

Module-5

General Adjustive Behaviour & Frame of Reference

After discussing maintenance needs let us now talk about general adjustive behaviour. Human behaviour is classified as overt and covert behaviours. Overt human reactions refer to behavioural manifestations that we are able to see. On the other hand, covert behaviours are not readily available for observation as they are not manifested outwardly. Our attempt right now is to primarily look at human reactions and identify defining criteria for all possible types of reactions.

The general adjusting behaviour are—

- ★ Our reactions are holistic
- ★ Our reactions are economical
- ★ Our reactions may be automatic or planned
- ★ The reactions have affective components
- ★ The reactions might be task or defense oriented

It is important to note that human reactions are considered to be holistic. The entire framework of psychology always talks with respect of three important components—cognitive (thought process), conative (actions) and affective (feeling) factors. The way you think what you think, the way you do whatever you do and the way you feel the way you do so, all these three things are supposed to run in harmony with each other. As you perceive something in the environment if consider it to be worth responding then you think about it, feel about it and you also act accordingly. The more harmonious these components are, the more stable you become. The more disharmonies you have between these three constitutional

elements, the more internal unrest you feel. During our discussion about psychotic and neurotic disorders you would realize that a psychological disorder does imply lack of harmony between these three components. When we say that reactions are holistic it basically means that we watch a given situation or stimuli to evaluate whether it demands a response or not. If so, then we derive well thought reactions, feel the whole situation and then executed it. What matters is that we enact according to our thought and feeling. This makes human reactions holistic in nature.

If you compare this with neural firings, it works on all or none principle. Either the neuron receives and transmits the signal or it does not get excited at all but you cannot expect a neuron to get stimulated and getting terminated halfway. Similarly, if you intend to open the door after listening to the knocking sound, you plan your movement and execute it. In case someone plans to go and open the door but starts moving here and there, goes halfway and then turns back, his/her act is likely to be considered weird. Take the example of our communication. You select your words and arrange them in certain order and then express it. Unwarranted pauses, halfway termination of a sentence, and such behaviour are not considered normal. As an exception, there may be experimental manipulations of the reactions in which you knowingly stop or modify your reaction for one or the other reason. Here the reaction is still holistic having perfect synchronicity between your thought process, your feelings and your motor reactions. The midway modification or termination will be considered as an intelligent adjustment.

One important aspect of human behaviour is that all the reactions are supposed to be economical. You do not want to spend more and more in terms of time and effort and therefore human beings tend to lay out a plan, think of possible outcomes and then they execute it after weighing the options. Read the chapter on motivation in any introductory book on psychology and there you will find description of conflicts and their types. Say,

approach-approach conflict where I want to do this as well as that also or approach-avoidance conflict where the moment you approach something you cannot avoid some other thing. For example, take your end semester exams. If you intend to move to the next semester you have to appear for the exams, and when you approach exams you are inviting passing or failing grades. In our lives there are certain things where you will definitely land up in one or the other type of conflicts. Some of them might not be that easy to resolve. The more conflicting experiences you face in life the higher are the chances that you will undergo litmus test with respect to your adjustment process. So, when it is said that reactions are economical, what is meant is that you weigh the options, you consider how prudent it is for you to act in that given situation, and you try to execute it to only the extent where you do not consider that it to be in excess. Psychologically a reaction is not looked with respect to right or wrong but it is looked in terms of being proportionate or not. Say, you are talking in the class and the instructor gets disturbed. He/she expresses disgust and talks about this conversation to the class wherein the duration of this conversation is more than the duration for which you were talking. Although, neither conversation nor getting disgusted is wrong, the way the sequence of events have been described, the reaction is likely to be considered disproportionate by many. The disturbance can lead to disgust but this is a disproportionate display of disgust.

Even in acute cases, say posttraumatic stress, the basis on which the psychiatric diagnosis is made also has a temporal framework. For example, take someone who was caught in the nuclear disaster in Fukushima in Japan. Irrespective of the fact that he had gone through the worst experience, as an individual he is given only one month to cease the catastrophic experience from repeatedly coming to his mind. Such intrusive thoughts and images, which could otherwise be extremely disturbing, are considered okay till one month. After the lapse of this time if he still reports so, he will be said to have intrusive symptoms. Remember that intrusion is a symptom of posttraumatic stress disorder. As our reactions are

supposed to be economical, we adopt strategy that poses minimum threat and which ensures maximum success. It should simultaneously be considered to be proportionate. Energy is wasted when behavioural reaction is not economical. The more energy is wasted the more our survival is at risk, something that we are not biologically predisposed to do.

Further, the reactions can either be automatic or they can be planned. Automatic means that it is impetuous. You encountered the stimuli and spontaneously came forward with the reaction. This is automatic reaction. When you think, decide and then execute, the reaction is considered planned. At times your plan not to react is also a psychological reaction. Irrespective of the place and context some of us rarely react no matter how serious the debate is. Psychologically such decision to refrain from showing reaction also has significance.

Fourth important factor is that reactions are supposed to have emotional components. As discussed in the beginning, there are three important components in any reaction, the cognitive, conative and affective components. You cannot have a reaction without the feeling component. Say, you are facing danger and will feel afraid or you are facing threat and hence become anxious. All situations evoke certain degree of feelings in you. Take a very simple example. You are studying and a mosquito bothers you. What could be the possible reactions? You might simply blow it away without trying to harm it. In situations like these you refuse to entertain the stimulus which is intruding your current engagement, you refuse to get disturbed. In a similar situation, you try to kill the mosquito or react very vigorously. All these possibilities have certain degree of emotional involvement. Our entire focus is on the individual. When a group of people participate in a demonstration or an agitation, irrespective of the cause finally you would realize that people get emotionally tied up with it and they fight showing emotions that could be deprived of the concern. For example, reckless driving by a driver kills a child and the public of that very locality makes the traffic come to stand

still. They set few vehicles on fire. They demand that the police should take some action but what does the mob do? They also create disturbance that varies on a continuum of irresponsible citizen behaviour. Usually people show more of emotional reactions than showing solidarity for the cause. Mostly public demonstrations reflect certain pattern—traffic blockage, putting things on fire, closing shops, shouting slogans, and so forth. All of them are emotionally governed whereas the concern for the cause is more cognitively governed. Reactions always have a feeling component embedded in it.

Reactions that we show against any given stimuli can either be task oriented or defense oriented. Task oriented means you face a situation, you design a strategy and you execute it to complete the task. Defense oriented reaction means you anticipate the fallout of the situation and you know that this might result into your ego getting hurt and therefore you try to defend your ego.

Characteristics of healthy development

So, with respect to the human adjustment process, what are the basic characteristics of healthy development? For an individual this means identifying those features that I have developed and that gives me well integrated uniform platform so that I can maintain mental equilibrium. I do not respond in a way that the society questions my level of adjustment. What are the major characteristics? You should have an adequate frame of reference, you should have essential competency, you should have goal direction and you should reflect personal growth and self actualizing tendencies.

Now talking about adequate frame of reference, consider a situation when you are told that a certain person will be coming to the class and will be talking about human adjustment

process. You have never heard of that person. You all will have an image of that person and the moment you see the real person you try to look at your self-generated mental reference and try to fit the real image with the imagined picture. In our real life we always try to draw mental pictures and later see how short the real and imagined pictures fall. Recollect when you were told that having cleared JEE now you are a student in an IIT. You must have derived an image of the place you had not visited, of the instructors and classmates whom you had not yet met, and many more such experiences. This refers to the frame of reference. This frame is usually governed by three assumptions— the reality, possibility and value assumptions. Reality assumption is based on your exposure to different professors and the aggregate of their characteristics.

If I show you an image of a male with long curly hairs, long coat, and polished nails and tell you that this is your instructor, it might not fit your frame of reference. Even if the image is of a very young man who otherwise appears to be fashion driven, you will not find the image fitting your assumption of the professor. Then what are the commonly seen assumptions? The older the instructor the more knowledgeable and wise he would be, thicker the lens of glasses the more knowledgeable the professor would be, the more he fits our frame of reference. You have seen certain people in reality and accordingly you develop your frame of reference. You have certain images of professors even though in reality you have seen only a few. Your sample size is very small as compared to total number of professors all over the world and hence is inadequate to draw a frame of reference, but still you do that. It goes to this extent that even if I have not seen certain things in reality I go by possibilities.

I am an artist commissioned to make calendar for a given year and I am told to pay special attention to the festivals of India. I decide that the month in which a festival falls will have the image of the concerned god or goddess. Say end of January has Saraswati puja and I make an image of Goddess Saraswati on that very page. The truth is that I have never ever

seen her nor has anybody else. She can look like an African or an East Asian or may have Mongolian features, but I discard all of these possibilities and make her look like a normal Indian and with features of a superior normal human beings. My creative assumptions lead me to make Gods very handsome and Goddesses really attractive. Take the most commonly seen example in Hindu temples. Look at the actions of *Hanuman*— putting his own tail to fire, holding the whole mountain while flying or pulling apart your chest to show image of Ram. Most of the calendars and almost all the temples use these images of *Hanuman*. They might appear illogical to many but still we have added value assumption to it. It is more and more symbolic; beside religious symbols they have moral values, something that the society cherishes and hence for those who believe the images represent more than what is depicted.

In practice, most of our behaviours are conditioned. Certain behaviour comes unknowingly and is dependent on how we have been brought up. As a baby you accompanied your parents to the place of worship and saw them following a template. Once you replicate the pattern to find that they appreciate you. You keep repeating it. Now after growing up many of us still do this in one form or the other. Involuntarily, without thinking you are conditioned to do that in a certain way. Take another example when one learns how to do something based on your active participation and feedback. You go to school for the first time; you go to the class and do not stand up when the teacher comes in due to your ignorance of this practice. You are told not to repeat the error. Next time a maid enters and you still stand up and again you are told the error. The feedback makes you learn that this is a mark of respect for teachers who come to your class. Very interestingly, you are also told that when you stand up you should wish the teacher good morning or good afternoon. Across schools you would find elementary school students wishing their teachers in the same musical manner. Psychologically speaking these behaviours would be considered outcomes of classical and instrumental conditioning. In the former case one involuntarily gets

conditioned whereas in the later case you participate in the process while the behaviour gets modulated.

Majority of our behaviour is conditioned behaviour, either classical or instrumental. Of course there are other ways of learning like cognitive learning which does not fall under the purview of conditioning. We have certain reality experiences where we think of certain possibilities and we have certain value assumptions which are more culturally governed. This is how we make our frame of reference. Somebody who falls short of it is still acceptable with certain minor aberrations. Major aberrations are not acceptable. Interestingly, with age our frame of reference becomes more rigid. When you find that the real life experiences does not fit into your frame of reference, you do not question your own frames of reference but you say that this behaviour is a misfit.

So, frame of reference is a very amazing thing. The more you grow the more rigid it becomes. Having learnt about it, one should try to be fair enough in life to say that this experience does not fit in my frame of reference but either the behaviour has a problem or my frame of reference is not adequate. Thus, the frame of reference should be malleable enough for the whole of your life, something that is not usually seen. We should be consciously aware of the rigidity that creeps in and try our best to retain its permeability so that you live a life where your frame of reference is not questioned by others and it also helpful to you.

Having discussed frame of reference let us now talk about another important issue—essential competencies. These competencies basically say that you are supposed to master the physical, social, emotional and intellectual skills that are needed by your society. Remember that there would be a great degree of variation in terms of what is expected of different individuals by different societies. This becomes further more complicated when individual differences also gets mixed with it. Recently a clip was uploaded by some Chinese parents on

the internet which has drawn attention of many across the world. The clip showed -13 degree temperature in a province of china with heavy snowfall and a couple removed the clothes of their 4 year old child and asked him to run on the snow. Why? They wanted their child to be physically very strong. The clip showed that the child kept crying and pleading but to no avail.

Now imagine a situation where you say that in terms of physical need all that is required is that you should be able to walk and be able to perform the regular motor activities expected of individuals of your age and sex. If you are able to do that then it is perfectly okay. Age and sex have strong connotations in our culture. If you are contemplating movement of heavy loads then our culture says that women will not do it. It is a man's job. Therefore, in a country like India when first women bus driver came in Bombay, when women conductors took up a job, or when the first women auto driver started her auto in Delhi, it became national news. The society, under present circumstances, did not expect this to happen. There are set of things that are gender driven, you have a clear distinction that these are manly and these are womanly activities.

Women education has been an issue in contemporary India. If you look at the national boards in India like CBSE, ICSE or state boards, the majority of toppers are girl students. But when you take total admissions in technical institutes, you realize that majority are males. When we finally come to practicing the profession we see that all areas are male dominated except for nursing. So why is that so? In terms of intellectual capability girls have proven themselves to be equal and even superior to the boys, yet the society supports the non superior group more.

The emotional reactions that you exhibit also have normative judgments attached to it. If you cry as a male people ask 'why do you cry like women'; so crying is attached to

women. Similarly, if you tend to be more aggressive or assertive people say that 'you are more like a man'. So, if you are an aggressive male it is acceptable. If you are an extra sensitive female that is also acceptable. But if you these behaviours are interchanged then the acceptability lowers down. Therefore, in terms of competency, people will still look at sex difference and the cultural acceptability of the emotional competencies. By and large, anthropological, biological, psychological and evolutionary research shows that females are much more capable in terms of emotional and social competency. Most of these social rules on majority part of the world are made by males. So, it is the males who decide the rules of the games and females are supposed to follow them.

If you read anthropology research, when you see marriage as an institution or family as a system, the stability component and the compromises to be made, we see that men across ages have largely tried to gain superiority by power. You capture a place if you have more weapons and strength. This act of brutality will also be translated into sexual crimes. War and rape are twin brothers. All wars will definitely have certain percentage of sexual crimes. When certain social systems were evolving and societies were contemplating about having family as a unit and family unions with one male and one female in a monogamous setup marriage also got institutionalized as it was the way peace and tranquillity seemed attainable. Anthropologists interpret that it is the social competence of women to act smart and decide to remain a subsidiary queen or a keep of an influential man than to remain in a monogamous condition with somebody who is physically and financially weak. This is the way stability has been attained in several cultures. Social competence will also mean how much you adhere to the norms of a given society. In terms of healthy development, irrespective of the fact that we have been making distinctions in male and female and even at times between cultures, there is a minimum essential qualification that society expects from you, in terms of how physically capable you are, how intellectually superior you are and how emotionally

stable you are and how much competence you have in terms of desired social skills. Remember that what is true for x is not true for y. In the same family as an elder child you are denied certain privileges that the younger ones enjoy from the parents. Similarly, if you are intellectually superior and rich the order of expectations from you changes. You can interpret many of the worldly events on the basis of this. Why is it that in most of the countries, people belonging to families of prime ministers and presidents enjoy more privileges?

Intellectual abilities, for example, are one the most valued constructs in any society and language proficiency is one of the valuable indicators of it. We see cases where moderate degree of intellectual performance is largely accepted but the society discriminates between those who have intellectual disabilities and those who do not have it. Even within those who are intellectually not impaired the degree of acceptance varies depending on the context. Imagine a case when someone who is good at his mother tongue is considered inferior simply because he is not good at English language. Till date the dialogue from an old movie of Mr. Amitabh Bachchan “I can talk English, I can walk English” seems amusing to many. Why is this otherwise meaningless dialogue still accepted by the audience? The fact remains that you can identify with it as you yourself do not know how to converse in English. Perhaps the very act of saying so adds value to the vernacular language that you are proficient at. So, if I speak a particular vernacular language and identify with the comment “I can talk English, I can walk English” I add detrimental value to the foreign language. Perhaps this makes the dialogue still so amusing.

Self correction is another important psychological characteristic. You define yourselves with respect to the competencies that you have. Your adequacy to perform certain things matters. The most important thing is that independent from social influences you show certain degree of stress tolerance and move in certain direction that you have decided for yourself. If you have decided that you are not somebody who is interested in engineering

stream you will look for something else. You decide by yourself and then you sustain your interest and motive and keep moving towards the goal that you have set for yourself. This is how one moves toward personal growth and self actualization; one tends to move towards the development of one's own potential and self fulfilment. You try to reach a point so that the peak of your potential can be exploited.

You have your real life experiences and you also have certain value judgements that you have acquired from the society. This helps you derive a frame of reference. Once you are aware of what society expects from you then you try to master physical, intellectual, emotional and social skills. Accordingly you define your self-identity, look at your competency and adequacy and then try to achieve goals. In this manner you try to maximize the potential that you have, and the nearer you move to your actual target the more fulfilling is the experience.

Very interestingly, you can come across people who are by and large considered to be unacceptable by the society but they continue to do that because they find meaning in it. Pole Pot, the leader of Khame Rouge, used to preserve skulls of his enemies in his living room after killing them. When he was 80 years old and caught at his hideout in Cambodia a number of skulls were recovered. What was the fun in storing skulls?

Mr. Amitabh Bachhan, the famous film actor, was hospitalized after an accident during shooting of the movie Coolie. A young boy used to come at the hospital's entrance with a rosebud every day. He used to come and stand at the gate everyday till the famous actor was discharged. When Mr. Amitabh Bachhan came out the boy offered him the flower and told about his every day visit. Why the boy used to do so?

Both these cases indicate how people derive meaning in their life; how meaning of life varies from person to person. Hence, it is important to reflect and explore your

intermediate and ultimate goals in life and prioritize things accordingly. What motivates you and what appears emotionally appealing to you are to be realized.

Dr. Christian Bernard's brother had a hole in his heart and died at a very early stage. When Dr. Bernard grew up, his father showed him a half-eaten biscuit that he had preserved as a memory of his lost son. Later, Dr. Bernard preserved this half-eaten biscuit. After completing his study of medicine he evolved the remedy for holes in the heart. Since then he kept on tirelessly performing surgery to plug holes in the heart of his patients. He once said the aim of his life was to plug hole in every human heart that carries it. The half-eaten biscuit kept on reminding him the unplugged holes in the heart of many children. You can very easily see the blend of motivation and emotion here.

Let us revisit the cases of Mr. Amitabh Bachhan and Dr. Christian Bernard. Temporally the goals in both the cases were very farfetched. The boy with the rose bud was perhaps not sure of Mr. Bachhan's survival but was still optimistic. Dr. Bernard must have been aware that plugging all the holes in human hearts is not possible, but was always motivated to carry on the surgery on different patients. In both the cases the concerned person kept moving ahead. These interesting dynamics needs to be realized when you look at adjustment processes. Irrespective of your capabilities you develop certain vision of life. You look at the intermediate and the final goals. Most of us can only see the intermediate goal at a given point in time; some have multiple intermediate vision; some seem to have much clearer vision of the life goals. The beauty of adjustment process is that we keep trying to achieve one goal after the other. The day you stop doing that, depressive tendencies will over power you. The realization that I am left with nothing more that has to be achieved might sound philosophical, but could be very depressing as you hardly find things that can motivate you to sustain your journey as a social being.

Self Assumptions

Till now we have talked about characteristics of fully developed individual, adequate frame of reference, essential competencies, self direction, and personal growth and self actualization. The nature of this course is such that we are more interested in making micro analysis to understand the dynamics of human adjustment process. Everything is centred around the self. If you examine how an individual defines the self and how the elements of 'self' are selected, you will understand humans attempt to fulfil maintenance needs, thus showing characteristics of healthy development. This is also helpful in order to maintain the level of psychological adjustment. We also talked about three assumptions— reality assumption, possibility assumption and value assumption. Reality assumption is the view of things that the individual thinks they really are, of the kind of the person he really is, and of the nature of the world around him. The way you view things in the external world, your interpretation of things, the way you think about your own self, and the assumptions you make on the basis of real life situations about the world around you, are all governed by the reality assumption.

Possibility assumption means the view of how things could be. You think in terms of hypothetical constructs, in terms of modifying something that exists, or thinking of something which does not exist at all. When you think of changing things in the environment the basic assumption is that you still look for opportunities which can lead to personal growth. Because certain number of individuals would be thinking of the possible modification, this would lead to certain degree of progress in the society.

Value assumption represents the view of the way things should be. This also includes interpreting things in terms of right or wrong, good or bad, etc. It is all judgement based. The

set of assumptions provides a frame of reference (also called as cognitive map). When you think of yourself with respect to the environment then you look at the pushes and pulls in the environment and your own merits and limitations. You somewhere interpret self and the environment, the pushes and pulls from the environment, your own strengths and weaknesses and therefore you can map the society and your own self. This cognitive map or frame of reference is guided by these assumptions.

Value assumptions will differ even when two of us belong to the same culture. Our tendency to adhere strictly to the given social norm will differ. The level of compliance to a given set of social norms varies from individual to individual. Couple of years back, activists of Ram Sena in Bangalore chased and manhandled unmarried couples on the Valentine's Day. Recently there was news showing a couple of youngster sitting near holy fire and taking oath to protect couples on the coming Valentine's Day. Although both the sets of people belong to the same society, they interpret the norms so differently.

Let us take another example. Since 1947 we are a democratic country and as citizens we all share equal rights. Does the text in the books of law reflect in the social scenarios? In Amethi, a place in the state of Uttar Pradesh, the first vote in an election is casted by a person belonging to dhobi community; the second by the king of Amethi, the third by the queen and then by the rest of the population. While explaining the logic behind this, the king once said that it is a good omen. If I am participating in any activity where I want a desirable outcome, I always begin with this social protocol. Although, this might not appear logical, it is an accepted form of behaviour in this part of the world.

Let us take another example. In certain areas in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra the newly born babies are taken to the second floor of the place of worship (it includes both, temple as well as mosque) and the priest/ maulawi drop the baby from this height. The family

members stay on the ground with piece of cloth and are supposed to catch their baby. The visual of this process is very scary. Now, however horrible and illogical this practice might appear to you, this is still prevalent and local people support it.

Look at our armed forces. Every regiment has its own slogan— ‘Har har Mahadev’, ‘Jo bole so Nihal...’ and so forth. All of them have religious connotation. You will find soldiers worshipping their guns before lifting them to kill their enemy. During Operation Desert some American forces were seen with lingerie and similar stuff. You can very easily see the difference in the pre-war act of soldiers coming from two different cultures. Let us come back to our own armed forces. They worship their arms and then use them to kill the enemy. Once they do so, the body of the enemy is given full respect and is handled with due dignity. If you recollect the events from Operation Vijay, the famously called Kargil war, Indian forces were given the mutilated bodies of few soldiers in the beginning. Later, when the Pakistani forces did not claim the bodies of the deceased, the Indian army performed the last rights as per the Islamic rituals. The reason we are discussing this issue is that one point the person is your enemy and you do not hesitate killing him. On the other instance he is respected as a human body. There seems an inbuilt heterogeneity and dichotomy in the whole act. At one point you take pride in killing the enemy; at the other point you take pride in treating the body of the same enemy with full respect. The switch over from one state to the other is worth exploring.

Let us go little beyond the training, uniform, and dignity components associated with the men in uniform and their handling of enemies and interpretation of the deceased. Look at the butcher who kills animal everyday for his lively hood. If you see them in your locality, you will find them feeding the animals, taking care of them till they reach a certain size, and then slaughtering them. Feeding is a sensitive act; care giving is also a sensitive act; but what

about slaughter? You find great deal of such dichotomies in the human behaviour. How, when, and what you interpret is interesting to understand.