
UNIT 4 ATTITUDE, PERSONALITY AND THINKING*

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4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you would be able to:

- *Explain the nature of attitude and its components;*
- *Understand important factors in attitude change;*
- *Understand the meaning of personality and factors influencing personality development;*
- *Explain the theories of personality;*
- *Describe the Indian perspective on personality; and*
- *Discuss the nature and types of thinking.*

4.2 INTRODUCTION

Self is a term in psychology which refers to how we perceive ourselves, how we think and behave. Factors both in our internal and external surrounding influence

*Dr. Megha Pushkarna, Associate Professor, IILM University, Gurugram, Haryana

our thoughts, interactions and reaction patterns to different situations. We usually have a mental image of our self, e.g., a ‘confident person’ or ‘short-tempered’ etc. which are results of our past experiences related to the way we behave as a reaction to situation and people. These mental images then become our beliefs and they keep adding into our mental bank of varied experiences of reactions. Our self consists of self-concept. You have already studied about self and self-concept in earlier units 2 and 3.

Psychologist Dr. Bruce A. Bracken (1992) had explained various dimensions that influence our self-concept. These are:

- *Academic*: how well we do in studies/school/college
- *Affect*: knowledge about our emotions/self-control
- *Competence*: how capable we are of achieving our goals/targets
- *Family*: how adjusted we are in our family/parents/siblings
- *Physical*: how we accept and feel about our body/appearance/image
- *Social*: our ability to get along with people around us/being social

These aspects of our self-concept help us to become individually different from others and impact our attitudes and personality development. In this unit, we will be discussing about attitudes, personality, thinking styles which are important correlates of self, and how they influence our everyday interactions.

4.3 ATTITUDE

4.3.1 Nature and Components of Attitude

When someone asks you about your opinion or when we feel strongly about a situation, person, or an event, it can be explained as an attitude. However, it is not just opinion that is involved in attitude, but also includes how we like or dislike someone/something and how we express our feelings about them. Attitude has been defined by Hogg & Vaughan (2005) as “a relatively enduring organization of beliefs, feelings, and behavioural tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols”.

Triandis (1971) defines attitude as a tendency to respond positively or negatively toward a certain person, object, idea, or situation. It develops through one’s learnings, experiences and interactions with others. One is not born with attitude. Rather, it is influenced and shaped by significant people around such as parents, teachers, friends, community leaders and so on; and also by events and situations. Schools, family, society, and culture – all play a role in formation of attitudes by the individual. Thus attitude formation can have direct sources (e.g., parents, teachers ec.) as well indirect sources(e.g., media, community events etc.).

Attitude interestingly is not only for others but for us as well, we call these self-drawn attitudes or evaluations as self-esteem. How we value ourselves for ourselves is our self-esteem. Calling our self “silly” or “amazing” shows how we value ourselves when a situation is being judged by self.

Attitudes are a combination of three crucial components as explained below.

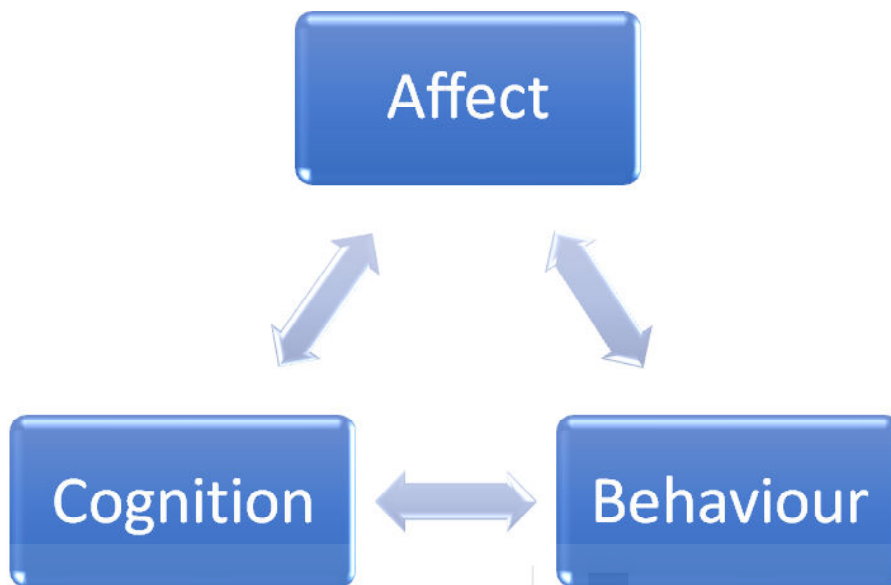


Fig. 4.1: Components of Attitude

- *Emotions component:* It refers to how we feel, what emotions do we experience related to the object of our attitude. It is also called as the affect component of attitude. Emotions in our attitude can bring out both positive and negative changes and influence our decision making and behaviour.
- *Behaviour component:* It refers to how we behave with regard to the focus of attitude. For instance, a positive attitude towards persons with disabilities will make us behave in a positive way when we come across such a person in our college or workplace.

Another example would be our attitude of respect towards people serving in the defence forces. We admire them as we have associated feelings of pride for people who are protecting us and our behaviour towards them would be accordingly marked by respect towards them.

Zajonc (1968) explained behaviour attached to an attitude with the help of exposure effect. He explained our tendency to develop more positive feelings towards objects and individuals when we are exposed to them. We can develop a positive attitude towards a product simply by repeatedly being exposed to it. Thus, advertisements of soft drinks in summers and hot drinks in winters may increase our positive attitude for those drinks and lead to buying coke in summers and coffee in winters.

- *Thoughts component:* It refers to what thoughts are associated with the focus of attitude and how we mentally store information about it. It is also called as the cognitive component of attitude involving our ideas and beliefs about the attitude.

With repeated exposure to an event or a situation we form strong mental constructs around them, and if not changed, such attitudes can become stereotypes. Common gender stereotyping examples are “girls are not

good at sports and boys are messy and unclean”. These attitudes can develop into strong inflexible stereotypes which lead to stubborn mindsets, those that are difficult to mend and create rift in people and society. Thoughts around these attitudes seldom change as they are passed on to us by generations with people confirming to them and we do not see any reason to change them too. When confronted to change our attitudes, we feel something is wrong as no one has changed it before.

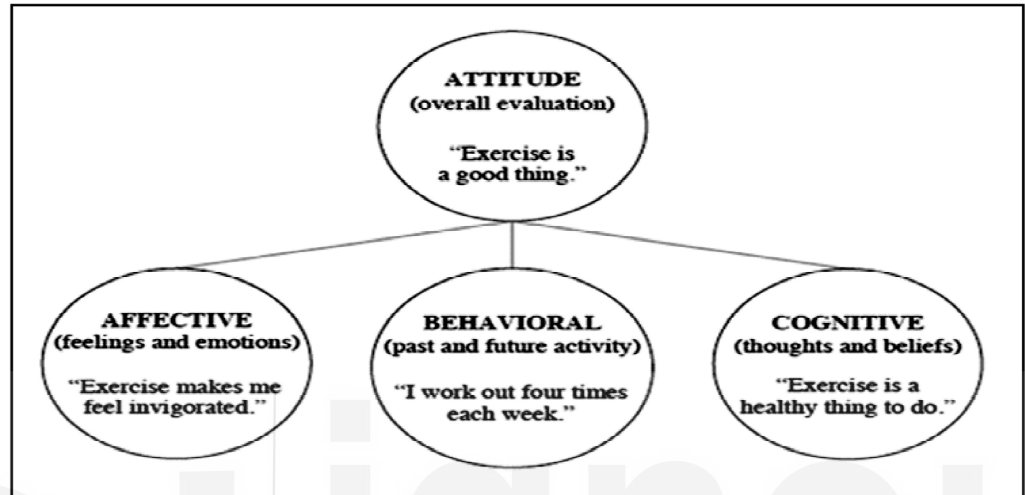


Fig. 4.2: Example of ABC Components in Attitude

(Source: <https://qsstudy.com/organizational-behavior/components-of-attitude>)

Research indicates that not all three of these components need to be in place for the formation of an attitude (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Attitudes do influence our behaviour because these are based on our past experiences and learnings. Our thoughts and behaviour also depend on how we are expected to conduct ourselves. However, studies have found that attitudes may not always predict behaviour (Wicker, 1971). A number of factors can influence whether the attitude one holds will translate into actual behaviour by the person. For instance people in general may hold environment friendly attitude and talk about pro environment steps like plastic/polythene bags should not be used. But they may use it for buying vegetables or throwing household garbage etc. citing the reason of convenience or lack of alternatives.

Attitudes can serve the following **functions**:

- Knowledge- Human beings always look for a purpose or meaning in anything that is done, e.g., studying a course in psychology subject and to become a psychologist. If the outcome of any action that we take is of our choice, then we put in more effort and value to that particular work. This helps in developing positive attitude towards it.
- Ego-defense- Attitude is sometimes used as a shield to guard ourselves against harsh realities of life which can negatively affect our mental health. At times, some people or situations can pose a threat and therefore we develop a certain attitude to safe guard ourselves from being hurt.
- Instrumental- We put in more effort and energy into anything that is rewarding. If we are aware of the reward at the end, we develop a positive attitude towards that task, person, or the situation. External motivation

generates a positive attitude towards goal seeking behaviour. So is the case when a situation is not rewarding enough, and we do not feel like investing time and energy into the same.

- Value-expressive– We all have certain value systems, some of those we get from our families, some from the kind of circle of friends we choose to be with and some from the cultural expectations we have from the type of social milieu we live in. Some value-based systems can inculcate positive attitudes like doing community work(seva) in Sikhism; but on the other hand, some value-based system can also inculcate negativity and hatred to the extent that we blindly follow it without looking at a larger picture which is loss to life and property (e.g., communal riots).

4.3.2 Can Attitude be Changed?

Since attitudes are learned, it can be changed also. All our attitudes may not be appropriate and lead to healthy adjustment and well-being. Hence we need to be aware of our attitudes and how they impact our mental health and well-being. Changing attitude is not an easy task. It requires careful attention to different factors involved in forming of an attitude. Four main things that we can focus on in the process of attitude change are:

- The *source of the message* given regarding change of attitude needs to be an expert, a trustworthy and influential person.
- *Content of the message* needs to be clear and structured with no ambiguity.
- *Medium of message delivery* also plays an important role in influencing the change process. For example, social media may be more effective than the print media if we want to change public attitude towards respecting elderly in public transportations or advocating the rights of persons with disabilities.
- *Characteristics of target audience* needs to be considered in the process of attitude change. The content of the message as well as the medium needs to be appropriate as per the target audience.

4.4 PERSONALITY

Personality is a term commonly used in our everyday conversations to explain a person's behaviour, general appearance and reaction patterns. Personality comes from a Latin word 'persona' which explains a mask worn by theatrical performers to enact different roles on stage. Some common definitions of personality are,

- "Personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his characteristics behavior and thought" (Allport, 1961, p. 28).
- "The characteristics or blend of characteristics that make a person unique" (Weinberg & Gould, 1999).

Personality thus consists of our thoughts, feelings, and actions towards others. At times, our personality differs from situation and circumstances as how we are at home may not be how we would like to present ourselves in front of our friends.

However, personality is marked by two salient features such as,

- **Consistency:** Personality shows a set of patterns in a person's behaviour in any situation. E.g., people who are shy to talk, stay quiet in any situation when meeting someone new for the first time.
- **Stability:** Personality is seen stable over a person's entire lifespan, this means an extrovert will stay an extrovert even at 15 years, at 30 and even at 65 years of his age.

People vary in their personality and these individual differences make people behave differently to the same situation. For example, you may have noticed differences in reaction patterns in people involved in a traffic jam, while some would fight, others would stay calm. Many factors influence these differences in our personality and its development.

4.4.1 Factors influencing Personality Development

- **Physical Factors-** our physical structure like height, weight, illness, skin colour, attractiveness influences how we feel about ourselves and this shapes our personality.
- **Social interactions-** Personality is shaped by our social milieu which means people we live with and interact with (e.g., family, community, culture, and our religion) shape our personality.
- **Heredity-** It refers to what we inherit at birth, in the form of physical features, characteristics, cultural factors from the family we are born to.
- **Intelligence-** Research indicates intelligence to be related to development of personality, where people high on intelligence is seen to have an impact on better adjustment at home, school, and work. People with higher intelligence have a better understanding of problem solving thus can make smarter decisions for themselves than the ones who are low on intelligence and depend on others to decide for them.
- **Gender-** Gender as a socio-cultural perspective influences personality of individuals. The sociocultural expectations shape the personality development accordingly. For instance, boys are raised to fight back and be tough whereas girls are raised to be nice and adjusting. If the opposite behaviour is seen in either of the gender, people find it unacceptable to see a girl fighting back and a boy being adjusting. Stereotypes like boys do not cry and girls cannot be good at sports influence the way we naturally are and how we shape our preferences and our personality.

Thus different factors related to biological, psychological, and sociocultural aspects influence the development of personality. It is dynamic in nature and a driving force in our life that determines success and failure in life.

Self Assessment Questions 1

1. What are the three components of attitude?
2. What are the factors that need to be considered in the process of attitude change?
3. Two salient features in defining personality are _____ and _____.

4.4.2 Theories of Personality

- **Sigmund Freud- Psychoanalytic Theory of Personality**

Sigmund Freud is considered to have given first formal theory of personality. He explained personality as a complex part of our existence which is webbed into many facets like biological, cultural, and social. In his Psychoanalytic theory, he explained personality comprising of three components known as Id, Ego and Superego that work together to influence human behaviours.

These are explained briefly as follows:

The Id- this is present in all of us from birth and includes all desires which need immediate satisfaction. For instance, infants if not satisfied with food will cry until they are pacified or have their needs met. Id can be thought of as that child, who needs immediate satisfaction when the need arises. Freud says id is controlled by *pleasure principle*. When needs are not satisfied, it creates anxiety causing confusion and distractedness.

The problem is that we cannot always have all our needs satisfied. As we grow up, we learn to wait for the right moment and at times control those urges. And that natural control mechanism in us comes to us in the form of ego.

The Ego- this develops from id and controls impulses in a socially acceptable manner. Ego works at a conscious level to manage the unconscious impulse motives of id. It acts as a balance between the id and the superego. As ego works with *reality principle*, it looks for a balancing act of satisfying impulses in appropriate ways, thus using delayed gratification.

The Superego- this is the temple of our personality working on *moral principle* or ideals we need to follow as taught by our parents. We all have within us a conscience or moral barometer guiding us in right and wrong doings leading to rewards and punishments. Another component of superego is *ego ideal* which guides our aspirations and the best we want to be in life. Superego works to strive perfection by reducing id impulses and directing ego to behave in an idealistic manner.

According to Freud, id, ego and superego are not separate identities in us but intertwined connections that influences our personalities.

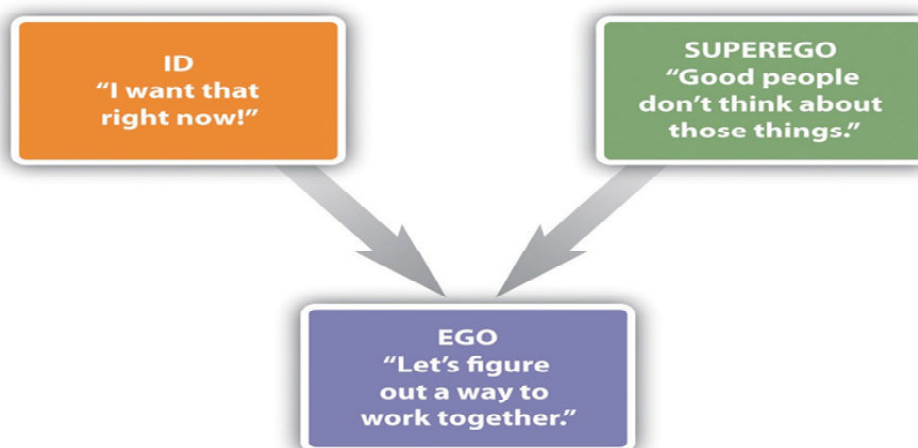


Fig. 4.3: Three Aspects of Personality by Sigmund Freud

- **Abraham Maslow- Humanistic Theory of Personality**

Maslow studied personality by looking at people’s experiences and their idea to use free-will to be the best version of themselves. While researching successful people, Maslow felt they all shared similar characteristics of being open, creative, loving and most importantly accepting of themselves. He came to believe that to develop our personalities, in his words, to be actualized, we need to have a hierarchy of needs which starts from basic needs to be fulfilled to higher self-esteem needs and self-actualization needs.

At a basic level, these needs are physical needs for survival to higher level of being self-actualized. These needs are explained very well in the below pyramid with the largest, most fundamental physiological needs at the bottom and the smallest, most advanced self-actualization needs at the top. Each layer of the pyramid must be fulfilled before moving up the pyramid to higher needs, and this process is continued throughout the lifespan.

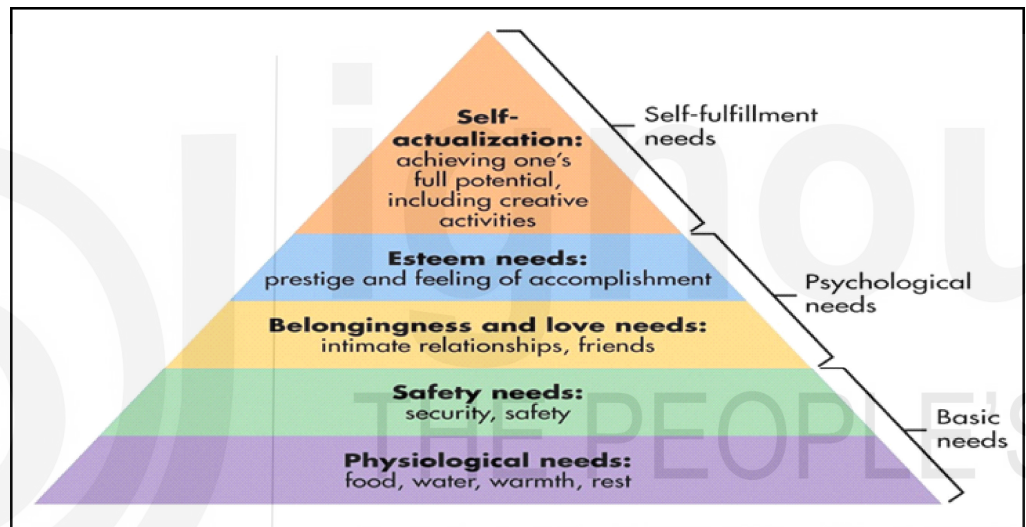


Fig. 4.4: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

(Source <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html#gsc.tab=0>)

According to Maslow people who were more aware of their goals and strived for perfection had *peak experiences* of intense satisfaction when they saw their efforts showing desired results. He believed in people’s own potential to create their own destiny.

- **Raymond Cattell- Trait Theory of Personality**

Personality is seen as having some traits or characteristics which can be used as a group to define the way people are similar in their ways of behaviour. Some of their traits are grouped like introvert or extrovert, optimistic or pessimistic. Cattell explained that traits are trends in behaviour which can be seen as individual differences as well as grouped into categories of common reaction patterns in personality.

With an extensive research background, Cattell discussed 16 personality factors and created a personality assessment called as 16PF, where traits are ranged from high to low for everyone. The individual’s personality structure is explained by profiling bipolar “source-traits” or “primary factors” (16 in adults, 14 in

adolescents, 12 in children), each shaped by the mix of heredity and environment differently. To understand it, below are 16 traits that were discussed by Cattell.

For example, level of warmth explains how caring and thoughtful a person is towards others. Low score on this index indicates cold and distant personality whereas high score indicates a supportive and a comforting personality type. In the same manner, being low on sensitivity index indicates strong control on emotions and high score indicates being emotionally sensitive.

Factor	Low Score	High Score
Warmth	cold, selfish	supportive, comforting
Intellect	Instinctive, unstable	cerebral, analytical
Emotional Stability	Irritable, moody	level headed, calm
Aggressiveness	Modest, docile	controlling, tough
Liveliness	somber, restrained	wild, fun loving
Dutifulness	untraditional, rebellious	conformity, traditional
Social Assertiveness	shy, withdrawn	uninhibited, bold
Sensitivity	coarse, tough	touchy, soft
Paranoia	trusting, easy going	wary, suspicious
Abstractness	practical, regular	strange, imaginative
Introversion	open, friendly	private, quiet
Anxiety	confident, self-assured	fearful, self-doubting
Open-mindedness	close-minded, set-in-ways	curious, self-exploratory
Independence	outgoing, social	loner, crave solitude
Perfectionism	Disorganized, messy	orderly, thorough
Tension	relaxed, cool	stressed, unsatisfied

Fig. 4.5: Sixteen Personality Factors by Cattell

Source: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/personality-theories.html>

Self Assessment Questions 2

1. Id works on which principle?
2. Which part of our personality tries to manage the unconscious impulse motives of id?
3. What is the highest need in Maslow's hierarchy of needs?
4. How many factors were proposed by Cattell's trait theory of personality?

4.4.3 Indian Perspective on Personality

Indian perspective on Personality is not defined like a clear definition, instead it is examined in scriptures in the form of 'Swabhaaya' known as the essential quality in a being. Sri Aurobindo in his "Essays on the Gita" used the term "spiritual personality" to explain three powers, the 'Purushottama' as the Supreme truth into which we must grow, the 'Self' and the 'Jiva'. To develop spiritual personality, yoga is instrumental in leading to ego-lessness and desire-lessness, without which the development of impersonality is not possible.

The ancient Indian model of "personality" given in the Upanishads, is called the pancha kosha model, and consists of 'five' sheaths or koshas. They are 'Annamaya' (food sheath), 'Pranamaya' (vital air sheath), 'Manomaya' (mental sheath), 'Vijnanamaya' (intellectual sheath), and 'Anandamaya' (bliss sheath). 'Annamaya'; a segment of human system is nourished by 'anna', that is, food. 'Pranamaya' is that segment which is nourished by 'prana', that is, 'bioenergy'.

‘Manomaya’ is the segment nourished by ‘education’. ‘Vijnanamaya’ is nourished by ‘ego’ and ‘Anandamaya’ is the segment nourished by ‘emotions’.

Concept of Triguna and development of Personality

Concept of Guna or qualities dates to Atharva Veda which was also discussed in Bhagawat Gita as Tamas, Rajas, and Sattva.

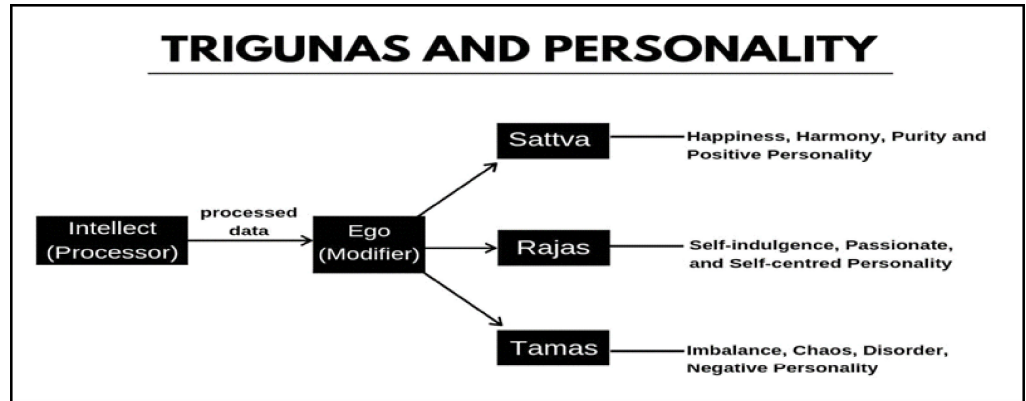


Fig. 4.6: Concept of Trigunas

Source: <https://fitsri.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/trigunas-and-personality.jpg>

- a) **Sattva guna** guides us to be good and caring along with wisdom to control mind and urges. This is seen in people who have spiritual values and dedicated to leading a simple life. Qualities like respect for elders, nonviolence, meditation, and self-control are motive force of sattvic action.
- b) **Rajas guna** directs passion, desires which can create restlessness in us as it is tied with attachments. People driven by Rajas Guna are seen to be enthusiastic and activity driven in life.
- c) **Tamas guna** arises from hopes and illusions which creates fantasies and disillusionment in us. People when driven by tamas seek happiness which ends in self-delusion.

Thus personality is the integral part of our self and influences our functioning and well-being. We have a genetic endowment (traits like our parents) that we get in our personality as well our culture (norms and ethics) that shapes our personality. Intelligence that we are born with and develop as we grow influences our social interactions and new associations with our surroundings. Slowly but steadily, we develop a certain character which is unique to ourselves and attracts likeminded people. When we explain personality, we are explaining how people respond to situations with the value systems they inherit and the preferences they develop over their lifespan.

4.5 THINKING

4.5.1 Nature of Thinking

Human beings are thinking beings. But what is involved in thinking? How do we think? What is the importance of thinking in our effective functioning and living?

Thinking is also known as ‘cognition’, i.e., to know. It is a mental activity that involves the processes of perception, memory, planning, problem solving,

decision-making etc. Thus the inputs or information received are processed in the brain through our past memories and emotions leading to certain behaviour. Thinking thus comprises of all mental activities/processes that flow into behaviour.

We see things in our surrounding and perceive meaning out of them because of this higher mental processing which flows into decision making, critical thinking and reasoning. An important part of this process is mental imagery, which refers to the mental representation of objects of thought in the form of visual images. It is as if you are drawing the picture of the object mentally.

Thinking involves an information processing approach. The information is received, processed, organized, stored and planned. It involves the use of our emotions, motivation and memory to analyze the things, engage in critical and creative thinking, and take decisions.

Thus thinking is not an unstructured processing, rather it is a step-by-step block of association which involves:

- **Images** of felt and observed experiences which are recalled as objects and activities.
- **Concepts** or ideas that explain a class of events that are similar (e.g., a car represents four-wheeler, a holiday represents relaxed work-free days, etc).
- **Symbols** are substitutes of actual objects or activities (e.g., school bag, uniform, books, school building, teachers symbolise learning experience).
- **Language** is the strongest medium of thinking in the form of reading, writing, and hearing new information and assimilating it as an experience (e.g., newspapers, news on TV tells us latest news and the world around us).

In the 1950s, Benjamin Bloom developed a classification of thinking skills that is still helpful today; it is known as Bloom's taxonomy. He lists six types of thinking skills, ranked in order of complexity: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

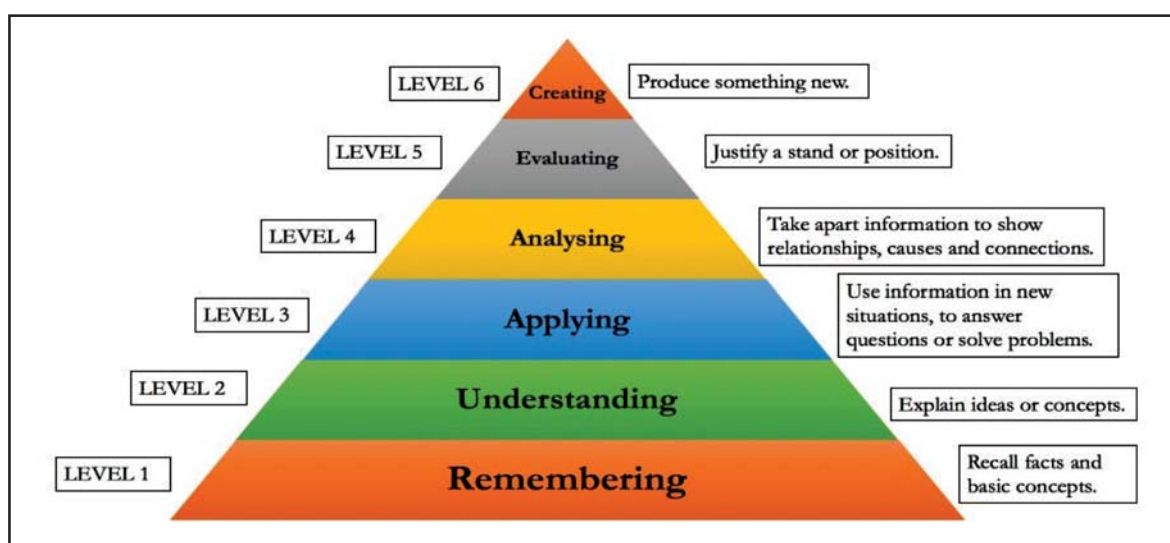


Fig. 4.7: Bloom's Taxonomy

Thus, looking at above, we can say that thinking is a mental process which is active when we are awake and when we are sleeping. Our active as well as passive thoughts convey us how to assimilate information from our environment and store it into meaningful experiences.

4.5.2 Types of Thinking

As discussed in the above section, thinking is a product of a lot of simultaneous association in our environment as well as our mental functioning. Now let us see the various types of thinking as follows:

- **Perceptual or Concrete thinking**- this explains how we perceive from our senses and experiences. It is concrete as it is seen from objects which are permanent and inflexible (e.g., two people attracted to each other).
- **Conceptual or Abstract thinking**- an ability to take concepts and generalize them philosophically (e.g., notion of being in love).
- **Reflective thinking**- works as an insight for problem solving, digging deeper into past experiences to remove obstacles to arrive at a solution (e.g., how to get better marks than last year).
- **Creative thinking**-ability to construct something different or new. Here we use associations to create new links to develop something more than we know (e.g., scientists, artists always creating something better than what they have already done).
- **Critical thinking**- is digging deeper into our own beliefs and discovering truths where facts and emotions are separated to analyse a problem from an unbiased standpoint (e.g., decision related to problem solving behaviour).
- **Associative thinking**- sometimes we engage in free association or mindless thinking when we are over worked to find relief. (e.g., daydreaming, delusions, or fantasies).

Thinking plays an important role in our life, in fact, it can be considered as central to our way of functioning and our well-being. It influences our life in a significant way as we use our thoughts to understand the world around us. Our thoughts based on our past experiences, learnings and situational backgrounds influence our decisions and choices in life.

The nature of our thoughts, positive or negative, impacts our psychological well-being. It can help us to think in divergent and creative ways or create roadblocks to nurturing self care and self actualization. Addressing thoughts or cognitions is one major focus in certain counseling and clinical approaches to therapy. Our thoughts can create faulty patterns or distortions which hamper our healthy functioning and leads to maladjustments, and even mental disorders. As these faulty thinking patterns are not based on reality, they can result in mental health related problems. For instance, beliefs such as, "I am a failure" or "I always have to suffer" leads to associated feelings (sadness, dejectedness, loneliness, frustration etc.), bodily sensations (fatigue, inactivity, laziness, headache etc.), and behaviour (avoidance, staying at home only, excessive eating, using drugs/alcohol too much etc.). Hence it is important to focus on our thoughts, be aware of them and steer them in a right direction to achieve good mental health.

Self Assessment Questions 3

1. What is the ancient Indian model of personality given in the Upanishads called?
2. Name the 'Trigunas'.
3. What are the thinking skills given by Bloom?

4.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we learned about some important correlates of self, that is, attitude, personality and thinking. We are the sum of all our past experiences, mental processes like thinking and our inherent nature which is personality. We can say we are unique, with how we define our lives and make decisions, which enhances our self-esteem; but at the same time, we behave in a typical manner, which can group our thoughts and actions into categories, which is explained under personality traits and thinking behaviour. The unit described the nature of attitude and the components of attitude. Further, personality was explained in terms of the factors affecting and the theories of personality. The Indian views on personality was also described. Finally, the unit elaborated on the nature of thinking and types of thinking.

4.7 KEY WORDS

- Attitudes** : are tendency to respond positively or negatively toward a certain person, object, idea, or situation which develops through one's learnings, experiences and interactions with others.
- Personality** : "is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his characteristics behavior and thought" (Allport, 1961, p. 28).
- The Id** : is present in all of us from birth and includes all desires which need immediate satisfaction.
- The Ego** : develops from id and controls impulses in a socially acceptable manner.
- The Superego** : works on moral principle and is guided by the values given to us by our parents.
- Self-actualization** : refers to the full realization of one's potential and of one's "true self".
- Traits** : refer to characteristics which can be used as a group to define the way people are similar in their ways of behaviour.
- Thinking** : is a mental activity that involves the processes of perception, memory, planning, problem solving, decision-making etc. which flow into behaviour.

4.8 ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Answers to Self Assessment Questions 1

1. Emotions/affect, thoughts/cognitions, and behaviour
2. Factors that need to be considered in the process of attitude change include (a) source of the message, (b) content of the message, (c) medium of message delivery, and (d) characteristics of the target audience.
3. Consistency and stability

Answers to Self Assessment Questions 2

1. pleasure principle
2. ego
3. self-actualization
4. 16

Answers to Self Assessment Questions 3

1. pancha kosha model
2. sattva, rejas and tamas
3. knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation

4.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1. Define personality and explain how do we develop this dynamic concept throughout our lives?
2. Can an attitude be considered right or wrong? Elucidate with examples.
3. Which theory of personality appealed to you and how do you think it can contribute to your personal growth?
4. Describe the nature of thinking and analyze the role of higher mental processes in it.
5. Is situation a strong predictor of personality development? Discuss.

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4.11 FURTHER LEARNING RESOURCES

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