

The bon in 1895. le
bon suggested



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The earliest systematic interpretation of this theory was proposed by a French writer, Gustave Le Bon in 1895. Le Bon suggested that a “ Collective mind” forms in a crowd and with this the conscious personality of the individual members almost disappear. Le Bon believed that the members of a crowd are dominated by a single impulse and act almost identically. He felt that individuals become susceptible to “ suggestion” in crowds. People actually “ melt into the group and become anonymous”. People are less capable of rational thought when once they are caught up in the frenzy of the crowd.

Since nobody notices what anyone says or does in a crowd, one’s personal beliefs become less important. The collective belief is formed from the “ contagious growth of a belief that is suggested and spread throughout the crowd”. This happens more or less like the way in which contagious disease spreads. Le Bon was an aristocrat and thoroughly disliked crowds drawn from the ranks of the ordinary classes. He had his own prejudices towards them. He was firmly convinced that a person in a crowd “ descends several rungs in the ladder of civilization. Isolated, he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd, he is a barbarian; that is, a creature acting by instinct”.

(Quoted by I. Robertson) ‘In crowds’ Le Bon wrote, “ It is stupidity and not mother-wit that is accumulated” (as quoted by Samuel Koenig). “ The great accomplishments of civilisation, however, he claimed, have been achieved by means of deliberate thought and by a small intellectual aristocracy, never by crowds. This led Le Bon to a certain mistrust of masses, whom he associated with crowd behaviour, and to dislike of what he called the philosophy of number” — (Koenig) Assessment of the Theory: Le Bon’s theory

of the crowd has exercised a tremendous influence on the sociological research of collective behaviour. There is no doubt that the members of the crowds are subject to certain amount of contagion from others. They are highly suggestible and look to others for cues and behave in a less critical and more irresponsible manner. These aspects of Le Bon's theory have been almost accepted. But no one subscribes to the view that there is a separate mind called "the group mind" or "collective mind".

There is no crowd mind with its independent existence. Le Bon's prejudices towards the lower classes are also not justifiable. 2. The "Emergent Norms" Theory: The most accepted theory of crowd today is the "emergent norms" theory of Turner and Killian (1972).

Supporters of this theory have charged that the 'contagion theory' exaggerates the irrational and purposeless components of crowd behaviour. Crowds are never entirely like-minded, and contagion theory does not explain why the crowd takes one action rather than another. Turner argues there are considerable differences in the motives, and actions of crowd members.

Some of the people present in the crowd may be more impulsive, while others are passive supporters. Again, some may take on the role of onlookers while some opportunistic individuals try to seek their own gratification from the crowd situation. The unanimity of the crowd is only an illusion. Even in the midst of a riot, some people may have very different motives and intentions. Some may even behave in an indifferent manner. "According to this theory, crowds are guided by norms, just as other groups in

society are, but the norms are devised as the crowd goes along rather than assumed from the beginning as they are in most social situation”—Wallace and Wallace What happens in a crowd, according to turner is that — new norms emerge in the course of social interaction.

These norms define appropriate behaviour in a crowd situation. These norms emerge from the visible actions of a few people. When utter confusion prevails in the crowd, these few activists, are able to define the norms — whether they are norms regarding applause, violence, clapping or anything else—for most of the members.

Though good number of people do not accept the direction that is being given by these activists, they do not express any opposition, may be because of fear of ridicule, coercion, or even personal injury. Hence casual observers from outside | believe that the crowd is unanimous. Crowd behaviour in this way can very much is explained in terms of norms. The only difference is that the norms are improvised on the spot. The crowd itself evolves the norms and then enforces them on it members.