

## Personality and Its Theories

**N**O topic in the field of psychology is more fascinating than personality. Tremendous research has been done on the topic but no final conclusions have been drawn as regards the nature of personality. If you ask a man, the meaning of the term personality, he would not be able to give answer to this simple question in clear and definite terms because the human personality is so complex a phenomena that it can be interpreted in many ways.

The term personality has been defined in various ways by the psychologists who worked on the problem of personality and the variables influencing its development.

### MEANING OF PERSONALITY

The meaning and definition of any term is arbitrary. This also holds true in case of the word personality. To arrive at its meaning, we have to trace the historical root of the word. The term personality has been derived from the Latin word "Persona" that was associated with Greek theatre in ancient times. Persona was meant a mask which the Greek actors commonly used to wear before their faces when they worked on the stage. In our own country, actors in Ram Lila and Krishna Lila use mask when they enact the role of a particular character from the epics.

The mask, worn by the actors, was called persona. According to the concept of mask, personality was thought to be the effect and influence which the individual wearing a mask left on the audience. Even today, for a layman, personality means the effect which an individual leaves on other people. Precisely, we can say that the mask or persona of the actor implied a cover for the real person behind it. It was developed on the basis of Plato's idealistic philosophy who believed that personality is a mere facade for some substance.

#### Some Definitions

(1) Personality as a stimulus. (Some psychologists define persona-

lity in terms of its social stimulus value. (How an individual affects other persons with whom he comes in contact, whether he is impressive or repulsive, he has dominating or submissive personality.) Personality, from this point of view, becomes identical to reputation and impression, mostly in terms of physical appearance, clothing, conversation and etiquette. Generally, we use this concept of personality in selecting applicants for various jobs and courses. The interviewers take into consideration the total picture of an individual's organized behaviour.

(2) Summative approach. (The second approach of defining personality emphasizes the importance of sum total of different processes and activities of the individual as, for example, innate dispositions, habits, impulses and emotions etc. This approach was criticized by Gestalt psychologists who objected to the idea of aggregation or sum total of parts without introducing the concept of organization and integration of parts into a total whole.

(3) Integrative approach. (The definitions of this category lay emphasis on the integrative aspect of personality and its definite pattern of organization.) Warren's dictionary defines personality, "Personality is the integrative organization of all the cognitive, affective, conative and physical characteristics of an individual as it manifests itself in focal distinction from others."

G.W. Hartman defined "Personality is integrated organization of all the pervasive characteristics of an individual as it manifests itself in focal distinctiveness to others."

(4) Totality view. (This approach to define personality puts more emphasis on integration than the first category of definitions given above.) It forgets the part. According to this view, the general characterization or pattern of an individual's total behaviour is his personality. A man's personality is the total picture of his organized behaviour, especially, as it can be characterized by his fellowmen in a consistent way. Mark Sherman in his book, *Personality: Inquiry and Application* (1979) has defined personality as, "the characteristic pattern of behaviours, cognitions and emotions which may be experienced by the individual and/or manifest to others."

(5) Personality as adjustment. An individual, since his birth, attempts to adjust to his environment. Behaviour of an individual can be defined as an adjustment to his environment. Every individual develops his own unique way of adjustment in the society. According to this approach, personality is an individual's characteristic pattern of behaviour. Individual, through his continuous reactions, attempts

to adjust himself in his environment. We can say that sum of the individual's movements as he adapts himself to the environment is his personality.

We have described the various approaches to define the term personality. Below we will examine important definitions of personality.

Fredenburgh in his book, *The Psychology of Personality and Adjustment* tried to summarize the various definitions in a single definition which runs as, "Personality is a stable system of complex characteristics by which the life pattern of the individual may be identified."

Allport (1961) who devoted most of his time for research on personality defines "Personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustment to his environment."

The definition given by Allport is very comprehensive and includes all aspects of an individual's personality. Some terms used in the definition need explanation. Dynamic means that personality is undergoing a constant change but is still organized. It constitutes two types of systems psycho (mental) and physical and these two systems interact with internal and external environment. The word 'determine' lays emphasis that it is the psychophysical system that activates the organism for action. The unique adjustment of the individual to his environment means that each individual employs different methods of adjustment resulting in unique adjustment.

Guilford (1959) defines personality "An individual's personality, then, is his unique pattern of traits. ... A trait is any distinguishable, relatively enduring way in which one individual differs from another."

Thus we see that different approaches have been made to define personality but there is no agreement on a single definition of personality. Though there is diversity of views but even then all psychologists agree on certain common basic characteristics. One basic fact is that personality is unique. No two individuals, even the identical twins have alike personality. The second basic fact regarding personality is that it is the product of its own functioning. What we do today, depends on our accumulated experiences of the past. The experiences are accumulated day after day and shape our personality by continuous interaction with external environment. The third common characteristic of most definitions is that they stress the need to understand the meaning of individual differences. Personality is what makes individuals unique: it is only through the study of personality

that the relevant differences among individuals can be made clear.

## THEORIES OF PERSONALITY

Psychologists have developed several theories of personality to study the structure and growth of it. Space does not permit to describe all theories of personality so we shall follow sample approach in the description of theories. The following theories will be discussed in the present and the next chapter.

- (1) Type theory.
- (2) Trait theory.
- (3) Psychoanalytic theory.
- (4) Phenomenological theories.
- (5) Learning theory of personality.
- (6) Social behaviour theory.
- (7) Rotter's Expectancy—reinforcement model.

## TYPE THEORIES

It has been the nature of persons, from ancient times, to name and classify objects of his environment and human beings into different categories called "Types". The old system of typology still continues and even in modern times, psychologists have developed various typologies which will be described. Greek physicians were the first in the fifth B.C. who classified people into four broad categories on the basis of emotional and temperamental characteristics. One of Aristotle's pupils theorized that human body consists four fluids. The personality of an individual is typed by the dominance of one of them in the body. The four types are as follows:

| S. No. | Humour             | Temperament | Characteristics                    |
|--------|--------------------|-------------|------------------------------------|
| 1.     | Blood              | Sanguine    | Active, hopeful                    |
| 2.     | Yellow bile        | Choleric    | Irritability, quick to anger       |
| 3.     | Phlegam<br>(Mucus) | Phlegmatic  | Calm, temperamentally<br>sluggish. |
| 4.     | Black bile         | Melancholic | Depressed, slow and pessimistic.   |

If we study our own scriptures we find in ancient India we had an advanced system of Ayurveda in which our ancient physicians broadly categorized all human beings on the basis of three elements in the body. The predominance of one of the three decided the category of the person. It appears that systems of Hippocrates and Indian physicians were, more or less, similar. The three elements which the Indian physicians theorized are pitt (bile), bat (wind) and kuf (mucus)