

# Indian Journal of Psychological Science

**Internationally**

*Indexed, Refereed and Peer Reviewed*

**Editor**

**Dr. Roshan Lal**

Professor of Psychology  
University of Delhi,  
INDIA-110007

**UGC CARE List-II: Emerging Sources Citation Index:**

<https://mjl.clarivate.com/search-results?issn=0976-9218>

# I J P S

DOI Link :: [https://doi-ds.org/doi/10.2422/0976-9218/04.2024-71225896/IJPS/NAPS/January/2024/Vol.18\(1\)/JaswinderKaur](https://doi-ds.org/doi/10.2422/0976-9218/04.2024-71225896/IJPS/NAPS/January/2024/Vol.18(1)/JaswinderKaur)

The official organ of:



**National Association of Psychological Science** (Regd)

[www.napsindia.org](http://www.napsindia.org) Email: [managingeditorijps@gmail.com](mailto:managingeditorijps@gmail.com), Phone: 9417882789

Dr. Jaswinder Kaur & Birendra Singh

# A Study of the Psychology of Mob Lynchers: An Indian Perspective

Dr. Jaswinder Kaur\* Birendra Singh\*\*

## Abstract

*Mob Lynching is a pathway to glorify a religion or a class of people by oppressing and taking the laws into one's own hands. It involves taking one's life by attacking the person in groups. The rise in the phenomena of mob lynching in India is as alarming as helplessness in terms of lack of availability of laws in the country. This research article aimed to explain how mob control is one of the most difficult tasks that law enforcement organizations have to perform since it is tough to control a mob or crowd without infringing human rights. It is extremely important that law enforcement organizations learn about crowd psychology; otherwise, they will be unable to manage the crowd effectively with just use force. This research article will cover several crowd/mob behaviour theories. The objective of this research article is to help readers understand the reasons behind of mob behaviour. Understanding mob psychology can help law enforcement and mediators observe and communicate with crowds more effectively. Mob psychology can aid in the identification of mob leaders and rational people, allowing for more effective communication, distraction, as well as cooperation with the crowd. The article will attempt to attempt to solve the complexity of mob psychology in order to help readers understand why mobs behave as they do and how they may be effectively managed.*

**Key Words:** Psychology, Mob Lynchers, Crowd Psychology, and Human Rights.

**About authors:** \*Assistant Professor of Law \*\*Ph.D. Research Scholar (Law),  
Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Punjab.

DOI Link :: [https://doi-ds.org/doi/10.2024-71225896/IJPS/NAPS/January/2024/Vol.18\(1\)/JaswinderKaur](https://doi-ds.org/doi/10.2024-71225896/IJPS/NAPS/January/2024/Vol.18(1)/JaswinderKaur)

## INTRODUCTION:

Crime has always been a historical concern in human societies, and it has always been fought in various ways depending on the culture that is currently dominant. People, particularly modern

urban dwellers who are aware that they may become victims of crime, want a society without any crime and full of true peace. Those same people, however, believe that such a desire is a false dream that will never come true.

There are several ways in which crime affects the public, and the peoples, in turn, a key stakeholder in crime management and prevention. One of the most significant methods of crime prevention is to educate society. Public opinion and attitude also influence which crimes are treated more seriously by legislators. This was obvious during the Nirbhaya rape case when rape and juvenile delinquency laws were amended in response to widespread public outrage. Crime, in turn, has an impact on public opinion, as the high number of crimes against women in Delhi has led to the city being known as the “rape capital of India.” The various trends and patterns of crime promote public fear of crime. Some parts of the country are regarded as unsafe or dangerous to visit due to the frequency with which crimes have occurred in the past. Crimes create fear and distrust in the minds of the public. Most individuals are afraid of getting friendly with strangers when traveling. These are some of the ways that crime and the public interact, however, there are more ways that the public is actively involved in crimes. When a group of people band together as a mob or a crowd, it can lead to tragic and brutal acts like riots and mob lynchings (Sinan Caya, 2016).

As we have seen in the recent past, hate crimes, particularly ‘mob violence’ and mob lynching,’ have spread across the streets. The incidents of mob violence affected many people, inflicting bodily injuries, horrifying assaults, and even the death of vulnerable persons, both young and elderly. Hate Crime is defined as an act of prejudice motivated by religion, caste, ethnic, gender, or regional identity. Apart from being violent in character, such crimes endanger a society’s essential ideals. The hate-motivated offender not only attacks the rule of law but also, in essence, his victim’s fundamental life (Sinan Caya, 2016). This is what distinguishes hate crimes as cruel and horrible. Societies with a diversified population structure, such as multi-religious, language, and cultural diversity, are prone to prejudice and hatred-based violence. Such occurrences abound throughout history, and India is no exception. However, until recent occurrences of “mob lynching,” the term “hate crime” was barely heard in India’s criminal justice system. The Supreme Court of India, by announcing steps to stop mob lynching, brought the concept of ‘hate crime’ to the forefront of the crime control discourse. A detailed examination of these guidelines suggests, first, that law enforcement organizations should always

be free of political influence, and second, that the problem of mob violence must be addressed in specific socio-political contexts (Girjesh Shukla, 2020).

A crowd is defined as a large group (mass) or a multitude of individuals and small groups of people that have temporarily gathered in the same area with the understanding that they constitute a crowd and share some characteristics. When one hears of mob violence and property destruction, one wonders whether people who are part of the mob would behave the same way as separate individuals. In most situations, the de-individualization of mob/crowd members provides anonymity to the perpetrators and emboldens them to commit such crimes (Girjesh Shukla, 2020).

According to (Zimbardo, 1969), the process of de-individuation comes when people become part of a huge anonymous group, lose their particular identity, and thus lose their reservations about violence. According to (McDougall, 1920), a renowned psychologist, a crowd is “excessively emotional, impulsive, fickle, inconsistent, irresolute and extreme in action, displaying only the coarser emotions and the less refined sentiments; extremely suggestible, careless in deliberation, hasty in judgment, incapable

of any but the simpler and imperfect forms of reasoning; easily swayed and led, lacking in self-consciousness, devoid of self-respect and sense of responsibility.” As a result, its behavior is like that of an unruly kid or a wild beast.’

The police have mainly considered the mob as a disparaging unit because it has brought them numerous issues. Mob psychology is fascinating. When they believe that injustice has been done to them and that the authorities are not listening to them, ordinary people who are law-abiding and passive can rapidly turn hostile and illegal, committing crimes (Sanjeev P. Sahni & Poulomi Bhadra, 2021). People in a mob are capable of committing atrocities and causing extensive harm to both people and property. The use of excessive force by police officers when controlling mobs is often criticized in today’s era of human rights activism and widespread media coverage. Controlling a crowd is a challenging task, and considerably more difficult in a large country like India, with its numerous religions, castes, classes, languages, and so on, since the police are frequently condemned for being prejudiced towards a certain group. This might result in unneeded violence or resource waste. As a result, it would be extremely advantageous if police officers were able

to understand crowd psychology and use that understanding to control the crowd psychologically (Sanjeev P. Sahni & Poulomi Bhadra, 2021).

### **CRIMINOLOGY THEORIES ON STRUCTURE OF MOB LYNCHING:**

Mob violence has been studied in the areas of criminology and criminal psychology. The ‘criminology of mob lynching’, which regards lynching as a normal way of behavioural expression caused by a combination of various factors. What motivates a crowd to engage in collective violence and lynching is an issue that has not been well addressed in India, and it has no place in the framework of legislation intended to govern mob violence. In the book *The Crowd - A Study of the Popular Mind* (Gustave Le Bon, 1896), Professor Gustave Le Bon emphasized the basic features of mob violence. He stated that once a person becomes a part of a crowd, he loses his individuality. After joining the mob, the offender loses touch with his or her personal life, occupation, character, or intelligence. He is ‘converted into a crowd,’ with a ‘collective mentality’ forcing him to feel, think, and behave in ways that he would not have felt in isolation (Gustave Le Bon, 1896). The six assertions provided below of

criminology theory and other explanations to describe the structure of mob lynching in India.

- First of all, there is a misconception that sociopaths and psychopaths always commit mob lynchings. Social learning and tolerance for violence are deeply rooted habits among India’s growing youth. In many instances, they grow up perceiving violence as a response to and solution to a problem. Internalizing violence on their side is a reality that presents itself anytime the opportunity arises. Singhele observes in his works, *The Criminal Crowd* (Scipio Sighele, 2018) and *The Psychology of Sects* (Harold G. Koenig, 2012), that the mob is mostly made up of strangers, but it exhibits significant cohesion when it comes to acting. About its members, he says that “*Their sudden organization caused by a spark of passion springing up from one of them electrifies this disorder in such a way that the mob acts like a single being*” (G.S. Bajpai, 2019). Processes of imitation, moral contagion, and

suggestion/inculcation are always visible in cases of mob violence.

- Secondly, According to Le Bon(Gustave Le Bon, 1896), individual identities tend to merge in a crowd to form a collective identity with its own different ways of thinking and expressing emotion. This is why the mob may commit heinous crimes with perfect impunity. In essence, the individual's conscious, rational mind is governed by the crowd's unconscious, irrational mind. The collective mind of crowds becomes extremely insane as a result of this transition from conscious to unconscious, reason to emotion. The mob frequently executes on a scale of anonymity, contagion, and suggestibility, allowing its members to perpetrate horrible crimes and brutal executions. Le Bon believes that a passionately charged mob provides a sense of anonymity, which relieves the members' sense of personal responsibility for their actions. Members rely on instinct to govern their behaviours because they lack a feeling of responsibility(Gustave Le Bon, 1896).

- Thirdly, mob lynching can also be attributed to de-individualisation. Individuals are no longer motivated by a feeling of personal moral restraint in this instance, according to Leon Festinger, Albert Pepitone, and Theodore Newcomb Festinger. Crowds' loss of individuality results in a significant reduction or complete loss of individual reasonability, individual guilt, and individual moral restraints.
- Fourthly, in his book *Opinion and the Mob*, Tarde emphasized how violent members of a crowd are particularly intolerable, silly, sickly susceptible, and have a surprising sense of irresponsibility due to their belief that they are all-powerful. Finally, the members' mutually exalted emotions have no bearing on the sense of measure. Contagious cohesiveness is a major aspect of mob violence, according to McDougall, since the bigger the number of individuals who experience the same emotions at the same time, the greater the contagion. Freud also stated that in a crowd, the superego's restrictions are relaxed, and primitive ego impulses take over. An individual is freed from his or her inner censor

and begins to act according to their instincts or basic impulses, which are confined to the inner depths of their personality.

- Fifthly, Zimbardo conducted various studies in which he examined participants' willingness to act aggressively toward other participants. Zimbardo desired that the aggressors in his tests be addressed in a way that gave the impression of anonymity. The investigations discovered that deindividuated aggressors were far more ready to shock the victims for a longer amount of time than aggressors whose identities were revealed through the use of a nametag and regular attire.
- Sixthly, dehumanization has also been mentioned as a cause of mob rage. According to Homer Dixon, dehumanization de-individuates and externalizes members of the other group, and does not view them as members of his/her moral community. In cases of mob lynching, the disregarded members have a great sensation of alienation as a result of a group of individuals who remove themselves to the point of generating a strong sense of condemnation, which frequently

converts into brutal violence. According to Homer-Dixon in *Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others*, persons who commit mob violence are led by group affiliations and see themselves as higher than others. Furthermore, Allport's theory proposes that a shared stimulus prepares two individuals for the same reaction, and that when they are thus prepared, seeing one make that response unleashes and heightens that response in the other. Interstimulation is the second principle. Any law, to be effective, would require, how it takes care of dealing with those factors which are the product of human instinct and behaviour.

### **PSYCHOLOGY THEORIES ON MOB LYNCHING:**

Crowd behaviour was first studied by psychologists in the nineteenth century. Crowds, according to social psychologists such as *Gustavo Le Bon and Gabriel Tarde*, (Gustave Le Bon, 1896) arise as a result of impulse and mass imitation. As a result, Le Bon popularized 'mob psychology' as a theory of crowd behaviour. Later, Le Bon's hypothesis paved the path for additional hypotheses.

These social psychologists argue that crowd behaviour is significantly more attentive, balanced, and socially ordered than Le Bon imagined. Furthermore, they have enlarged the discipline to include the study of mob, riot, panics and rage, rumours, spectators, and public and mass movements under a new umbrella of “collective behaviour.” To explain crowd behaviour, psychologists, sociologists, and criminologists have developed many theories. Emotions play a significant effect in crowd behaviour. Every person experience basic emotions such as anger, fear, and fury. These similar emotions cause the crowd to form, feel, and act in a uniform manner. In certain situations, this similarity builds a link and enables communication (sometimes verbal, sometimes nonverbal). When people get engulfed in a crowd, the suggestion of leaders, the use of oral interaction and other indicators, the animated gesticulations of certain members, and the stressful situations and environment intensify these feelings. Because of these heightened emotions, the mob is readily swayed by leaders (Sanjeev P. Sahni & Poulomi Bhadra, 2021).

In a crowd, primarily rationality becomes numb, and people accept the most heinous suggestions made by the leaders. De-individualisation can also be attributed to

mob violence. According to *Festinger* (Festinger, L., Pepitone, A. & Newcomb 1952), among crowds, humans are no longer directed by a feeling of moral self-control. Crowds’ loss of individuality results in a significant reduction or full removal of logic, responsibility, and ethical limitations for people. Zimbardo conducted a number of tests to see if participants were willing to act aggressively toward other participants. Zimbardo wanted to explore whether any of the volunteers in his tests could be de-individualized in such a way that they felt anonymous. The results of the experiments demonstrated that de-individualized participants were far more prepared to shock the subjects for a longer period of time than individuals whose identities were disclosed through the use of tags with their names inscribed on them and a lack of camouflage. This demonstrates that when people are de-individualized, they are capable of committing heinous crimes. Dehumanization has also been linked to mob anger (Sanjeev P. Sahni & Poulomi Bhadra, 2021). The important principal theories provided below of mob psychology and other explanations to describe the mob lynching in India.

1. *Le Bon’s Theory* (2012), Le Bon says that the individual identity dissolves to produce a collective

identity with its own way of thinking and communicating emotions. This is the reason that mobs perform heinous acts without any fear of the repercussions. To put it concisely, the individual's conscious, logical thinking is replaced by the crowd's unconscious, irrational mindset. The collective mentality of crowds becomes extremely inane as a result of this shift from conscious to unconscious, rational to illogical. The mob is generally affected by anonymity, suggestibility, and contagion, allowing its members to commit criminal acts of violence and cruelty. According to Le Bon, a zealously motivated mob can act anonymously, which reduces the members' feeling of individual blame for their wrongdoings. The crowd's actions are guided by primitive impulses because they lack a feeling of responsibility.

According to Le Bon, the original and biggest proponent of crowd behavior, the individual begins to follow his basic instincts, which he would normally keep under control if he were alone. He is no longer conscious of his own actions, as

though astonished. While particular sensitivities are destroyed, other senses may be stimulated to a greater degree. He is no longer himself, but has transformed into a puppet that is no longer controlled by his logic. When he joins the mob, he transforms into a beast. He exemplifies the impulsiveness, viciousness, fierceness, ardor, and courage of uncivilized humans.

Le Bon developed the key concept of 'collective mind' to explain crowd behavior. The collective mind is not just an amalgamation (or summation) of the diverse minds of the group's members. The group mind is a separate entity that works on each person. Emotions, appeals, ideas, and slogans are the driving forces underlying its operation. The crowd's mentality operates more emotionally and less logically. It is a reckless mentality, focusing its attention on some immediately reachable goal(s). It has a low degree of intellect and is readily disturbed. According to Le Bon, when society is weakened or fractured, it is vulnerable to the group mentality.

2. *McDougall's Theory*(1920) The theory of the behaviour of

disorganized crowd or groups given by William McDougallis almost similar to that of Le Bon's. He emphasizes two major aspects impacting crowd behavior, including the elevation of emotions in a crowd, which is followed by a fall in logical thinking. McDougall stated that the degree of the contagion is proportional to the number of persons who show the same emotions simultaneously. Individuals are influenced by collective emotions and lose their ability to refuse them, allowing them to exhibit the same feelings in themselves. The shared communication among members aggravates the common emotion. The inability to stay untouched by the impact of the crowd, in turn, hampers intellectual thinking and reduces rational thinking among members of the crowd (Sanjeev P. Sahni & Poulomi Bhadra, 2021).

3. In accordance with McDougall's theory of sympathetic induction, the explanation for escalation of emotion given by Freud does not find acceptance by many psychologists. Sigmund Freud writes in the essay '*Group Psychology and Analysis of Ego*'

(Freud, S., 1959), "*There is no doubt that something exists in us which, when we become aware of signs of emotion; how often do we not successfully oppose it, resist the emotion, and react in quite the opposite way?*" *Why, therefore, do we invariably give way to this contagion when we are in group?*' Freud associates it with our indirect impulses. According to Freud, every group is tied by emotional bonds, particularly the relationship of love. He identified this as the main phenomenon of group psychology."

Freud stated that, Individual members of a crowd lose control of their super ego and fall under the control of their basic Id and ego. Their super ego's self-control is overrun by the influence of the crowd, and their basic instinct or 'Id' impulses, which generally remain in the subconscious mind, gain control of the individual. The Freudian theory has been frequently criticized as it cannot be proved by observation. mob behaviour can occasionally be the manifestation of suppressed urges, although it is not usually the cause of crowd behaviour. This theory

also fails to explain other aspects of crowd behaviour (Sanjeev P. Sahni & Poulomi Bhadra, 2021).

4. *F. H. Allport's Theory* (Allport, F., 1924), Allport criticized McDougall's theory of sympathetic induction of emotion and behavior. He used two principles to describe crowd behavior, one of which is the social facilitation principle. According to this social facilitation principle, one person's behavior contributes to another's emotional reaction but does not cause it. Sometimes we laugh in a group when others laugh without knowing the reason. Interstimulation is the second principle. In crowds, a stimulus such as a verbal or nonverbal gesture might cause suggestibility. A slogan or round of handclapping serves to break down boundaries between people and fosters togetherness. They express the same mood and gestures gradually and steadily. As a result, each individual motivates the other. As a consequence, excitement develops as does each individual's suggestibility. Skilled politicians and party manipulators employ a variety of ways to create crowd

rhythm and win people around to their causes. Interstimulation among crowd members makes them feel invincible. Interstimulation and social facilitation both lower individuals' intellectual ability and make them more suggestible. Subsequently, members of a crowd display behavior that they would never show as individuals (Sanjeev P. Sahni & Poulomi Bhadra, 2021).

5. *Turner's Theory (1964)* (Turner, R., 2021), Sociologist Ralf Turner developed a new perspective on crowd behaviour known as the emergent norm perspective. This approach is based on the idea that even the most violent and dangerous crowds exhibit some social interaction in which some behaviours are acceptable, limits are set, and courses of action are recognized and allowed by the crowd. Crowd behaviour is directed by social norms agreed upon by the crowd's members, according to emergent norm theory. According to the emergent norm approach, crowd behaviour is caused by a mix of like persons, anonymity, and shared emotion. According to this idea,

individuals come together with certain expectations and social norms, but through interaction among crowd members, new expectations and norms might form (Turner, R. 2021). This drives the audience to behave in ways that they would not in a regular circumstance. Some citizens, for example, may peacefully assemble to protest something. During this peaceful protest, a few aggressive members of the crowd began assaulting police enforcement and pelting rocks at the property. Soon, the other members of the mob consider yelling insults and pelting stones as appropriate, and within minutes, the remainder of the crowd members adopt similar aggressive behaviours (Anne Templeton & Fergus, 2020).

6. *Sighele's Theory*, According to Sighele, even though the mob is heterogeneous in nature, as it is typically made up of individuals from different age groups, genders, classes, cultures, and values, and is sometimes formed on the spur of the moment, it demonstrates collectiveness and cohesiveness to a considerable level. Sighele also

notes how imitation, moral contagion, and suggestion may lead to mob violence or criminality. According to Sighele, a mob has an aim and an intention, but only the core members of the mob understand this intention, while the majority of the members join out of influence (Sighele, S., 2018).

7. *Jung's Theory*, Jung has made several assumptions on mob criminality. Mobs, he claims, are like wild monsters. The sudden explosion of the mob's collective energy causes unexpected changes in the members' state of mind. Members are transformed from rational humans into wild creatures. 'If one were to choose a hundred exceedingly clever persons, together, they would quickly create a foolish agglomeration!' said Jung. He claims that everyone has a dark/primal side, and that the conscious and subconscious minds are always in odds. When a person joins the mob, his subconscious mind gives him the idea that he is all-powerful. The anonymity of the mob envelops the individual, making him irresponsible (Jung, C. G., 1981).

8. *Adler's Theory (1956)*, Adler's theory was based on the concept of an inferiority complex. He contended that people who have an inferiority complex 027 themselves give up it when they join a gang. Their inferiority complex appears to be over compensated as a member of the mob.
9. *Espinas' Theory(1878)*, According to Espinas when a person is a member of the crowd, he behaves differently. He asserted that a brilliant public speaker can influence an audience and whip them up into a frenzy by doing behaviours such as cheering, clapping, and hooting. The audience becomes more united as a result of this emotional condition.
10. *Reiwald's Theory (1947)*, According to Reiwald Individual aggressiveness peaks during wars, civil conflicts, or revolutions, according to this statement. Individuals must manage their hostility in order to live in a civilized community. This is accomplished by legislation so that individuals or mobs do not take matters into their own hands.

Although civilizations have been successful in restraining such collective anger, mob lynchings and riots may occur even during periods of peace. According to numerous psychological theories on mob violence, mob violence occurs as a result of social learning that violence is a solution to problems, and mob violence occurs as a result of a sense of anonymity. All of the hypotheses discussed above point to one component as a contributing factor to crowd behaviour. As a result, these hypotheses do not appear to be compelling or sufficient. Crowd behaviour is generated by a variety of elements, including stimulation, anonymity, suggestibility, emotionality, initiation, the power of unconscious impulses, a lack of volition, and contagion, which may be the causes/factors underlying the creation of the crowd's characteristic behaviour.

### CONCLUSION:

The study of mob psychology is a critical area for research, and it is now more important than ever that more research and study be done in this area since various countries throughout the

world are confronting new challenges related to crowd violence, such as mob lynching, riots, agitations, and so on. As we have seen recently, the government has codified offenses related to mob lynching and hate-crime murder, with penalties that extend from seven years to death. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, introduced in 2023, deals with incidents in which a mob of five or more people commits murder based on grounds like race, caste, community, or personal belief. This is nested within Section 101 of the Bill, which addresses the punishment for murder. Section 2 has been added to this section, which deals with penalties for offenses related to mob lynching and hate crimes (Kaunain Sheriff M., 2023). But as the supreme court held in the case of ***Tehseen S. Poonawalla v. Union of India***, AIR 2018 SC 3354 case that first there should be some preventive steps to be made to stop this kind of crime in society. The existing and growing crowd/mob psychology theories will help us in understanding the reasons and factors behind crowd behaviour. As a result, law enforcement authorities and negotiators/mediators will be able to deal with mobs and crowds without using excessive force.

#### REFERENCE:

Sinan Caya, *Theories on the Psychology of Mass- Violence*, RRJSS, (Sept., 2016). <https://www.rroj.com/open-access/theories-on-the-psychology-of-massviolence-.pdf>.

Girjesh Shukla, *Hate Crimes: An Argument for Alternative Penal Policy*, 48(1), Indian Journal of Criminology 14, 14-15 (2020).

Zimbardo, P. G., *The Human Choice: Individuation, Reason, And Order Versus Deindividuation, Impulse, And Chaos*, NSM (1969).

McDougall, W., *The Group Mind, A Sketch of The Principles of Collective Psychology, With Some Attempt to Apply Them to The Interpretation of National Life and Character*. G.P. Putnam's Sons (1920).

Sanjeev P. Sahni & Poulomi Bhadra, *Criminal Psychology And The Criminal Justice System In India And Beyond* 155 (1<sup>st</sup> Ed. 2021).

Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (9 (1899) 521).

Girjesh Shukla, *Hate Crimes: An Argument for Alternative Penal Policy*, 48(1), Indian Journal of Criminology 14, 19-19 (2020).

