CHAPTER V

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON PERSONALITY

V.1. Meaning of Personality

The subject of this research is intricately connected with the personality dispositions of women in the late adulthood. Personality is known to manifest changes along the life cycle; these changes, positive as well as negative, are especially evident during the menopausal period when there are certain physiological developments in the body.

It is believed that most of the personality changes are caused by one's psychological reaction towards the bodily transformations rather than by chemical and glandular changes which bring about bodily transformations. Together with the psychological reaction, a host of background conditions present during that time also contribute to personality alterations.

It is only the negative changes which tend to cause social and personal upheavals. In order to investigate such negative changes in the personality, it is essential to comprehend the complexities of the human personality.

The most acceptable definition of the word "personality" has been formulated by Gordon Allport. He says "Personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his characteristic behaviour and thought." Entailed here are two crucial words, namely, 'dynamic' and 'psychophysical'. The word 'dynamic' conveys the ever-changing nature of personality
while 'psychophysical' refers to habits, attitudes, emotional states, motives and beliefs which are essentially psychological but which have a physiological basis. Thus, it is the psychophysical aspect of personality which renders it dynamic.

To understand the emergence and development of traits in an individual, one has to take recourse to such concepts and postulates about personality as will help unravel the very complex nature of a human being. Hence it is worthwhile to examine below a few theories of personality which throw light on some common negative experiences of women in the age group of 40 to 55 years.

The personality theories are based on hypothesis, concepts and developmental framework which enable one to know why people behave the way they do. Besides their descriptive value, the theories also have predictive value which help to place the task of understanding an individual as he leads his life in clearer perspective. Julian Rotter (1964) brings out the importance of practicality of personality theories. According to him, personality theories identify the common consistent characteristics and the process of their acquisition and change. The measurement of these characteristics will help to know, to understand and predict an individual’s behaviour. Besides, personality theories find out and explain the experiences and conditions that give rise to the development and changes in personality characteristics.
Three theories which most adequately meet Rotter's assessment are Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, Jung's theory of analytical psychology and Erikson's psychosocial theory.

V.2. Freud's Theory of Psychoanalysis

The theory of Dr. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) stresses the importance of the psychosexual development during the early years of life and believes that all later development of traits have roots therein. According to Donelson and Gullahorn, "...Freudian theory is highly reactive. What we are as adults is determined by past experiences; we function to avoid anxiety and maximize instinctual pressure; much of our motivation is unconscious, as we defend against what is unpleasant about ourselves."

The theory proposes that the psychic life is represented by three levels of awareness viz., the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious. The conscious level includes everything we are aware of at a given time. Freud felt that only a small part of mental life, which consists of thoughts, memories, perceptions and feelings, is covered by the level of consciousness. The pre-conscious covers all the experiences that are not conscious but which can be brought to the level of awareness with ease. The unconscious level guides and moulds important aspects of human behaviour through impulses and needs which are outside the realm of awareness.

The theory suggests three components of personality: the id, the ego and the superego. The id is innate, raw,
unorganized, lawless and free of inhibitions. It expresses through the pleasure principle which means immediate reduction of tension. The ego takes place when the capacity to postpone need emerges as an individual learns that there is an external world. It expresses itself through the reality principle which means gratifying needs in accordance with the norms and ethical standards of the outside world. To achieve this an individual has to learn, think, reason, perceive and memorize. The super ego consists of values, morals and attitudes which are acceptable to the social world. These are developed through the process of socialization.

Freud's view on the development of personality is based on the assumptions that adult personality is moulded by the early childhood experiences and that sexual energy, present at birth, develops through the psychosexual stages.

There are four stages of psychosexual development—oral, anal, phallic and genital, according to the areas of the body through which sexual energy is discharged. There is a period which occurs in between the third and the fourth stage, called latency period, in which sexual energy is sublimated to nonsexual activities like sports.

Together with the psychosexual developmental stages go the concepts of fixation and regression. They explain how certain negative personality characteristics are developed in the early life and continued in the later part of life. During the psychosexual stages, it is possible that the individual may come across many failures. These
failures are called fixations which occur either due to too little gratification that makes him afraid to go to the next stage, or too much gratification that leaves no motivation to move on to the next stage. In regression an individual seeks an earlier and easier mode of satisfaction.

Some of the personality traits which are developed in adulthood due to fixation are labelled according to the stage at which they occurred. These are: (i) oral-passive personality in adulthood characterised by traits like dependency, passivity, gullibility and immaturity; (ii) oral-sadistic personality includes traits like sarcasm, argumentativeness, domineering tendency; (iii) anal-retentive personality covers traits like obstinacy, stinginess, orderliness, punctuality, extreme cleanliness or extreme messiness; (iv) anal-agressive personality consists of traits like cruelty, destructiveness, hostility, untidiness; (v) phallic personality indicates, especially among women, traits like flirtatiousness, seductiveness and promiscuity and (vi) the genital stage characterised by maturity, responsibility and ability to postpone heterosexual gratification.

It is the phallic stage which has been the most controversial. It is also the most relevant one for such a study as the present one dealing with the psychology of adult women. Its dominant element is a conflict of sexual attraction which is against conventional modes of thinking. It is this conflict which manifests itself in a daughter
being strongly attracted to her father — the Electra complex, which is the counterpart of the son-and-mother attraction known as the Oedipus complex.

In this stage, the girl makes a discovery that she lacks a penis, and wishes she had one. Freud names this phenomenon "penis envy". She then becomes hostile towards her mother and blames her for depriving her of a penis. The consequences of "penis envy" amongst women give rise to traits like weak super ego, feeling of inferiority to men, contemptuousness towards other women, masochism, vanity, passivity and jealousy. The neo-Freudian, Karen Horney, however did not agree with this view about women. She thought the concept of "penis envy" was a result of male bias amongst psychoanalysts who had treated neurotic women belonging to a particular social class. She viewed women not as biologically disposed towards masochistic attitudes of being weak, dependent, submissive and self-sacrificing, but these attitudes were the result of the strong impact of the social factors.

The genital stage is a period starting from adolescence till death. This includes developmental phases such as courting, selecting a marriage partner and raising a family. To achieve genital personality is the ideal personality to reach which people must learn to postpone gratification. Freud also introduced the concept of 'anatomy is destiny' while explaining his theory. By this concept he implied that psychosexual development does not depend on physiological factors covering hormones. Instead, he thought that society
and the pattern of upbringing and care was responsible for the differences in men and women. Women realise that they lack the penis and must accept the superiority of men. It is their reaction towards the lack of penis, the anatomical difference, together with social factors, which gives rise to differences in personality dispositions among men and women.

Thus, going by Freud's theory, the personality of a woman is a result of social and cultural factors that affect her inherent perception of her physical parts.

V.3. Jung's Theory of Analytical Psychology

The Swiss psychiatrist, Carl Jung (1875-1961), accepted Freud's concept of the unconscious but made it broader by adding to it the concept of collective unconscious. It refers to the total experiences of past generations and includes universal images and symbols known as "archetypes". In this theory, the components of personality are:

(i) Archetypes expressed positively or negatively e.g. The Mother archetype as a lifegiver or as the witch.

(ii) The self — referred to as the central archetype. It is the inner guiding mechanism.

(iii) Animus and Anima. The masculine aspect of a woman is animus i.e. her soul is masculine. There occurs a simultaneous development of inner and outer traits. This leads to the phenomenon of women who are most feminine overtly being most masculine inwardly.
(iv) The "shadow" is the centre of personal unconscious. It consists of desires, experiences and attitudes which are against the social norms and which have been found incompatible. Jung called it negative self because all the rejected material is accumulated here. The material gets organized and becomes the shadow of the ego. The shadow becomes dangerous when it is not recognized.

(v) The ego is the centre of awareness. It maintains consistency and direction of our conscious lives. It covers memories and experiences about which the individual is conscious.

(vi) The "persona" is the mask; it covers the social roles, appearance and expression. It protects both the ego and the self from social forces.

Jung did not accept Freud's view about an individual's development being confined to the first decade of life. According to Jung, the life cycle is made up of two broad stages: up to 40 years and after that. The first stage deals with only that part of personality which is in contact with the environment. In this an individual tries to resolve his problems and satisfy his needs. The second stage deals with the inner growth and development of self-realization. The task of the individual in this stage is to understand the self and achieve unification of ideas and behaviour.

Jung conceived life to be creative and thought it to be a continuous movement towards self-realization which, he believed, to be the primary objective. He opined that the
physical processes are important to an individual only to
the extent that they are represented in the psyche, and
that emotions accompany all psychic changes. Jung noted
the tendency among individuals to change their values and
roles especially in the second half of the life, that is
after 40 years. Women in this phase tend to become more
assertive. According to Jung, "personality can never develop
itself unless the individual chooses his own way consciously
and with conscious moral decision."  

Applying Jung's theory of analytic psychology
to the personality of women during late adulthood leads to
the opinion that "If a woman does not establish good relations
with the men in her life, she may attempt to deny her own
masculinity. She may relapse into an infantile helplessness,
or an all-absorbing motherhood that engulfs her children and
perhaps her husband as well." This denial of animus may
show in her excessive demands and stubborn and stern attitude
towards husband and children. Finally, according to Jung,
the second stage of life, beginning around 40 years, is the
ripest period for self-realization when the individual
awakens to the futility of maintaining the persona.

V.4. Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development

The Danish scientist, Erik Erikson (1902- ),
accepted Freud's concepts of structure of personality, namely,
the id, the ego and the super ego, and psychosexual stages
of development, namely, oral, anal, phallic and genital.
However, he added the psychosocial stages to explain that
development also occurs due to the relationship that exists between the individual and the environment. According to this theory, the development takes place throughout the life cycle. Erikson believed that personality organization can be explained by combining clinical insight with social and historical factors. The psychosocial theory concentrates more on the ego functions and stresses creative and adaptive powers of the individual.

Erikson maintained that each of the psychosocial stage has its own set of crisis, and the choice of selecting the correct alternative is up to the individual. The selection of the alternative may be positive or negative. The crisis at each stage in fact poses challenges which are helpful in bringing about faster growth. He perceives the positive and negative nature of the alternatives as potentials for strength and weakness; he however assures that failure at any one stage does not necessarily indicate failure at later stages.

The psychosocial stages are primarily based on epigenetic principle of maturation. It takes place through eight stages: (i) Infancy stage of trust versus mistrust. (ii) Early childhood — autonomy versus shame. (iii) Play age — initiative versus guilt. (iv) School age — industry versus inferiority. (v) Adolescence — ego identity versus role confusion. (vi) Young adulthood — intimacy versus isolation. (vii) Middle adulthood — generativity versus stagnation, and (viii) Maturity — ego integrity versus despair.
The seventh stage, which consists of two opposing tendencies — generativity and stagnation, is considered difficult by many people. Generativity refers to concern for younger generation and the conditions of the society in which they live. It is a tendency to guide and improve the younger generation, to give care. The need to give to the society from which the individual has benefited earlier is predominant. Stagnation, on the other hand, refers to self absorption, a tendency to move away from the society. In this, personal needs and comforts are predominant. An individual who has slipped into stagnation is not only self-indulgent and non-productive from society's point of view, but also suffers from poor inter-personal relations, feeling of hopelessness and apathy; he tends to lead an empty, meaningless life.

Erikson perceived that the differences between men and women occur more as a result of environmental factors covering not only anatomical but also historical, cultural and psychological facts interacting together to give rise to "uniquely female experience". He says that "the most basic fear for women, unlike men, is the fear of being left empty (which frequently may amount to the fear of being left alone) while women's creativity, deriving from her inner-space orientation, contains a unique potential which our male dominated society (oriented as it has been toward outer space) urgently requires."
According to the theory of psychosocial development, anxiety results if a woman has not demonstrated some capacity for success in either the family or the career role. Around the second half of adulthood, the tasks of parenthood are completed and the woman has to change her values and roles. If she fails to realize this need to change, then it leads her to frustration and despair. This is the time when menopausal changes begin to take place in women. Therefore, the period is often considered as critical for women.

According to English and Pearson (1955), it is thought that personality plays a larger part in the symptomatology than the cessation of glandular activity. "Many women go through this phase without any stressful symptoms; others become panicky and afraid of a loss of sexual identity."

Thus it can be said that women who suffer during the menopausal period probably have difficulty in accepting new roles and values and slip into the phase of stagnation, which requires a detailed analysis in order to suggest ways, if any, to overcome the hiatus on the way to attain what Carl Rogers referred to as self-actualisation.
REFERENCES


4. Donelson, Elain, Gullahorn Jeanne E., p. 26
