NATURE AND COMPONENTS OF ATTITUDES

For a few minutes quietly do the following mental exercise. Today, how many times did you tell yourself: "In my opinion..." or others may say so and so, but I feel....?

What you fill in the blanks are called opinions. Now continue the exercise; how important are these opinions to you? The topics of some of these opinions may be only simply ways of thinking, and it does not matter much to us that others agree or disagree with our views. If someone opposes or challenges our views about these topics, we get emotional. We may have made some of these views part of our behaviour. In other words, if our views are not merely

thoughts, but also have emotional and action components, then these views are than 'opinions', they are examples of attitudes.

Attitudes are evaluations of ideas (such as the insanity defense), events (such as surprise parties), objects (such as abstract art) or people (such as sorority members). All definitions of attitudes agree that an attitude is a state of mind, set of views or thoughts, regarding some topic (called the attitude object'), which have an evaluative feature (positive, negative or neutral quality). The thought component is referred to as the cognitive aspect, the emotional component is known the affective aspect, and the tendency to act is called behavioural (or conative) aspect. These three aspects have been referred to as the A-B-C components (Affective - Behavioural -

Cognitive components) of attitude.

Attitudes have to be distinguished from two other closely related concepts, namely, beliefs and values. Values are attitudes or beliefs that contain a 'should' or 'ought-' aspect, such as moral or ethical values. Values are formed when a particular belief or attitude becomes an inseparable part of the person's outlook on life. Consequently, values are difficult to change.

In addition to the affective, cognitive and behavioural components, attitudes also have other properties. Four significant features of attitudes are Valence (positivity or negativity), Extremeness, Simplicity or Complexity (multiplexity) and Centrality.

Valence (positivity or negativity):
The valence of an attitude tells us whether an attitude is positive or negative towards the attitude

object. Suppose an attitude (say, towards nuclear research) has to be expressed on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (Very bad), 2 (Bad), 3 (Neutral — neither good nor bad), and 4 (Good), to 5 (Very good). If an individual rates her/his view towards nuclear research as 4 or 5, this is clearly a positive attitude. This means that the person likes the idea of nuclear research and thinks it is something good. On the other hand, if the rating is 1 or 2, the attitude is negative. This means that the person dislikes the idea of nuclear research, and thinks it is something bad. A neutral attitude would have neither positive nor negative valence.

Extremeness: The extremeness of an attitude indicates how positive or negative an attitude is. Taking the nuclear research example