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## The Effects of Group Psychology on Individual Behaviour: A Study of Two Cases from the Qur'ān

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### **Abstract**

An individual, while moving in a group, often behaves quite differently from his or her personal disposition, rather, sometimes he or she goes opposite to his or her own personal disposition in actual is. An individual may shun his or her individuality and embarks upon such heinous and inhuman actions or such acts of extraordinary bravery and valour, which he or she may not expect from his or her self in individual capacity. Such is the influence of group behaviour. This article explores and analyzes the effects of group behaviour on individual with the help of the theories of psychodynamics and situational factor to explain how an individual forsakes his or her individuality to act upon the whims and impulsive directions of his or her group relentlessly. These two theories study the phenomenon through different angles. Psychodynamics takes it as something unveil the innate dispositional savage behavior of human nature, while the Situational Factor theory understands it as an external influence of situation, which temporarily carries away a man from his individuality and throw him or her at the disposal of group behaviour. In this regard the function of the labeling will also be studied. These theories are applied to two cases selected from the Qur'ān to study individual behaviour in a group. Application of these theories on these Quranic episodes will present a new understanding of the phenomenon under study.

**Keywords:** Psychodynamics; Situational Factor; Function of Labeling; Individuality; Group Psychology, Quranic Psychology theory.

### **Introduction:**

It is a generally observed that an individual while moving in a group behaves quite differently from his or her personal behavior, rather, he or she tends to demonstrate a behavior different to his or her personal disposition, which he or she is generally known for. An individual in a group is observed to get ready instantly to behave in such a way that he or she may not expect of his or her own self in his or her individual capacity. Psychodynamics and situational factors theory explain the motives of human behaviour in a group in different ways. Psychodynamics focuses on dispositional analysis of human nature to show that innate primitive, instinctive and savage disposition of human, which is always there underneath, and unleashes under the veil of a group, whom the individual becomes a part of; on the other hand, the situational factor theory sees this change in human behaviour a sudden influence of the situation present at that time, hence, it is an external factor which comes into play. The function of labeling in this regard is the key factor to create the desired situational factor to make a group act in a certain way.

This phenomenon of change in human behaviour is studied in this paper, in the light of the experiments made by some renowned psychologists and anthropologists. Then these theories are applied to some cases selected from the Qur'ān to see if they give the same results and how these theories help us understand this phenomenon in the Quran in the perspective of the two selected episodes.

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In the end, the reason of appreciation of the individual acts of valour reported in the prophetic narrations have been justified to show that individual acts of valour need extra courage and effort to be performed as compared to performing them collectively in a group.

### **Individual Behaviour in Group:**

Gustavo Le Bon<sup>1</sup> (1841-1931) writes: "An individual in a crowd is a grain of sand amid other grains of sand, which the wind stirs up at will."<sup>2</sup> A group, crowd or mob behaves like a single collective mind. It does not allow an individual to think or act in his or her individual capacity.

We see the Qur'ān invites its addressees to deliberate individually, on the message being delivered to them by a man of their own.

قل إنما أعظكم بواحدة أن تقوموا لله مثنى وفرادى ثم تتفكروا ما بصاحبكم من جنة إن هو إلا نذير لكم بين يدي عذاب شديد<sup>3</sup>

Say, "I advise you for one thing only: that you stand up before Allah, in pairs and in singles, then reflect; (you will easily appreciate that) there is no madness in your fellow (the Prophet)." He is none but a warner to you in the face of a stern torment.

Now, we examine influence of the collective behaviour on individual behaviour employing the theories of situational factor and psychodynamics.

Psychodynamics of Group Psychology:

Psychodynamics observes that a man when is active in a charged mob, is more to be impulsive. The traits of his character he shows then, are always there in his sub consciousness, but they stay suppressed by his consciousness. This is his consciousness which is more influenced by the external environment he is brought up. We can say that psychodynamics treats this behavior in realm of predisposition. Freud explains it this way<sup>4</sup>. Le Bon also is the same opinion. According to him the in an organized mob a man shuns his civility and adopts barbaric attitude following his instinct.<sup>5</sup>

Le Bon further writes:

...these characteristics peculiar to crowds, and not possessed by isolated individuals. The first is that the individual forming part of a crowd acquires, solely from numerical considerations, a sentiment of invincible power which allows him to yield to instincts which, had he been alone, he would perforce have kept under restraint.<sup>6</sup>

### **Situational Factor:**

Albert Bandura<sup>7</sup> on man's capability of changing his behaviour writes: "Our ability to selectively engage and disengage our moral standards... helps explain how people can be barbarically cruel in one moment and compassionate the next."<sup>8</sup> Situational factor theory says due to momentary external factor influence a man tends to do such a thing as he can least expect of himself in normal conditions. Michael Cholbi<sup>9</sup> (age 46 in 2019) writes that Situational factor influences man's behavior more than lasting psychological attributes or individual features.<sup>10</sup> Also, human will power can be manipulated by the environment.<sup>11</sup>

Philip Zimbardo<sup>12</sup> explains this phenomenon that situational factor plays the decisive role to cause such unexpected sort of behavior in an individual moving with a charged mob. To him, any man has the capability to show weird or violent behaviour of unthinkable magnitude under changing situation. Zimbardo refers many incidents from real life experiences to prove his point that how amiable fellows, very congenial to each other

became brutal enemies to each other and did crimes of inhuman nature under the influence of situational factor.

Zimbardo noted in 1994, the gentle Hutus of Rwanda went violent and machete their peaceful neighbours, Tutsi. The situation was generated by labeling. Their political leaders created racial hatred against their otherwise peaceful minority community, Tutsi. They painted them their national enemies. The Hutus blindly followed the slogans. Once the situation was established, logic stayed muffled. The Hutus joined in the massacre of the Tutsi. The situation was so intense that the housewives did not hesitate killing the innocent children of the Tutsi.<sup>13</sup> Zimbardo further writes that this behavior lies in every human being. It needs situation to ignite it to bring it to surface.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Function of Labelling:**

To label a person or group to create a perception no matter true or false what we call function of labelling.

Bandura had an experiment with two groups of students. Both the groups were asked to give an electric shock to other group member through a device if they receive a wrong answer. The intensity and duration of electric shock has to be decided by the group members. Before the experiment started, Bandura just casually mentioned to a group that the other students are “animals” and to the other that the first group is nice. That discrimination caused considerable change in their responses.

The “animals” received more intense and longer shocks than the “nice” ones.<sup>15</sup>

In the case of Rwanda carnage this labeling function was at work, too.<sup>16</sup>

According to the author of this paper, situational factor theory has better explanation for mob psychology.

If a man in a charged mob inclines to show primitive instinctual savage tendencies, he may also influenced to show a sublime character, too, under the influence of situational factor. To avert damage or loss is natural to man, but we read in the nonviolence movement of Mahātmā Gāndhī against the British rule against this basic instinctual behavior. Gāndhī asked his followers to keep their posture of nonviolence against beating and shelling by the police. The whole crowd assumed that behavior thought it was against the primitive nature of self defence.

Situation factor not only unfolds to man his primitive traits of his character but can also uplift him many degree higher in morals, which is not primitive.

### **The First Case from the Qur’ān:**

We have shown that group psychology also plays deep and influential role to effect great acts of valour and nobility, too. This is what we are going to see an application of from the Qur’ān.

The Jews while they were being severely persecuted in Egypt in the time of Pharaoh remained loyal to monotheism but as soon as this persecution was over and they reached other side of the sea after their enemy was drowned with all his army, they tend toward polytheism. This show of their strength and weakness is mentioned in place in the Qur’ān.<sup>17</sup> Persecution is counterproductive. It creates reaction which gets its strength from collective suffering of fellows. This situation makes Jews staunch monotheists that God praised them,

but when this situation was over and another situation set in, the same monotheists took no time to turn over.

### **The Second Case from the Qur'ān:**

The story of young men of the Cave is too an example of group psychology. They were the residents of Ephesus, an ancient Greek city. They hid themselves to escape persecution for their new monotheistic religion of Christianity. It was the reign of Decius (249.A.D-251.A.D),<sup>18</sup> or it was the time of Hadrian (129. A. D. -134. A.D)<sup>19</sup>. The Young men reappeared after a very long time of sleep during the reign of Theodosius (408.A.D-450.A.D).

At their time of disappearance the government was persecuting people for their conversion to Christianity<sup>20</sup> however, the young men stayed strong in holding up their faith. Their strength came from their trust in God and the belief in the hereafter, but the having a feel of a group sharing similar faith and threat made them stronger against the odds. It would be difficult to face it an individual.

It is observed that it is rather easier for human beings to show chauvinism in a battlefield than as an individual. They feel more motivated in group. Collective suffering makes a bond which strengthens its members. This is the situational factor, established for a group. This is the effect of group psychology.

To show feats of bravery by an individual is always need some extra nerve, because situational factor in not there and there is no feel of collective suffering. That is why individual bravery is put at higher pedestal.

In the lives of the companions of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH), we hardly know cowardliness during warfare we find that at individual level at times their occurred some signs of hesitation not cowardliness. It is narrated from Hudhyfah bin al- Yamān that in the battle of Maot, the prophet announced that who was willing to go out and find out about the activities of the enemies. To encourage them the prophet said they he would pray to God to make him his companion in the paradise. But no one showed up for fear, hunger and cold. Then the prophet called his name and he had to go to spy.<sup>21</sup> On his returned the prophet embraced him and prayed for him.<sup>22</sup> This was because this feat of bravery of performed by an individual.

This is the reason behind declaring the man who speaks truth in front of a tyrant the great of the martyrs:

Jābir reports from the prophet, the prophet said. ""The master of martyrs is Ḥamzah bin 'Abd'l-Muṭṭalib and a man who stood to an oppressive ruler where he ordered him and forbade him so he (the ruler) killed him."<sup>23</sup>

The prophet said. "The best Jihād is to speak a word of truth to a tyrant ruler." <sup>24</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

Human beings in a group can act quite differently or weirdly to their normal behaviour as compared to their individual behaviour. They are observed to embark upon either the most relentless acts like inhuman lynching or massacring others, as we find in the case of the Hutus who cause horrible suffering to Tutsi, minority community in their land of Rwanda, or the most noble act of patience as shown by the protestors led by Mahātmā Gāndhī or the acts of the highest valor as is demonstrated by the soldiers on the battlefields.

Psychodynamics and the theory of situational factors explain this phenomenon of sudden change in human behavior in different ways. Psychodynamic explains it in terms of dispositional analysis of human nature, that is, it comes from inside, while the situation factor theory finds that the influence of the external situation brings such drastic change in individual behavior for a short while. In this regards the function of labeling performs the key role.

The author of this paper finds that this phenomenon is better explained by the theory of situational factor, while psychodynamics is partially successful in this regard. Resultantly, we find that the acts of extra ordinary valour in individual capacity need extra courage to perform as compared to performing them in groups. That is why, the individual acts of gallantry are more appreciated.

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