Chapter III

TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY: ITS ORIGIN AND DIFFERENCES FROM THE OTHER PSYCHOLOGIES

Transpersonal Psychology is a humanistic psychology. Humanistic approach developed in opposition to the two theoretical approaches – psychoanalytic and behaviorism. The humanists have taken an opposite position to these two schools, humanism is often referred to as the “third force”. The best known theorists in this movement are Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. 

There are a few more that we shall refer in due course. These theorists and their followers have rejected the negative view of human beings that both psychodynamic theories and behaviorism offer. Psychoanalytic or psychodynamic theory suggests that people are driven by sexual and aggressive impulses and unconscious ideas that they cannot control. Behaviorism holds that we are completely controlled by the external environment. Humanists feel that these views failed to understand what is most human and essential about us, holding our little hope for the development of human beings in general.

Before we start our discussion regarding Humanistic/Transpersonal Psychologies, we shall write here on what is Behaviorism. Behaviorism is the ‘second force’, ‘first force’ is psychoanalytic, in psychology.

BEHAVIORISM

John B. Watson (1913) is considered as the founding father of Behaviorism. Watson rejected mind as the subject of psychology and insisted that psychology be restricted to the study of behavior – the activities of people and animals. Behaviorism laid emphasis on conditioned responses as the elements, or building blocks of behavior. Watson maintained
responses. Behaviorism laid much emphasis on learning. It denied the existence of inborn behavioral tendencies. Behaviorism asserted that there is no essential differences between human and animal behavior and that we can learn much about our own behavior from a study of animal behavior. Behaviorism continues to be a modern-day school of psychological thought.

We have talked above about 'conditioned response'. Let us make it clear here what is meant by behaviorist conditioned response. According to behaviorism man is essentially a biological organism. Like other organism, man also responds to the environment in which he lives. These responses are automatic. They are reflex actions. All biological organisms having nervous systems are capable of reflex action. These are automatic actions. For example, when a person touches a hot object, he or she will pull quickly away from it. The reflexes occur without our being aware of them. Behaviorism holds that all human behaviors are essentially like this, automatic, and not involving conscious thought.

There are three essential elements to any reflex. First, there is a 'stimulus'. In the above example this would be the hot object. Second, there is a response. In the above example this would be the behavior of pulling away from the hot object. The third element of the reflex is the connection between the stimulus and the response. These connections are often referred to as stimulus – response, or S-R bonds.

Behaviorism explains how stimuli and responses got linked together such that when the stimulus occurs, the response necessarily follows. This process is called 'conditioning'. There are three important factors that influence conditioning:

(a) **Contiguity** - Contiguity means that the events occur together in time and space. Because of contiguity certain responses get connected to certain stimuli.
(b) **Frequency** - The second important factor in conditioning is the frequency with which stimuli and responses, or pairings of stimuli and responses, occur. If a certain stimuli occurs and is followed by a response many times, these two are likely to become bonded together, connected in some way. This process was illustrated by the early experiments of the Russian physiologists Evan Pavlov. Pavlov is considered one of the most important figures in the history of behaviorism. Pavlov used a device in which a dog was given food at the same time that he sounded a bell. The food made the dog salivate. After repeating this procedure a number of times, Pavlov showed that the dog would salivate whenever the bell was rung even if no food was given. The dog was conditioned to salivate whenever the bell sounded. The stimulus of the bell became connected to the response of salivating because they were paired frequently. This process is called ‘classical conditioning’. In general, the more the stimuli and responses are paired, the stronger the connection between them and the stronger the conditioning.

(c) **Reinforcement** - It refers to a way of making the conditioning (or connection) stronger. According to Behaviorism, conditioning is made stronger when a response results in some pleasing event of a behavior results in something pleasant to the organism, it is likely to be repeated. If it results in something unpleasant, it is likely not to be repeated. A behaviorist B.F. Skinner made ‘reinforcement’ as the basis of conditioning. Skinner modified the classical conditioning and named his own modified version as ‘operant conditioning’.

29
For understanding operant conditioning, reinforcement is a key term. A reinforcer in operant conditioning is any stimulus or event which, when produced by a response, makes that response more likely to occur in the future. Reinforcers correspond roughly to what we call ‘rewards’ in everyday speech. Examples of the many things that can serve as reinforcer in operant conditioning are food for a hungry animal, praise for a child, a “well-done!” from the boss, or escape from pain. If reinforcement is contingent upon a certain response, that response will become more likely to occur. According to behaviorism almost any response can be made more likely to occur by following it with reinforcement; the behavior of animals and people can be “shaped” and molded by appropriate arrangements of responses and reinforcers.

Operant conditioning does not require elaborate opportunities; it goes on around us all the time. All that is necessary is that reinforcement be made contingent upon the making of a particular response. Approval and smiles from other people, agreement by others with our ideas, a feeling of self-worth and importance, the accomplishment of difficult tasks, and many, many other pleasurable states of affairs can act as reinforcers to mold our behavior.

Behaviorism theory is strongly deterministic. According to behaviorism, human behaviors do not just happen; rather, they are produced by stimuli or reinforcements that become associated with the behaviors in very precise and lawful ways. The determining power behind behavior is in the stimuli and reinforcers, which are in the external environment, not inside us where we could control them. In other words, behaviorist theory holds that our behaviors are controlled in a very strict way by environmental events, and not by our own wills. One of the important implications of this theoretical position is that as individual human beings, we are not responsible for our actions. Forces over which we have
no control produce our behavior. According to Skinner (1971) the ‘control and prediction’ of human behavior is often considered to be a legitimate goal and perhaps the most important reason and justification for psychology.

Behaviorists are more concerned with the scientific status of psychology. They assert that human beings can be adequately studied by the method of natural science just as other natural organisms and events are studied. They assert that only observable things can be studied scientifically. They say that anything that cannot be observed should not be studied or used to explain human behavior.
HUMANISTIC/TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Humanistic psychology is an approach which was adopted by some researchers in the field of science of human nature to save man from the dehumanizational orientations of some psychological theories like classic psychoanalysis and behaviorism.

John Rowan (1976 states:

“Humanistic psychology is not just a new brand of psychology, to set side by side on the shelves with all the old brands. It is a whole different way of looking at psychological science. It is a way of doing science which includes love, involvement and spontaneity, instead of systematically excluding them. And the object of this science is not the prediction and control of people’s behavior, but the liberation of people from the bonds of neurotic control, whether this comes from outside (in the structure of our society) or from inside.”

According to humanistic psychology every human being is unique. There is an innate potential in each of us to grow towards perfection. If we do develop properly following the dictates of our potential, we can become what Rogers (1959) calls “fully functioning” person. Maslow (1954) gives another term for this human growth as ‘self-actualization’. Self-actualization is the state of realizing our innate potential and become fully the persons we really are.

Humanistic/Transpersonal psychologists state that human nature is basically good. They advocate that we all should strive to fulfill our natures and become self-actualized. Humanistic/Transpersonal psychologies study those areas which are

---

neglected by psychoanalysis and behaviorism. We shall make this point clear by giving a definition of Transpersonal Psychology.

Anthony Sutich (1969) in the first issue of the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, defines Transpersonal Psychology as follows:-

“Transpersonal Psychology is the title given to an emerging force in the psychology field by a group of psychologists and professional men and women from other fields who are interested in those ultimate human capacities and potentialities that have no systematic place in positivistic or behavioristic (first force), classical psychoanalytic theory (second force) or humanistic psychology (third force). The emerging Transpersonal Psychology (fourth force) is concerned specifically with the ‘empirical’, scientific study of, and responsible implementation of the findings relevant to, become, individual and species-wide meta-needs, ultimate values, unitive consciousness, peak experiences, B-values, ecstasy, mystical experience, awe, being, self-actualization, essence, bliss, wonder, ultimate meaning, transcendence of the self, spirit, oneness, cosmic awareness, individual and species wide synergy, maximal interpersonal encounter, sacralization of everyday life, transcendental phenomena, cosmic self-human and playfulness, maximal sensory awareness, responsiveness and expression, and related concepts, experiences, and activities. As a definition, this formulation is to be understood as subject to ‘optional’ individual or group interpretations, either wholly or in part, with regard to the acceptance of its content as essentially naturalistic, theistic, super-naturalistic, or any other designated classification.”
An attempt to define Transpersonal psychology has set off debates and discussions too. A discussion reported in the Association for Transpersonal Psychology Newsletter describes the open approach to defining transpersonal psychology as:

“.....a way for transpersonal to be defined by our continuing rediscovery of it, by new insights and understanding as well as new evidence and theory. Hence the desire to keep it open and take a process approach to defining it (1977, p.4).”

In the above definition of the transpersonal psychology we see that Sutich has differentiated transpersonal from the humanistic approach. In fact, they share the common platform. Some authors treat them as one approach and some view transpersonal psychology as an outgrown approach over the humanistic one. In the present research we treat them as one with the only difference that Transpersonal Psychology is more mystical and eastern.

There are a few psychologists like Charles T. Tart (1975) and John Rowan (1976) who wish to combine Western psychology with eastern transpersonal psychologies. The other name is Robert Ornstein (1969, 72, 77) who tried to link Sufism and Modern Psychology.