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## PRO-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Throughout the world, doing good to others or being helpful is described as a virtue. All religions teach us that we should help those who are in need. This behaviour is called helping or pro-social behaviour. Pro-social behaviour is very similar to 'altruism' which means doing something for or thinking about the welfare of others without any self-interest. Some common examples of pro-social behaviour are sharing things, cooperating with others, helping during natural calamities, showing sympathy, doing favours to others, and making charitable donations.

Pro-social behaviour has the following characteristics. It must:

- ① aim to benefit or do good to

another person or other persons.

- ② be done without expecting anything in return.
- ③ be done willingly by the person, and not because of any kind of pressure, and
- ④ involve some difficulty or 'cost' to the person giving help.

For instance, if a rich person donates a lot of money that is obtained illegally, with the idea that her/his photograph and name will appear in the newspapers, this cannot be called 'pro-social behaviour' although the donation may do good to many people.

In spite of the great value and importance attached to pro-social behaviour, people do not show such behaviour very often.

Immediately after the Mumbai blasts on 11 July 2006, the community stepped forward to help the blasts victims in any way they could. By contrast, on an earlier

occasion, nobody came forward to help a girl on a morning suburban train in Mumbai, when her purse was being snatched. The other passengers did nothing to help, and the girl was thrown out of the train. Even as the girl was lying injured on the railway tracks, people lining in the buildings around the area did not come to help her.

## Factors Influencing Pro-social Behaviour

- \* Pro-social behaviour is based on an inborn, natural tendency in human beings to help others members of their own species. This inborn tendency facilitates survival of the species.
- \* Pro-social behaviour is influenced by learning. Individuals who are brought up in a family environment that sets examples

of helping others, emphasises helping as a value, and praises helpfulness, and showing more pro-social behaviours than individuals who are brought-up in a family environment devoid of these features.

\* Cultural factors influence pro-social behaviour. Some cultures actively encourage people to help the needy and distressed. In cultures that encourage independence, individuals will show less pro-social behaviour, because people are expected to take care of themselves, and not depend on help from others. Individuals in cultures suffering from a shortage of resources may not show a high level of pro-social behaviour.

\* Pro-social behaviour is expressed when the situation activates certain social norms that require helping others. Three norms have been mentioned in the context of pro-social behaviour:

⑥ The norm of reciprocity: We should help those persons who have helped us in the past.

⑦ The norm of equity: here we should help others whenever we find that it is fair to do so. For example, many of us may feel that it is more fair to help a person who has lost all belongings in a flood, than to help a person who has lost everything through gambling.

\* Pro-social behaviour is more likely to be shown by individuals who have a high level of empathy, that is, the capacity to feel the distress of the person who is to be helped, such as Baba Saheb Amte and Mother Teresa. Pro-social behaviour is also likely in situations that arouse empathy, such as the picture of starving children in a famine.

\* Pro-social behaviour may be reduced by factors such as a bad mood, being busy with one's own

problems, or feeling that the person to be helped is responsible for her/his own situation (that is, when an internal attribution is made for the need state of the other person).

\* Pro-social behaviour may also be reduced when the number of bystanders is more than one. For example, the victim of a road accident - sometimes does not get help because there are many people standing around the scene of the accident. Each person thinks that it is not her/his responsibility alone to give help, and that someone else may take the responsibility. The phenomenon is called diffusion of responsibility. On the other hand, if there is only one bystander, this person is more likely to take the responsibility and actually help the victim.