

Determinants of Personality

THESE has been a constant warfare between hereditarians and environmentalists as regards the contribution of these factors in the development of personality. There are some psychologists who overemphasize the environmental influences to the exclusion of heredity in the growth and development of personality and there is another group of psychologists who claim the superiority of heredity over environment in the development of personality. As a matter of fact, no definite line of demarcation can be drawn between the contribution of heredity environment in the development. This is an old problem which has not yet been conclusively solved.

There is no doubt that an individual is the by-product of heredity and environment of the constant interaction of hereditary and environmental factors. These two factors contribute to the development of an individual. The way an individual is like or different from other individuals in his performance and personality is due to these factors. The teacher must have the knowledge of individual differences and their causes in order to teach efficiently and to deal effectively with students in the class. To understand behaviour, the teacher must have the basic knowledge of genetics because the organism is born with certain biological inheritance. The influences of genetics on the individual, in many respects, can be considered preliminary to understand human behaviour. He must also have the knowledge of environmental factors which influence the development of the individual and group of students. It is very difficult to deal in detail all studies which throw light on the contribution of heredity and environment, so we will mention only a few of them here.

DETERMINANTS OF PERSONALITY

Man is the by-product of a complex system of variables which constantly interact with personality and shape it. There are some important determinants which influence personality more than other factors. Genetic factors are basic that determine the personality development of an individual. Physiological determinants such as ductless glands, nervous system, emotion and motivation,

all play an important role in the development of an individual's personality. Then there are a number of psychological factors which directly and indirectly influence growth and development. Social and cultural factors also help in moulding personality. We will discuss only genetic, social and cultural determinants of personality in the following pages:

(1) GENETIC DETERMINANTS

Let us first explain the meaning of the term heredity. Heredity is of two types: *biological heredity*, which the child inherits from his forefathers in the form of chromosomes and second is *social heredity*, which means all that one generation gets from preceding generations in the form of social traditions, customs and skills, etc. Each generation transmits the acquired skills and knowledge to the succeeding generations.

Principles of Heredity

Like begets like. Even a layman knows that a cat gives birth to kittens, lions have cubs and human beings have babies. Children, generally, resemble their parents or relatives. But we also find that in many cases children do not resemble their parents. There are numerous instances where intelligent parents have dull children or handsome parents have ugly children. This variation is universal in nature and is called the principle of variability of inheritance. There are two principles: one is of resemblance and the other of variability.

Genetic Material

We know that a tiny seed carries within itself all the elements from which there will emerge a full grown tree. In the same way, germ cells carry all the characteristics of a potential child. This is called biological heredity of the child.

Mechanism of Heredity

When the human sperm and egg unite, the fertilized egg is called zygote. Each parent provides twenty three pairs of chromosomes, for the process of fertilization. Chromosomes are also called coloured body. Every cell in the body contains the same number of chromosomes. The number of chromosomes in a cell is constant for a given species but varies widely from one species to another. All human cells have forty-six chromosomes; half of the chromosomes come from the mother and half from the father. Within the chromosomes, there are thousands of genes. These genes are the carriers of heredity characteristics from one generation to another. Genes are minute particles located in the chromosomes.

The Genetic Code

In the year 1962, the Nobel prize winners discovered the structure of the material of heredity which throws new light on the traditional views of the composition of chromosomes. Chromosomes are made up of long organic molecules whose substance, deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) is found in the chromosomes as two long strands periodically connected by chemical bonds.

The most constant feature of genetic material is the order of four basic compounds connecting the two strands of DNA. Our heredity information is not in the long strands of DNA but in their order of appearance between the two strands of DNA. The sex of the individual is determined by genes. One pair of chromosomes is concerned with the sex of the child. Women have two special sex chromosomes called *X* chromosomes. Men have an *X* and a longer *Y*. Thus we see that a male has both *X* and *Y* chromosomes while the female has only *X* chromosomes. If one of the *X* sperm unites with an egg, also carrying an *X* chromosome, then the child will be a girl. If a *Y* sperm meets an egg, the offspring will be a male child.

Dominant and Recessive Traits

Genes, the carriers of human traits, are of two types: dominant and recessive. Genes occurring in paired positions along the chromosomes carry contributions toward the same characteristics but can give information of development. One gene may cause development of blue eyes while matched gene in the other chromosome may act to produce brown eyes. When both genes of the chromosomes act to foster identical characteristics in the offspring, this is said to represent the homozygous condition. If the information concerning a given characteristic differed in the paired gene position, the condition is called heterozygous. In many cases, one of the tendencies of the pairs of genes found in the heterozygous condition will dominate. Thus, when a child inherits a gene for blue eyes from one parent and a gene for brown eyes from the other, the child will have brown eyes. Therefore, we call the gene for brown eyes dominant.

(2) SOCIAL DETERMINANTS

Environmental influences begin since the time of the conception of the child in the mother's womb. Mother's mental, physical and emotional conditions influence the development of foetus in the womb. The external environment starts from the time of the birth of the child.

Man is a social animal. He is born in a social set-up. All men are born alike with respect to their biological need. Differences are created by social environment in which needs are fulfilled. Physical and geographical conditions of the environment play an important role in shaping the personality of human beings. People living in deserts, hilly areas and plains have great differences in their body built, height, mode of living, colour and habits, etc. Physical and geographical environments create distinctive personality characteristics in human beings. Social environment of home greatly influences the development of personality.

(1) Role of Home

All psychologists agree that personality of an individual develops with constant interaction between biological inheritance and environmental forces. The home plays most important role in shaping the personality pattern of an individual in early infancy. The first environment the child moves in, is his home. Here the child comes in contact with his parents and other members of the family. His likes, dislikes, stereotypes about people, expectancies of security and conditioned emotional responses, are all shaped in early childhood. There are several empirical evidences which support that childhood experiences are decisive determinants of personality in later life. The type of training and early childhood experiences play an important role in the development of personality.

Infantile deprivation in human is unethical. Few experiments on human infants by depriving them of light, sound, food or comfort have been conducted. One such attempt was made by Margaret Ribble in 1944 who initiated a series of investigations on the effect of severe psychological deprivation in infancy. She reports on the basis of the result of a study of 600 children that lack of adequate cuddling and other close physical contact with some friendly adult can impose serious handicaps on the growing infant.

Another important study was conducted by Brody in 1956 who studied the patterns of mothering. She studied 32 young mothers with their babies paying particular attention to methods of feeding, cleaning, offering objects and speaking to the baby. She concluded that patterns of mothering are important to develop future personality of children.

Family morale. It has been established by all studies on child development that one major dimension of family life is general moral pattern, including good relation between parents and satisfaction with each other. A low morale family life does not present a good model for the child for imitation. Stott (in 939, 41) administered to 1800 Nebraska adolescents, a questionnaire covering parent-child relationship and personality inventory. The results are summarized as below:

(i) Children coming from homes where good morale pattern dominated were better adjusted, more independent and more satisfactorily related to their parents than were the average adolescents of the group.

(ii) Those coming from homes showing family discord pattern were, generally, poorly adjusted in their social environment. Needless to mention that good family morale is productive of desirable personality traits and occurrence of conduct problems are associated with poor family morale.

(iii) *Economic factor.* Economic factor influences the development of personality. Poverty of parents and lack of money to fulfil the legitimate needs of children leads directly to certain kinds of frustrations.

Role of School

School plays an important role in moulding the personality of children because significant part of a child's life is spent in school between the ages of 6 and 20 years. Here he continues the process of liking and disliking, conforming and rebelling, acquiring a conception of the world and himself.

Obviously, much of the child's personality is already shaped in home before he comes to school. Here the teacher substitutes the parents. His behaviour plays significant role for the child's development. The school poses new problems to be solved, new taboos to be accepted into the superego and new models for imitation and identification, all of which contribute their share in moulding personality.

The importance of the principal or administration in maintaining discipline and determining emotional tone of school has been illustrated by Lyman in 1949. He was impressed by the contrast between two schools in the same neighbourhood—one school extended perfect cooperation and in the other there was complete disorder.

He tried out an inventory of attitudes toward the school and found that in the disorderly school attitudes of children were exceedingly unfavourable. They were hostile toward the principal. We see that some administrators will be

relatively more authoritarian, others more democratic and will develop personality traits likewise.

(3) Role of the Teacher

The teacher is an important constituent in the instructional process who can play a crucial role in shaping the personality of students. The way he teaches and handles the students has an effect on the future personality of children.

Ryan and Wundt (1955) conducted a study in the independent dimensions of teachers' behaviour which are as follows:

- (a) Fair and democratic methods.
- (b) Business-like, organized, responsible.
- (c) Encourages students' participation, challenging and interesting.
- (d) Enthusiastic.
- (e) Open-minded.

Teacher's role and social climate in the class. The way the teacher carries out his role in the class affects the emotional climate in the classroom. An authoritarian teacher will establish an autocratic climate and democratic teacher will create a different kind of climate. These differences in the attitudes of teachers will imply differences in the number of frustrations imposed upon the students and in the kind of personality development encouraged.

The classical experiment by Lewin, Lippit and White in 1939 threw light on the type of social climate created by authoritarian, democratic and laissez faire leaders and their corresponding influences on subjects personality development.

The results of the experiment are as follows:

1. Autocratic atmosphere tended to create aggression and hostility.
2. The democratic set-up led to constructive, thoughtful and cooperative behaviour. Generally the quality of work done was better in the democratic group. The boys liked democratic procedure. Nobody liked the laissez faire situation.

The typical classroom resembles the autocratic atmosphere. H.H. Anderson in 1945 conducted studies on dominative and integrative behaviour. The concept of dominative behaviour is closely related to Lewin's autocratic atmosphere and integration to democracy. The autocratic climate was full of threats, orders and criticism, whereas the democratic atmosphere (integrative) was flexible and child-centred. The integrative teaching developed positive personality traits of self-reliance, independent thought and cooperative attitudes.

Thus we can conclude that democratic approach is better than autocratic approach in developing good personality traits. It permits maximum personality development for each child, prepares him for group living, and for making his own decisions, and gives superior training in emotional self-control.

(3) CULTURAL DETERMINANTS

Every society is characterized by its cultural heritage which is transmitted from generation to generation in the form of social heredity. Indian society is very rich as regards its cultural inheritance that has a deep influence on children. Personality of an individual is gradually shaped by the culture he is born in. E.B. Tyler, the famous anthropologist, defined culture as, "It is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, morals, law, custom and many other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."

Culture refers to total life activities of a society. What people think or do and feel constitute the culture of a society. It is the physical way of life, social institutions and psychology of the people fused together. Biological inheritance is the same in human beings all over the world but it is the difference in their cultural conditions which develops distinctive personality characteristics in the individuals of different cultural groups. We can easily identify people reared in different cultures by the personality patterns they possess. English, American, African and Indian can be identified by their cultural backgrounds. India is a big country having many sub-cultures within a broad culture. The personality of individuals within these sub-cultures is moulded by the customs, beliefs, rituals and religious faiths and early childhood training of children. Culture is a great educator of human beings, sometimes directly and

sometimes indirectly by the methods of training and passing on great social heritage, it leaves permanent impression on the personality of the child.

The importance of cultural forces in the development of personality is very great. The influence can be understood by an example. Suppose there are three identical twins who are adopted in three sub-cultures—homes of Muslim, Christian and orthodox Hindu. They are reared and trained in three different cultural backgrounds. It is obvious that the impact of culture will produce three distinctive types of personalities. Our attitudes, needs and aspirations are regulated by our culture. C. Kluckhohn, emphasizing the importance of culture in the life of the individual, said, "Culture regulates our lives at every turn. From the moment we are born until we die there, whether we are conscious of it or not, constant pressure upon us to follow certain types of behaviour that other men have created for us."

In the course of development, society stabilized certain patterns of behaviour which are followed by the members of a society. It develops certain common personality characteristics in the members. Common characteristics develop in the members of a cultural group on three principles:

- (a) Early experiences which the child gets in a culture.
- (b) Child-rearing practices are culturally patterned so that children in a society are subjected to similar early experiences.
- (c) Similar experiences lead to similar personality configuration.

Culture influences the personality development of an individual in the following ways:

(i) Internalization of values, ideas, beliefs and customs through the process of learning. A child since his birth is reared in a definite cultural background where he is taught values, customs, and beliefs, etc. which create distinctive personality characteristics in the child.

(ii) Institutionalization: Buildings of various religious prayers, books and cultural programmes. Many religions, faiths and creeds are found in India that follow different religious faiths, beliefs, prayers and cultural programmes which create unique personality characteristics among the followers of different religions.

Anthropologists have made a study of the impact of culture on personality development. Margaret Mead conducted a study on adolescents in Samoa, a primitive culture. She concluded in her study that cultural conditions play an important role in moulding the personality patterns of individuals. According to her findings, the development of the sense of security seemed to be one of the chief factors determining the formation of personality.