Personality

MEANING AND NATURE

The term "personality" is derived from the Latin word *persona*, which was the name given to the masks that actors wore and the characters they portrayed. The meaning of the word personality has changed little since classical times and comments like what does he see in her? She has such a poor personality", or "look at that young man, what a fine personality he has" are quite common. Remarks like this make us believe that personality is a thing or quality that is possessed by all of us and we can paste labels such as fine, good or poor on it on the basis of the physical make-up, manner of walking, talking, dressing and a host of other similar characteristics of individuals. However, this is a very limited view and the psychological concept of personality goes further and deeper than mere appearance or outward behaviour. The question of how best to interpret or define personality has long exercised the minds of psychologists.

Watson (1930), the father of behaviourism, on the basis of his behavioural studies, concluded:

> Personality is the sum of activities that can be discovered by actual observations over a long enough period of time to give reliable information.

In this way he tried to make the word personality synonymous with the consistent behaviour patterns of an individual. This, however, reflected a very narrow meaning of the term personality.

During the same years, Morton Prince (1929) tried to give personality a broader base by accepting the role of both environmental and hereditary factors in constituting what is termed as personality. In his words:

> Personality is the sum total of all the biological innate dispositions, impulses, tendencies, appetites and instincts of the individual and the dispositions and tendencies acquired by experience.

This definition of Morton Prince was criticised on the ground that it does not present an integrated and organizational view of personality. Personality cannot be described through merely summing up the various elements involved in it and if this definition is accepted, it would be like describing a house as a collection of bricks.

The inability of various existing definitions to describe personality in acceptable terms led Allport (1948) to engage in trying to discover some useful definition. After evaluating 49 such definitions, he concluded:

Distinguishing Features and Characteristics of Personality

The results of various experimental studies and observations have led to the identification of the following characteristics of personality.

1. Personality is something unique and specific. Every one of us is a unique person in oneself. Every one of us has specific characteristics for making adjustments. However, the uniqueness of an individual's personality does not mean that he has nothing to share with others in terms of traits and characteristics of personality. He may have certain characteristics which he may share with others and at the same time many others which are unique to him.

2. Personality exhibits self consciousness as one of its main characteristics. Man is described as a person or as having a personality when the idea of 'self' enters into his consciousness. In this connection Bhatia (1968) writes:

   We do not attribute personality to a dog and even a child cannot be described as a personality because it has only a vague sense of personal identity.

3. "Personality", as stated by Allport (1948):

   It is not only the assumed, the external and the non-essential but also the vital, the internal and the essential.

It includes everything about a person. It is all what a person has about him. Therefore, it includes all the behaviour patterns, i.e. conative, cognitive and affective and covers not only the conscious activities but goes deeper to the semi-conscious and unconscious also.

4. Personality is not just a collection of so many traits or characteristics. For instance, by only counting the bricks, how can we describe the wall

of a house? Actually, personality is more than this: it is an organization of psychophysical systems or some behaviour characteristics and functions as a unified whole. Just as an elephant cannot be described as a pillar only by examining its legs, an individual's personality cannot be judged by only looking at his physical appearance or his sociability. The personality of an individual can be assessed only by going into all the aspects that comprise his totality.

5. Although the personality of an individual remains stable to a large extent, it cannot be said to be static, it is dynamic and continuously in the process of change and modification. As we have said earlier, personality is the 'everything' that a person has about him. It gives him all that is needed for his unique adjustment to his environment. The process of making adjustment is continuous. One has to struggle with the environmental as well as the inner forces throughout one's life. As a result, one has to modify and change one's personality patterns and this makes the nature of personality dynamic.

6. Personality is sometimes subjected to disorganisation and disintegration, leading to severe personality disorders on account of factors and conditions like severe anxiety, stress, traumatic experiences, prolonged illness, infections, and damage to the brain and nervous system.

7. Every personality is the product of heredity and environment. Both these contribute significantly towards the development of the child's personality. A child is not born with a personality but develops one as a result of continuous interaction with his environment. Therefore, not only heredity but also factors like constitutional make-up, social and cultural influences as well as experience and training etc. all affect one's personality.

8. Learning and acquisition of experiences contribute towards growth and development of personality. Every personality is the end-product of this process of learning and acquisition.

9. The personality of an individual can be described as well as measured.

10. Personality should not be taken as synonymous with one's character. Character is an ethical concept. It represents a moral estimate of the individual, while personality as a psychological concept is a more comprehensive term which includes character as one of its constituents.

11. Personality may be further distinguished from temperament which can be termed a system of emotional disposition. This system of emotional disposition represents only the affective side of one's personality and so personality must be taken as being much beyond one's temperament.

12. Personality should also be viewed differently from the ego or the individual self. The word ego is generally used for that unified part of one's personality which in ordinary language we call "I". However, as the psychoanalytic view of personality advocated by Freud explains, it is only a small aspect of one's total personality. Personality, therefore, stands for more than what the ego carries.

13. Every person's personality has one more distinguishing feature, that is,

aiming to an end or towards some specific goals. Adler clearly asserts this view and is of the opinion that a man's personality can be judged through a study and interpretation of the goals which he has set for himself and the approaches he makes to the problems he faces in his life.

In view of the foregoing discussion regarding its characteristics and scope, as a practical definition, it may be said that, *personality is a complex blend of a constantly evolving and changing pattern of one's unique behaviour, emerged as a result of one's interaction with one's environment and directed towards some specific ends.*

THEORIES OF PERSONALITY

The search for understanding the meaning and nature of personality would be incomplete if we do not discuss some important theories of personality. These theories in one way or another, try to describe the basic structure and underlying entities or constructs involved in personality along with the processes by which these entities interact. The theories of personality in general can be classified into the following broad categories:

Theories adopting the type approach. The viewpoint of Hippocrates, Kretschmer, Sheldon and Jung belong to this category.

Theories adopting the trait approach. Theories like Allport's theory and Cattell's theory of personality are based on the trait approach.

Theories adopting the type-cum-trait approach. Theories like Eysenck's theory of personality can be put under this category.

Theories adopting the psycho-analytical approach. Theories like psychoanalytic theory of Freud, theory of individual psychology by Adler, analytical psychology of Jung, social relationship theory of Horney and Erickson's theory of psychosocial development may be included in this category.

Theories adopting the humanistic approach. Theories like Carl Roger's self theory and Maslow's self-actualization theory belong to this category.

Theories adopting the learning approach. Dollard and Miller's learning theory and Bandura and Walter's theory of social learning can be put into this category.