



328en18



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# 18

## PERSONALITY THEORIES

*E*very one of us shares many things with others. However, apart from commonalities we also find that people are different in the way they appear and behave. The study of personality deals with the issue of human individuality. It has attracted the attention of common man as well as academic psychologists.

As a human being each one of us shows certain specific patterns of thinking, feeling and acting. They represent who we are and provide the basis of our interaction with other individuals. In everyday life we often find people who are called “aggressive”, “jolly”, “happy” and so on. These are impressions of people which we carry with us and use while interacting with them. It is in this sense that we frequently employ the word ‘personality’. 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. This chapter will help you learn about different aspects of personality.



### OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- Describe the concept of personality;
- Explain psycho-analytic, trait, social-cognitive, and humanistic theories of personality;
- Explain the concept of three gunas and familiarize with the ways of assessing personality; and
- Describe the factors influencing personality development.



## 18.1 CONCEPT OF PERSONALITY

The term personality is used in a number of ways including the apparent features of a person. However, psychologists use it to refer to the **characteristic pattern of thinking, feeling and acting**. By characteristic pattern we mean the **consistent and distinctive ways our ideas, feelings and actions are organized**. When we talk about personality we usually refer to the totality or whole of the person. Thus, the enduring pattern expressed by the person in various situations is the hall mark of personality. Interestingly the theories of personality go beyond the literal meaning of “personality” which stands for large masks used by actors in ancient Greek drama. Contrary to this the personality theorists view ‘personality’ as the essence of the person. It is a person’s “true” inner nature. The unique impression that a person makes on others is equally important in understanding personality. However the concept of personality has been defined by psychologists in many ways and it is the theoretical perspective or position which directs our attention to particular aspects of personality.

Understanding personality has proved to be a difficult and challenging task. It’s so complex that no single theory is able to cover the total personality. The different theories approach the structure and functioning of personality from different positions. There are many theories of personality each provides different answers about the way they treat the issues about personality functioning. In particular, they 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. In the present lesson you will learn about four major theoretical perspectives of personality. They include psychoanalytic, trait, humanistic and social-cognitive perspectives.

## 18.2 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. This theory has been very influential not only in psychology but also in literary circles, art, psychiatry and films. Many of Freud’s ideas have become part and parcel of every day usage. 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.



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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. Let us learn about these structures:

**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 behaviors. 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 behaviors 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

On the basis of case-history of patients, Freud reached at a conclusion that personality development occurs through a sequence of psychosexual stages. In these stages the Id's pleasure seeking tendency focuses on different areas of body. Table 18.1 shows these stages.



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**Table 18.1: Stages of Psychosexual Development**

Stages	Focus of activity
Oral (0-18 months)	Pleasure centers in the mouth and leads to activities of sucking and biting etc.
Anal (18-36 months)	Pleasure centers 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 the onset of 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. To defend or safeguard ourselves, we use technique called defense mechanism. These are also called Adjustment Mechanisms. Some of the key mechanisms are given below:

Mechanism	Description
Denial	Failure to recognize or acknowledge the existence of unpleasant event/information as I do not know, I have not seen etc.
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



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Freud's ideas have been controversial. The neo-Freudians differed from Freud on a number of issues. Some of the key theorists who are included in this category are listed below.

### **Carl Jung: Collective Unconscious**

Jung was opposed to the central role of sex and aggression in human life. Instead he proposed that people are motivated by more general psychological energy. He proposed that the deepest part of one's psyche comprises the collective unconscious. It is a set of influences inherited from our family and the human race. The collective unconscious contains archetypes which are the mental images of a particular person, object or experience. Hero, powerful father, innocent child, nurturant mother are example of archetypes.

### **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 psychoanalytic ideas have been criticized on the ground that there is inadequate evidence to support the theory.



### **INTEXT QUESTIONS 18.1**

Fill in the blank with suitable words:

1. Freud has likened mind with an \_\_\_\_\_.
2. In Psychoanalytic theory personality has three structures, namely \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Children repress their sexual impulses during \_\_\_\_\_ stage.

### **18.3 THE TRAIT PERSPECTIVE**

Traits are characteristic behaviours and conscious motives. They represent a



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relatively stable and enduring predisposition to behave in a given way. Traits are frequently used in describing people. The focus of trait approach is very common and involves enumerating list of personal characteristics. Trait theories of personality identify, describe and measure individual differences. 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. Some of them are: Reserved-Outgoing, Serious-Happy-go-lucky, Practical-Imaginative and Relaxed-Tense.

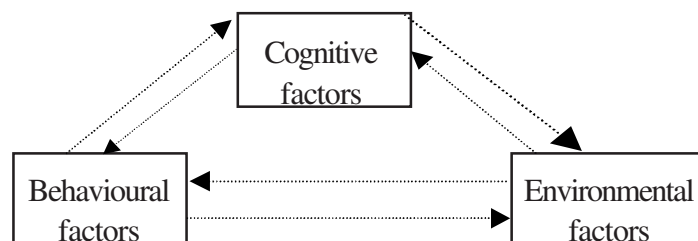
Eysenck proposed a theory which classifies people in four types: introverted-neurotic, introverted- stable, extraverted- neurotic and extraverted- stable. In subsequent work Eysenck proposed psychoticism as another dimension of personality.

Recently McCrae and Costa have proposed a five factor model, comprising of neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness. Traits are used to describe behaviour and make prediction. However, human behaviour is an outcome of interaction between traits and situations. Hence, the situations chosen and consistency in responding to situations indicate the value of traits.

It is said that the trait theories do not explain the personality of a person. They tell us little about the causes of individual difference, and the dynamic processes are neglected.

### 10.4 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. It is proposed that our thoughts and actions originate in the social world but it is essential to note that human beings have capacity for self-regulation and engage in active cognitive processes. Their interrelationships are shown in Fig. 18.1



**Fig. 18.1** *Reciprocal determinism of Behaviours, Cognition and Environment*

Bandura developed the concept of self efficacy which incorporates a person's



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cognitive skills, abilities and attitudes as represented in one's self-system. Self-efficacy indicates the degree to which one is convinced of the abilities and effectiveness in meeting the demands of a particular situation. 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. We often find that the expectations and skills learned by people are very important in determining behaviours.



### INTEXT QUESTION 18.2

Match the names given in column A with the concept given in column B:

#### Column A

#### Column B

- |             |                             |
|-------------|-----------------------------|
| (a) Freud   | (i) introverted – stable    |
| (b) Jung    | (ii) Need hierarchy         |
| (c) Eysenck | (iii) Sublimation           |
| (d) Bandura | (iv) Collective unconscious |
| (e) Maslow  | (v) self efficacy           |

## 18.5 THE HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVE

These theories propose that within each individual is an active creative force, often called “self”. This force seeks expression. It develops and grows. This perspective, also known as the third force, emphasizes on human potential and characteristics like self-awareness and free will. It views human beings as innately good. 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 idea of self actualized people. He proposed that human motives are arranged in a hierarchy of needs. As shown in figure 18.2 human needs are organized from physiological needs to self transcendence.

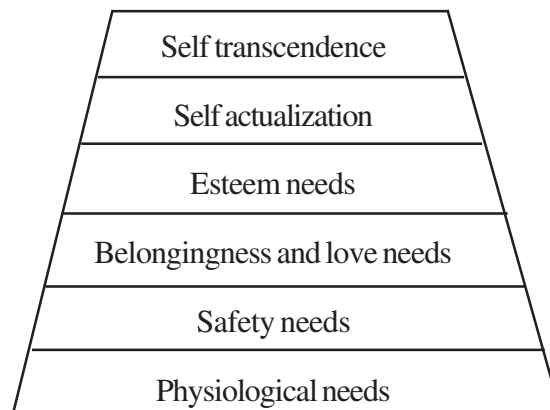
Maslow notes that the self actualized people have realistic perception, are spontaneous, easily accept self and others, are creative, and enjoy and appreciate positive aspects of life, like privacy and independence.





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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. They deny or distort the experiences that are contrary to 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. It holds an optimistic view of human beings.



*Fig. 18.2 Maslow's hierarchy of needs*

## 18.6 CONCEPT OF GUNAS

The Indian approach to personality emphasizes on the combination of three qualities namely, Sattava, Rajas and Tamas. These qualities or Gunas have been discussed in detail in the Samkhya Theory. Bhagvadgita has provided an account of these gunas. 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. A brief description of these gunas is given below.

**Sattva Guna:** The main attributes which characterize Sattva guna are truth, gravity, duty, discipline, detachment, cleanliness, 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.

## 18.7 ASSESSING HUMAN PERSONALITY

In view of the fact that the knowledge about personality is useful in many settings researchers have developed a variety of tools for its assessment. These 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. Two of the famous projective tests are Rorschach Ink Blot Test and Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). In the Ink Blot test a person is shown a set of 10 symmetrical ink blots and asked to say what he or she sees in each of them. The response given is interpreted by the psychologist. In the TAT certain photographs are shown and the person has to develop a story describing the situation with regard to its past, present and future. The story narrated by the person is coded and analyzed by the psychologist.

It must be noted that the use and interpretation of various personality tests requires professional training.



### INTEXT QUESTION 18.3

State whether the following statements are True or False:

- (1) Projection is failure to acknowledge the existence of unpleasant event information. True/False
- (2) Sublimation is canalization of sexual urge into productive, non sexual activities. True/False
- (3) Cattell has proposed 16 core traits of personality. True/False
- (4) Rogers has developed the concept of self efficacy True/False
- (5) Humanistic perspective is also called third force in psychology. True/False



## **18.8 FACTORS INFLUENCING PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT**

The development of personality of an individual takes place in a socio-cultural context. The particular potentialities with which a child is born may develop or become stunted depending on the way maturation takes place and the kind of experiences encountered by the person. 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. It has been indicated that there are stable ways in which specific situation trigger specific patterns of thought, feeling and behaviour.

- (1) **Genetic factors:** Almost all theorists consider heredity as a major determinant of personality. Some like Freud, view personality as purely biological. However, others recognize the value of social and cultural factors. In fact it would be wrong to view the question in either or manner and give more emphasis to heredity or environment. Studies of behaviour genetics suggest that most personality variables are 15 to 50 percent inheritable.
- (2) **Early experience:** Most of the theorists of personality think that personality development is a continuous process. 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.
- (3) **Primary groups:** While explaining personality development family is found to play a critical role. The early relationships with members of family are particularly important. Freud thought that many of the problems during adult life are due to problematic child rearing practices leading to emotional disturbances. The sense of identity and relevance of appropriate modeling has been emphasized.
- (4) **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. For instance boys and girls are expected to show different sets of personality characteristics. The various occupational roles are also shaped by 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.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 18.4

1. Name the guans mentioned in the Indian approach to personality.
2. Name the three categories of personality assessment.
3. Name two important projective tests of personality.
4. What are the factors that influence personality?

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### TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. Describe the concept of personality.
2. What are main four perspectives to understand personality?
3. What is the difference between conscious and pre conscious mind?
4. Name various stages of psychosexual development.
5. What is meant by need hierarchy? List all these needs.



### ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

#### 18.1

1. iceberg
2. id, ego, superego
3. latency

#### 18.2

Column A	Column B
(a)	(iii)
(b)	(iv)
(c)	(i)
(d)	(v)
(e)	(ii)



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**18.3**

- |          |         |         |
|----------|---------|---------|
| 1. False | 2. True | 3. True |
| 4. False | 5. True |         |

**18.4**

1. Satva, Rajas, Tamas
2. (a) observational, (b) self report, (c) projective
3. Rorschach; TAT
4. Genetic factors, Early experience, Primary groups, culture.

**HINTS TO TERMINAL EXERCISE**

1. Refer to section 18.1
2. Refer to section 18.2, 18.3, 18.4 and 18.5
3. Refer to section 18.2
4. Refer to section 18.2
5. Refer to section 18.5