, however, are based upon meta-concepts explaining individual's and group psycho-dynamic and also incorporate theoretically and empirically derived psycho-social variables characteristic of conflict. Whether the conflicts in the Muslim societies have the same underlying processes has not yet been substantiated.

At the specific level (i.e., conflicts in the developing countries, especially among Muslims), the majority of these theories lack the psycho-logic characteristic of Eastern and Muslim societies. The social

make up of the Muslim societies are governed by a different set of norms, values and customs that govern the behaviour of individual, and not the individual's own desire and the preferences as is the case in the West. The majority of these theories incorporate propositions based on laboratory experiments and simulations or field studies of conflict conducted in the Western societies.

The close association of people in the developing countries with their tradition and values emphasising the pluralistic nature of the society may have little in common with the individualist, highly competitive and business oriented Western societies.<sup>52</sup> For example, identity in collectivist cultures refers to social groups while in individualist cultures the emphasis is more on unique identity.<sup>53</sup> The West is often characterised by high self-esteem, optimism and self-enhancement while the East is characterised by modesty and self-criticism.<sup>54</sup> Social categorization has been exclusively used for stereotyping and negative intergroup behaviour by the Western social psychologists. This limits the implication of social categorization to the negative group processes only and, hence, neglects its relevance to group identity and social discourse. The Western social psychologists are ignorant of the social relevance and positive nature of social categorization as mentioned in Qur'ān. In the Islamic approach social categorization is used for the purpose of maintaining one's identity that facilitates social discourse. The following verse of Holy Qur'ān in Sūrah al- Hujurāt specifies the positive aspect of social categorization.

O mankind! We certainly created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into Nations and Tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye despise Each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things) (49:13)

### Conclusion

In the Islamic approach, social categorization serves the purpose of social identity and is instrumental in social discourse; hence, it does not have negative connotations as has been conceptualised in the Western social psychological theories. However, Muslims have not properly understood the significance of social categorization as mentioned in the above verse of the Qur'ān.

Moreover, "control" in the West means that the person actively tries to change the environment; in many collectivist cultures the self

is passive, going along with what the environment requires, and changes itself to fit into the environment. The well-being of collectivists depends on fitting in and having good relationship with the ingroup as compared to individualists who mostly care for personal emotions and satisfaction with the self.<sup>55</sup>

In the West, one generally finds that ingroups are perceived to be more heterogeneous than outgroups,<sup>56</sup> however in collectivist cultures, the reverse is found.<sup>57</sup> The explanation seems to be that individualists think of individuals when they make judgements of group homogeneity-heterogeneity and of attributes that distinguish individuals. Collectivists think of groups and the common attributes people have who belong to particular groups.<sup>58</sup> This type of thinking results in different kind of judgements about the homogeneity and heterogeneity of groups. This shows that some of the assumptions of these theories might not be applicable to the cognitive styles of people in the Muslim countries that are more collectivist. Given these contrasts, it is reasonable to believe that intergroup conflict will be more germane to pluralistic societies whose functioning and sometimes survival is based on group belongingness.

The Western social-psychological approaches also do not incorporate socio-economic and political variables that might also contribute in conflict under specific circumstances in Muslim societies.<sup>59</sup>

#### Notes:

1. R. J. Fisher, *The Social Psychology of Intergroup and International Conflict Resolution* (New York: Springer Verlag, 1990).
2. *Ibid.*, 6.
3. R.W. Mack & R. C. Synder, "The Analysis of Social Conflict - Toward an Overview and Synthesis," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* I (1957): 212-248.
4. C. F. Fink, "Some Conceptual Difficulties in the Theory of Social Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 12 (1968): 412-460.
5. M. Deutsch, *The Resolution of Conflict: Constructive and Destructive Processes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973).
6. D. Katz, "Nationalism and Strategies of International Conflict Resolution", in *International Behavior: A Social-Psychological Analysis*, ed. H. C. Kelman (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965).
7. S. Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (London: Hogarth Press, 1948); the concept of Ethnocentrism was originally used by W. G. Sumner, *Folkways* (Boston: Ginn Co, 1906).
8. S. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (London: Hogarth Press, 1930).



9. For a discussion of authoritarian personality see T. W. Adorno et.al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950); Summer, *Folkways*; and Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*.
10. J. Dollard et.al., *Frustration and Aggression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939).
11. Deutsch, *The Resolution of Conflict: Constructive and Destructive Processes*.
12. D. M. Taylor, & F. M. Moghaddam, *Theories of Intergroup Relations* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994).
13. Deutsch, *The Resolution of Conflict: Constructive and Destructive Processes*.
14. M. Sherif et.al., *Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation: The Robber's Cave Experiment* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Book Exchange, 1961); M. Sherif, *In Common Predicament: Social Psychology of Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966); R. R. Blake, & J. S. Mouton, *Group Dynamics: Key to Decision Making* (Houston, TX: Gulf, 1961). These studies are regarded as classic in the field of intergroup conflict.
15. Sherif, *In Common Predicament: Social Psychology of Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation*.
16. I. L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972); and I. L. Janis, *Groupthink*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982).
17. H. Tajfel, "Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination," *Scientific American*, 223 (1970): 96-102; H. Tajfel & J. Turner, An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict, in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, eds. W.G. Austin & S. Worchel (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979); and M. Billig & H. Tajfel, "Social Categorisation and Similarity in Intergroup Behavior," *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 3(1973): 27-52.
18. S. E. Taylor, L. E. Peplau & D. O. Sears, *Social Psychology*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J: Prentice Hall, 1997).
19. D. L. Hamilton, "A Cognitive-Attributional Analysis of Stereotyping," in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 12. ed. L. Berkowitz (New York: Academic Press, 1979); and D. L. Hamilton ed., *Cognitive Processes in Stereotyping and Intergroup Behavior* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1981).
20. H. Sagar & J. W. Schofield, "Racial and Behavioral cues in Black and White Children's Perceptions of Ambiguously Aggressive Acts," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 39 (1980): 590-598; and M. Rothbart, M. Evans & S. Fulero, "Recall for Confirming Events: Memory Processes and the Maintenance of Social Stereotypes," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 15 (1979): 343-355.
21. W. F. Brewer & G. V. Nakamura, "The Nature and Functions of Schemes" in *Handbook of Social Cognition*. Vol. 1, eds., R. S. Wyer & T. K. Srull (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1984); S. E. Taylor & J. Crocker, "Schematic Bases of Social Information Processing" in *Social cognition: The Ontario symposium. Vol. 1*, eds., E. T. Higgins, C. P. Herman, & M. P. Zanna (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1981); and W. G. Stephan, "Intergroup Relations" in *Handbook of Social Psychology*. Vol. III eds., G. Lindzey & E. Aronson (New York: Random House, 1985).

22. M. J. Harris, R. Milich, E. M. Corbitt, D. Hoover & M. Brady, "Self-fulfilling Effects of Stigmatizing Information on Children's Social Interactions," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 63 (1992): 41-50.
23. D. A. Wilder, "Predictions of Belief Homogeneity and Similarity following Social Categorization," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 23 (1984): 323-333.
24. M. Hewstone, "Attributional Bases of Intergroup Conflict" in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Conflict* eds., W. Stroebe et al. (New York: Springer Verlag, 1988); and M. Hewstone, "Causal Attribution: From Cognitive Processes to Collective Beliefs," *The Psychologist: Bulletin of the British Psychological Society* 8 (1988): 323-327; and T. F. Pettigrew, "The Ultimate Attribution Error: Extending Allport's Cognitive Prejudice," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 5 (1979): 461-476; and D. M. Taylor & V. Jaggi, "Ethnocentrism and Causal Attribution in a South Indian Context," *Journal of Cross-cultural Psychology* 5 (1974): 162-172.
25. J. S. Bruner, "On perceptual readiness," *Psychological Review*, 64 (1957): 123-152; J. S. Bruner, & J. V. Perlmutter, "Compatriot and Foreigner: A Study of Impression Formation in Three Countries," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 55 (1957): 253-260; H. Tajfel & A. L. Wilkes, "Classification and Quantitative Judgement," *British Journal of Psychology* 54 (1963): 101-114.
26. Stephan, "Intergroup Relations"; D. A. Wilder, "Social Categorization: Implications for Creation and Reduction of Intergroup Bias" in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* Vol. 19, ed. L. Berkowitz (New York: Academic Press, 1986).
27. P. W. Linville, G. W. Fisher & P. Salovey, "Perceived Distributions of the Characteristics of Ingroup and Outgroup Members: Empirical Evidence and a Computer Simulation," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 57 (1989): 165-188.
28. C. M. Judd, C. S. Ryan & B. Parke, "Accuracy in the Judgment of Ingroup and Outgroup Variability," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 61 (1991): 366-379; and A. J. Lambert, "Stereotypes and Social Judgment: The Consequences of Group Variability," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 68 (1995): 388-403; and P. W. Linville & G. W. Fisher, "Exemplar and Abstraction Models of Group Variability and Stereotypicality," *Social Cognition* 11 (1993): 92-125.
29. R. A. Baron & D. Byrne, *Social Psychology* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997).
30. Stephan, "Intergroup Relations".
31. B. C. Rollins & D. L. Thomas, Theory of Parental Power and Child Compliance, in *Power in families* eds. R. E. Cromwell & D.H. Olson (New York: Halsted Press, 1975).
32. A. Bandura, D. Ross & S. A. Ross, "Transmission of Aggression Through Imitation of Aggression Models," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 63 (1961): 575-582; and R. R. Sears, J. W. M. Whiting, V. Nowlis & P. S. Sears, "Some Child-Rearing Antecedents of Aggression and Dependency in Young Children," *Genetic Psychological Monographs* 47 (1953): 135-236.
33. A. A. Shah & S. Aziz, "Perception of Father's Personality by Addicts and Non-addicts," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 134 (1994): 121-122.

34. M. Bano, "A Thematic Analysis of Children's Stories in Urdu in terms of Achievement, Affiliation and Power Motives in Pakistan," *Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research* 3 (1988): 33-41; and D. C. McClelland, *The Achieving Society* (New York: Irvington, 1976).
35. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*.
36. McClelland, *The Achieving Society*; D. C. McClelland et al., *The Achievement Motive* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1953).
37. A. A. Shah, *Violence: A Critical Analysis of Theories of Aggression and Violence in Pakistani Context* (Paper Presented at the Seventh International Conference of Pakistan Psychological Association, Lahore, 1989).
38. Ibid.
39. J. T. Hepworth & S. G. West, "Lynchings and the Economy: A Time-Series Reanalysis of Hovland and Sears (1940)," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 55 (1988): 239-247.
40. Dollard, et al., *Frustration and Aggression*.
41. Blake & Mouton, *Group Dynamics: Key to Decision Making*; and Deutsch, *The Resolution of Conflict*; Sherif, *In Common Predicament: Social Psychology of Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation*; Sherif, et al., *Intergroup Conflict and cooperation: The Robber's Cave Experiment*.
42. M. Billig & H. Tajfel, "Social Categorisation and Similarity in Intergroup Behavior"; and Bruner, "On perceptual readiness"; Bruner & Perlmutter, "Compatriot and Foreigner: A Study of Impression Formation in Three Countries"; and Tajfel, "Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination"; and Tajfel & Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict".
43. H. C. Triandis, "Cross-Cultural Psychology", *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 2 (1999): 127-143.
44. Billig & Tajfel, "Social Categorisation and Similarity in Intergroup Behavior"; Tajfel, "Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination"; S. Shavitt, "Operationalizing Functional Theories of Attitudes, in *Attitude Structure and Function* eds., A. R. Pratkanis, S. J. Breckler & A.G. Greenwald (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1989); S. Shavitt, "The Role of Attitude Objects in Attitude Functions," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 26 (1990): 124-148; N. Ellemers, "The Influence of Socio-Structural Variables on Identity Management Strategies," *European Review of Social Psychology* 4 (1993): 27-57. The findings of these authors suggest that social categorization serves the purpose of stereotyping and discriminating other groups and appraising ones own group. This is in contrast to the Islamic notion of social categorization according to which the categorization of people into different groups is for the purpose of identity and social interaction.
45. M. A. Hogg & D. Abrams, "Towards a Single-Process Uncertainty-Reduction Model of Social Motivation in Groups," in *Group Motivation: Social Psychological Perspectives* eds., M.A. Hogg & D. Abrams (London: Prentice Hall, 1993), 173-190; M. A. Hogg & B. A. Mullin, "Joining Groups to Reduce Uncertainty: Subjective Uncertainty Reduction and Group Identification," in *Social Identity and Social Cognition* eds., D. Abrams & M. A. Hogg (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 249-279; M. A. Hogg & P. Grieve, "Social Identity Theory and the Crisis of

Confidence in Social Psychology: A Commentary, and Some Research on Uncertainty Reduction," *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 2 (1999): 79-93.

46. Taylor & Moghaddam, *Theories of Intergroup Relations*.

47. M. Deutsch, "The Prevention of World War III: A Psychological Perspective," *Political Psychology* 4 (1983): 3-32.

48. Sherif, *In Common Predicament: Social Psychology of Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation*; Janis, *Victims of Groupthink*; and Janis, *Groupthink*.

49. Deutsch, *The Resolution of Conflict: Constructive and Destructive Processes*.

50. Sherif, et al., *Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation: The Robber's Cave Experiment*; and Sherif, *In Common Predicament: Social Psychology of Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation*.

51. A. A. Shah, *Causes of Conflict Among Muslims: A Survey Report*. (Unpublished Manuscript, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 1998).

52. H. C. Triandis, "Cross-Cultural Psychology," *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 2 (1999): 127-143.

53. A. P. Fiske, S. Kitayama, H. Markus & R. E. Nisbett, "The Cultural Matrix of Social Psychology," in *Handbook of Social Psychology* eds., D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 915-981.

54. S. Kitayama et al., "Individual and Collective Processes in the Construction of the Self: Self-Enhancement in the United States and Self-Criticism in Japan," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 72 (1997): 1245-1267.

55. R. Diaz-Guerrero, "The Development of Coping Style," *Human Development* 22 (1979): 320-331; J. R. Weisz, F. M. Rothbaum & T. C. Blackburn, "Standing Out and Standing In: The Psychology of Control in America and Japan," *American Psychologist* 39 (1984): 955-969; see E. Suh et al., "The Shifting Basis of Life Satisfaction Judgments Across Cultures: Emotions versus Norms," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74 (1998): 482-493.

56. Linville, et al., "Perceived Distributions of the Characteristics of Ingroup and Outgroup Members: Empirical Evidence and a Computer Simulation"; Rothbart, et al., "Stereotyping and Sampling Biases in Intergroup Perception".

57. H. C. Triandis, C. McCusker & C. H. Hui, "Multimethod Probes of Individualism and Collectivism," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 59 (1990): 1006-1020.

58. E. Kashima, *Determinants of Perceived Group Heterogeneity* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1989).

59. Hepworth & West, "Lynchings and the Economy: A Time-Series Reanalysis of Hovland and Sears (1940)".