

ABSTRACT

Altruism and egoism are two opposite yet fascinating dimensions of human nature. Many philosophers and eminent writers regarded human nature as selfish (E.L. Freud, 1968,; and Machiavelli, 1950). Hobbes & Neitsche also took pessimistic view of human nature. It was Plato who stressed that inspite of their selfish and egoistic tendencies men may have concern for others. Later many social scientists supported his views (August Comte, 1875; Mill, 1863; Spencer, 1872, McDougall, 1908 etc.). The question of altruism opens a Pandora's box for complex issues and conceptual traps.

The word altruism comes from the Latin word "alter", meaning "Other", generally connotes an orientation toward other rather than toward self. It implies an unselfish concern, the interest of others above concern for oneself. Selflessness is the essential condition of altruism stressing the same. Walster & Piliavin (1972) said, "Altruism is very special form of helping behaviour, that is voluntary, costly to the altruist, and motivated by something other than the expectation of material or social rewards" Yarrow, Scott & Waxler (1973) held that altruism is not a specific form of behaviour, rather, it includes a "diversity of responses - helping, sharing, rescuing, sympathising and undoubtedly more."

Different views of human nature have led to different conceptualizations of altruism. The first one stressed reward-cost formulation, the second one emphasized moral duty as the cause of altruistic acts. The third one identifies altruism as an end in itself, as voluntary, and accomplishes good. Severy (1972) summarized that one could help and expect some remuneration, expect to feel good, expect to further his own cause. Wispe suggests a working definition of altruism, that, "this kind of behaviour intends not **only** the well being of other person but also has willingness to share however briefly.....his pain frustration and sorrow." Hence, altruistic behaviour is intentional, is an end in itself, and is done because the other person needs it. Thus, altruism is an unselfish concern for others. Several theories about altruism have been developed by Sociologists, Sociobiologists, Psychologists and social psychologists.

Sociologists recognized altruism by such tags as benevolence, charity, and the like suggested by its speed of diffusion into other people's language. Comte, Durkheim, Sorokin and others made significant contribution in regard to our concern for others. Advocating biological basis of all social behaviour, Sociobiologist, Edward O. Wilson (1975) accounted for social behaviour of various species in terms of genetic make up of those species,

as it has been influenced by their evolution over the ages. Kin selection can perhaps explain our willingness to help Kin and reciprocal altruism has been called upon to explain strangers (Trivers, 1971). The Psychological theories, include psychoanalytic view which regards men as selfish and stimulus response view. The social psychological theories emphasized the situational factors which attempt to answer why people help others. It stressed that presence of others leads to diffusion of responsibility as an inhibitory factor in altruistic behaviour. It also included motivators and mediators which include norms of responsibility, reciprocity, the effect of good and bad mood and personality influences on altruistic behaviour.

Many researches have been carried out in various areas related with/altruism and related behaviour. Help to strangers as a function of liberal, catholic or conservative church membership (Milgram, Mann & Haster, 1965, Frobes Gormoll, 1971; Starks & Glock, 1970). They showed that members of conservative church as less altruistic than those belonging to liberal church. People who empathize with others are more likely to help (Hoffman, 1976; Mussen and Eisenberg, 1977), empathic responses can lead to helping behaviour (Aronfreed, 1970; Hoffman, 1970; Krebs, 1975, Mehrabian & Epstein, 1972; Batson, Darley, and Coke, 1978; Batson & McDavis, 1978; Piliavin & Piliavin, 1973; Stotland et.al., 1978). Negative emotions inhibit

altruistic acts, facilitate them or have ^{no} effect at all (Shelton & Rogers, 1981). Presence of others had an inhibiting effect on emergency intervention (Latane & Darley, 1970; Schwartz & Clausens 1970; Shotland & Heinold, 1985).

Some researchers emphasized the importance of norm of social responsibility in helping (Berkowitz & Daniel, 1964), reciprocity norm as a mediator in helping (Bar-Tal, & Greenberg, 1974; Nemeth, 1970; Pruitt, 1968). Hartshorne, & May (1968), Hartshorne & Maller (1929), Rushton (1980, 1961) conceived a trait of altruism, but many others found negative relationship between personality and altruism, e.g. dominant people are less helpful (Ribat et.al., 1963), conservative and authoritarian as less helpful (Krebs, 1970). Yet many others failed to find any relationship between helping and authoritarianism, Machiavellianism, social responsibility, and need for approval (Latane & Darley, 1970), autonomy and submissiveness (Korte, 1970), independence or trustworthiness (Yakimovich & Saltz, 1971). Others found positive relationship between helping and self esteem (Walster & Piliavin, 1972), empathy (Fultz et.al., 1986), and level of moral development (Morrison, Siegel & Francis, 1984) Some researchers found females as more humanistic than males (Hoffman, 1975), While Staub, Shark (1970) and Gupta (1980) ^{found} more sharing by boys than girls.

Given the divergence^{of} opinion, what is the correct position? At this juncture, we believe that the claim that an altruistic prosocial personality dimension has been found is premature. Although there is some encouraging evidence that a composite index of personality measures may be able to predict individual differences in altruistic behaviour, the evidence is still spotty and inconsistent. Hence, it was decided to explore relationships if any between altruism and personality traits, and certain cultural variables.

The sample of the study comprised of 550 undergraduates selected on the basis of stratified random sampling in the age group of 17 to 22 years from Shibli National College, Azamgarh. It was drawn from faculties of Arts, Science and Commerce. The sample comprised of both males and females, rural and urban, and Hindus and Muslims.

The tools used included Altruism Scale, developed, constructed and standardized for the present investigation, Cattell's 16 PF test, and Kulshreshtha's Socioeconomic Status Scale.

The Ss were categorized into high and low groups on the basis of their sten scores on 16 PF test, then Altruism Scale was administered over them. Similarly Socioeconomic Status was determined by employing Kulshreshtha's socioeconomic status scale and Ss were categorized before administering Altruism Scale into high,

average and low. The sample had males-females, rural-urban, Hindus-Muslims, Arts, Science and Commerce groups, a subgroup had Ss from NSS Volunteers and N.C.C. cadets, Altruism was measured of all the groups and subgroups.

It was decided appropriate to present the criteria for the interpretation of variability measures i.e. Skewness and Kurtosis. Altruism is normally distributed in the sample (N = 550) as $Sk = .235$ and $Ku = 467$, both significant at .01 level, which are within reasonable limit of chance fluctuation.

The obtained results manifest that twelve out of 16 Personality Factors have been found to be significantly related with altruism, while relationship with only four factors was nonsignificant. Personality factors found significantly related at .01 level with altruism included-- Outgoing, Emotional Stability, Happy-go-lucky, Conscientious, Venturesome, Forthright, Placid, Experimenting, Self-sufficient Controlled and Tense. The unrelated source trait, included- Intelligence, Tough Vs. Tenderminded, Trusting Vs. suspicious, and Practical Vs. Imaginative. From the above results it may be observed that personality may, to a great extent, be considered as a predictor of altruism. Our hypotheses about possible relationship between personality traits and altruism stands verified to a large extent. Thus, personality traits may determine altruism. The results contradict the findings of Latané & Darley (1970), Korte (1971), Yakimovich & Saltz

(1971), and support, in one way or other, the findings of Hartshorne & May (1928), Hartshorne and Maller (1929), Rushton (1980, 1981), Walster & Piliavin (1972), Fultz and others (1972) and Morrison, Siegel & Francies (1984).

The obtained results on altruism as a function of Socio-economic status clearly depict that middle and low socio-economic status groups did far better than those belonging to high social status group. It seems middle and low social status groups display better models before their children as far as altruistic behaviour is concerned. It may also be accounted by the child rearing practices followed by parents belonging to different socioeconomic status. Females were obtained more altruistic than their male counterparts may be explained in terms of typical Indian context as well as different standards followed in rearing and socializing for boys and girls in our socio-cultural context. The Hindus and Muslims did not differ significantly in their altruism scores, is not surprising because of common cultural heritage. All religion is but one, "the destiny of India is to lead mankind to the place where the Vedas, the Quoran, and the Bible are harmonized" Rural Ss were significantly more altruistic than their urbanite counterparts which may be explained in terms of Milgram's (1970) Stimulus Overload Theory. The results support the findings of Milgram (1970), Korte & Kerr (1975) House & Wolfe (1978). Further greater amount of fellow

feeling and sharing behaviour among rural folk may also be called upon to explain this finding in favour of rural people. The results on altruism as determined by stream of discipline at undergraduate level was found to have significant impact. The subgroup comprising of students from faculty of Arts was found more altruistic than those from Science and Commerce. Same is the ^{case} with subgroup comprising of N.S.S. Volunteers who significantly performed better on Altruism Scale than subgroup comprising N.C.C. cadets and of normals. It seems National Service Scheme had its impact over the volunteers in inculcating a sense of duty toward and concern for others.

As the investigation of second order personality traits (as laid down in Cattell's 16 PF test) was out of the scope of the present dissertation it is suggested that further researches in future may encompass it. We should try to develop a prosocial altruistic society in India, which is the only country on the face of the World which in view of its glorious past and healthy traditions, can dream of it. In this direction, government, agencies may come ^{forward} with new scheme, and legislation if called for, to encourage this social virtue highly needed in the present terrorist stricken society, witnessing everyday terrorist borne Kidnapping and ghastly killing of innocent citizens. But it does not mean that a prosocial-altruistic society cannot be developed sans government aid. Voluntary organisations may also play an important role.