

LESSON 18

PERSONALITY THEORIES

SUMMARY

The study of personality deals with the issue of human individuality. As a human being each one of us shows certain specific patterns of thinking, feeling and acting.

The study of personality has also attracted the attention of psychologists and they have developed various theories of personality. Also, they have developed certain tools to assess people's personality. The personality related information is used in selecting people for various jobs, giving guidance to people in the need of psychological help, and mapping their potential. Thus, the study of personality contributes to different areas of human behaviour.

Concept of personality

Psychologist refers to the term personality as characteristic pattern of thinking, feeling and acting. Characteristic pattern means the consistent and distinctive ways our ideas, feelings and actions are organized.

The enduring pattern expressed by the person in various situations is the hall mark of personality. Personality theorists view 'personality' as the essence of the person. It is a person's "true" inner nature.

Different theories provide different explanations about the role of conscious/unconscious factors, determinism/freedom in functioning, role of early experience, role of genetic factors, uniqueness/universality etc.

The Psychoanalytic perspective

Founded by Sigmund Freud, this theory emphasizes the influence of the unconscious, the importance of sexual and aggressive instincts, and early childhood experience on a person. Freud started his career as a neurologist. His theory developed in the course of his observations of his patients, as well as, self-analysis. He used free association to help his patients recover forgotten memories. Freud discovered that mind is like an iceberg and we have limited conscious awareness. Freud proposed that psychological forces operate at three levels of awareness:

Conscious level: The thoughts, feelings, and sensations that one is aware of at the present moment.

Preconscious level: It contains information of which one is not currently aware, however, they can easily enter conscious mind.

Unconscious level: It consists of thought, feelings, wishes, drives etc. of which we are not aware. It,

however, influences our conscious level of activity.

Freud thought that unconscious material often seeks to push through to the conscious level in a disguised manner. It may be in a distorted manner and or it may take a symbolic form. Interpretation of dreams and free association were used for analysis of the three levels of awareness.

Personality Structure

Freud believed that human personality emerges due to a conflict between our aggressive and pleasure-seeking biological impulses and the internalized social restraints against them. Thus, personality arises in the course of our effort to resolve the conflicts. To this end he proposed three structures which interact with each other: Id, Ego and Super Ego.

Id: It is the unconscious, irrational part of personality. It is the primitive part immune to morality and demands of the external world. It operates on the pleasure principle. It seeks immediate satisfaction.

Ego: It is involved with the workings of the real world. It operates on the reality principle. It is the conscious and rational part of personality that regulates thoughts and behaviours. It teaches the person to balance demands of external world and needs of the person.

Super Ego: It is the internal representation of parental and societal values. It works as the voice of conscience that compels the ego to consider not only the real but also the ideal. It judges one's behaviours as right or wrong, good or bad. Failing up to moral ideals bring about the shame, guilt, inferiority and anxiety in the person.

Personality Development

Freud reached at a conclusion that personality development occurs through a sequence of psychosexual stages.

Stages	Focus of activity
Oral (0-18 months)	Pleasure centres in the mouth and leads to activities of sucking and biting etc.
Anal (18-36 months)	Pleasure centres on bowel and bladder elimination
Phallic (4 to 6 years)	Pleasure centre is genitals Touching and fondling of genitals give pleasure
Latency (7 to 11 years)	Children repress their sexual impulses and channelize them into socially acceptable activities such as sports, arts.
Genital (From Puberty)	Pleasure zone is the genital. Maturation of sexual interests.

Defense Mechanisms

The Ego has to perform a difficult duty of mediating between the instinctual demands of Id and moral position of Super Ego.

The Ego tries to solve the problem and if a realistic solution or compromise is not possible it

indulges in distorting thoughts or perception of reality through certain processes called defense mechanisms.

Mechanism	Description
Denial	Failure to recognize or acknowledge the existence of unpleasant event.
Displacement	Emotional impulses are redirected toward one other i.e., substitute person/object
Projection	Attributing own unacceptable urges to others
Rationalization	Justifying our actions or feelings through socially acceptable explanations
Reaction formation	Thinking or acting in a way that is the extreme opposite of unacceptable urges
Regression	Retreating to behaviour characteristic of an earlier stage of development
Repression	Exclusion of anxiety producing thoughts, feelings or impulses from consciousness
Sublimation	Sexual urges are channelized into productive, nonsexual activities

Carl Jung: Collective unconscious

Carl Jung proposed that people are motivated by more general psychological energy. He proposed that psyche comprises the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious contains archetypes which are the mental images of a particular person, object or experience.

Karen Horney: Basic anxiety

Horney emphasized on the importance of social relationships in personality development. Basic anxiety refers to the feeling of a child of being isolated and helpless in a potentially hostile world.

Alfred Adler: Feelings of Inferiority and Superiority

Adler proposed that the central human motive is that of striving for superiority. It arises from feelings of inferiority that are experienced during infancy and childhood. During this period the child is helpless and depends on others for help and support.

The Trait Perspective

Traits are characteristic behaviours and conscious motives. They represent a relatively stable and enduring predisposition to behave in a given way. This approach involves enumerating list of personal characteristics. The apparent traits are called surface traits (e.g., happy, cordial). Contrary to this there are certain source traits. Raymond Cattell developed a trait theory which has 16 source traits. He called them personality factors, e.g., Reserved-Outgoing, Practical-Imaginative.

Eysenck proposed a theory which classifies people in four types: introverted-neurotic, introverted-stable, extraverted-neurotic and extraverted-stable. In subsequent work Eysenck proposed

psychoticism as another dimension of personality.

McCrae and Costa have proposed a five-factor model, comprising of neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness.

The Social cognitive perspective

This perspective was developed by Albert Bandura. It views behaviour as influenced by the interaction between persons and the social context. Bandura developed the concept of self-efficacy which incorporates a person's cognitive skills, abilities and attitudes as represented in one's self-system.

The theory is based on laboratory research. However, the theory ignores the unconscious factors which may influence behaviour. The theory also emphasizes the rational side of life while ignoring the emotional side. The cognitive-social theory brings into focus the role of thought and memory in personality.

The Humanistic perspective

These theories propose that within each individual is an active creative force, often called "self". This perspective, also known as the third force, emphasizes on human potential and characteristics like self-awareness and free will. The conscious and subjective perception of self is considered very important. Carl

Rogers and Abraham Maslow are the main proponents of the humanistic perspective.

Abraham Maslow proposed the theory of needs, where he organized the needs in a hierarchy. Abraham Maslow proposed the idea of self-actualized people.

Maslow notes that the self-actualized people have realistic perception, are spontaneous, easily accept self and others, are creative, and enjoy and appreciate positive aspects of life, like privacy and independence.

Carl Rogers thinks that the basic human motive is actualizing tendency. It is the innate drive to maintain and enhance the human organism.

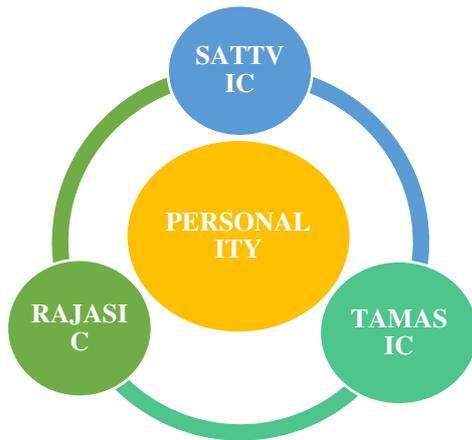
Rogers observed that people are motivated to act in accordance with their self concept. The ideal condition for development is unconditional positive regard. His notion of a fully functioning individual is that the self-concept is flexible and evolving.

Concept of Gunas

The Indian approach to personality emphasizes on the combination of three qualities namely, Sattava, Rajas and Tamas. These Gunas have been discussed in detail in Samkhya Theory.

These gunas are present in different degrees and at any point of time one or the other may dominate. The behaviour of a person depends on the guna that

is dominating a person at any point of time.



Sattva Guna: The main attributes which characterize Sattva guna are truth, gravity, duty, discipline, detachment, cleanliness, and mental balance, sense of control, determination and sharp intelligence.

Rajas Guna: A person dominated by Rajas guna has attributes that include vigorous activity, desire for sense gratification, dissatisfaction, envy and materialistic point of view.

Tamas Guna: It involves anger, arrogance, mental imbalance, depression, laziness, procrastination and a feeling of helplessness. Bhagvadgita views the three gunas in a prototypical form and describes that the food which we eat, mentality (Budhi), Charity (Dan) etc. can also be categorized in the three types of gunas or qualities.

Assessing Human Personality

Personality assessment tools can be categorized into three types

namely observational, self-report and projective.

The observational tools include interview, rating of a person in one or many situations.

Projective tests are a special kind of test in which ambiguous material is used and the person whose personality is being tested has to give his or her own meaning or interpretation. Thus, it is expected that the personality of the examinee will be projected in the response given by him or her.

E.g., Rorschach Ink Blot Test and Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)

Factors influencing personality development

The development of personality of an individual takes place in a socio-cultural context. In the process of growth and development people develop unique configuration of traits which lead to individual differences. In this way one finds that personality formation is a complex process depending upon common and unique experiences on the one hand, and, genetic factors on the other.

Genetic factors - Studies of behaviour genetics suggest that most personality variables are 15 to 50 percent inheritable.

Early experience - The early years play very important role in the shaping of personality. However, the immediate environment and

experiences are also found to be of immense value.

Primary groups – In personality development family is found to play a critical role. The early relationships with members of family are particularly important.

Culture - People living in one culture often share similar practices, beliefs and values. The child is expected to learn to behave in the manner expected by the culture. However, the effect of culture may not be uniform for everyone belonging to that culture because they are transmitted through different ways and persons and people also have certain unique experiences.

Evaluate yourself

1. Define at least five defense mechanisms.
2. Discuss the theory of Trigunas.
3. What is the humanistic perspective of personality?
4. List ways to assess the personality.