

Module-7

Neurotic nucleus, Neurotic paradox, Transient situational reactions and defences

Now that we have talked about reality, moral and neurotic anxiety could be instrumental in instigating a sense of anxiety within an individual, thereby demanding more and more from your side to strike equilibrium. We will look at the same issue from a slightly different angle now. Given the fact that all of us have a certain frame of reference, a sense of growth and self-esteem, certain reality, possibility, and value assumptions, accepting the premise that all of us are governed by certain degree of neurotic, reality or morality anxiety, is it that this is how the whole sequence of events take place in the life of a normal individual. What is taken into account for defining what type of behaviour would be considered deviating from the expected social norm or more technically speaking what type of behaviour is likely to be demarcated as clinically defined abnormalities?

Remember we have talked about maintenance needs, characteristics of healthy development, and major factors determining how self gets instrumental in the process of adjustment. We are now looking at normal human beings with certain characteristics in their overt behaviour that draws our attention. The first one is called neurotic nucleus and the other one is referred to as neurotic paradox.

The very fact that you see the word neurotic being used in the terminology you can anticipate that it has to have something which is 'not so normal'. Secondly, the word nucleus means that this is the central force in terms of governing the kind of behaviour that is displayed. Besides being a normal human being some people show feeling of inadequacy and anxiety. They feel somewhere that the demands of the situation are little more than what they are capable of delivering. This means that the very anxiety that is embedded in them hints

that they might fail any day, any moment; they live with it, although they also keep yourself engaged in doing what they are otherwise supposed to do. Because of the anticipation of failure, they do not try to land up in such a situation and hence try their best to avoid the situation rather than coping with it. Outwardly they might say that they are not interested in such and such things but the fact remains that it is because of the feeling of inadequacy and incompetency that they avoid certain situations rather than getting into it and trying their best to do the needful. Because one tries to live with this feeling of inadequacy and incompetency and also try not to cope with the situation, their behaviour shows certain degree of rigidity; they cannot negotiate and compromise. The reflected behavioural pattern is rigid and egocentric. Egocentric behaviour reflects self-absorbed behaviour wherein the individual considers himself or herself as the center of everything.

The world does not know that it is their incompetence and anxiety. Instead, they show certain self defeating behaviour. When they have opportunities to prove their capabilities, they can say that they do not know whether they will succeed or not but they are competent enough to at least initiate and try their best and see what happens. In many cases one is pretty aware of failure or partial or full success, but the willingness to take risk and initiate action is important. People with neurotic nucleus have anxiety which keeps bubbling within them and they feel that they are not good enough for certain kind of thing and hence try to avoid all life circumstances where their inadequacy and incompetency can be tested. To defend themselves what they do is they try to avoid any such situation that demands it and hence what they show is rigid and non negotiable nature. The world considers them a very rigid egocentric individual. Such tendency of avoidance somewhere also blocks the possibility of growth. It is important to understand that it is the reflection of neurotic nucleus that one exhibits, otherwise the person concerned are perfectly normal.

One might be an individual moving ahead in life, achieving certain things but this behaviour pattern is centred on a sense of incompetency and inadequacy. It is the inadequacy which acts as the nucleus and the behaviour surrounds it. Hence, rigidity, ego centric behaviour, avoidance tendency and all these pattern of behaviour rotates around the basic discomfort that one has. It is important in life to understand the compatibility between your ability and your ultimate target you have set for yourself. You should read literature on achievement motivation and personality to know about this dynamics in much detail.

Another pattern of behaviour is nuclear paradox. Such people pragmatically do their work but have some clings in their adjustive behaviour which are neurotic in nature. They derive immediate relief from anxiety because of avoidance which is used in varying degrees and combinations. Pragmatic functioning is important here. In the previous case one showed rigidity and ego centric behaviour to avoid the situation, here also one does try to avoid but that is only for immediate relief. If I ask you to do something, you say "I am very busy, I cannot do it". I press you hard and then you accept to do it. Here what happens is you try to look at things in totality and practically you try to break the problem and solve it. So, you do everything pragmatically but you show certain pattern of behaviour that others generally do not show. It could be something which does not stop your normal growth, the reflection in your behaviour is not intense enough to be classified as symptoms, but this is certainly a deviation from what you usually show.

For example, I ask you to do something but you avoid it, saying you are very busy and will talk about this tomorrow. You experience immediate relief but you evaluate that this is a situation which can potentially give me what I aspire for. You also calculate the risk that you might not be in a sure shot win situation but by and large the possibility is that you might win. Practically also you are in a situation where you need to do this work. Hence, you decide

to do it. But then you overdo it, you cross check it multiple times although it is not required. You reflect similar unwarranted behaviour.

Let us take another example. You are asked to take charge of the lecture hall complex. You are told that this is a big responsibility and although there were many people in the panel, you seem to be the best candidate for this job. You are being convinced that your powers and responsibility will increase soon; you will soon get promotion etc. You are told certain benefits of accepting this responsibility or you yourself fabricate the situation to get persuaded. Finally you take the responsibility and while executing your task you show certain cling in your behaviour. Earlier you used to pull the lock once to check after locking it, now you try and pull it few more times. You go home and again think whether everything was in the right order or not. Such behaviour can be considered reflection of being extra cautious, but it does reflect a neurotic cling. You are hooked to a particular thought and action and they influence your actions.

When you walk on a public place, every few steps you check your key, purse, handkerchief, etc. There was no need to do still you did so. Very interesting thing about this pattern of behaviour is that except this neurotic cling that you manifest, rest of your behaviour is normal. The magnitude of the behavioural cling is not high in neurotic paradox.

Then we come to a set of behavioural reactions known as transient situational reactions. These are the type of behaviour you exhibit in extreme situations. Let us take example of Mr. Amit, the young employee of Shamiana Restaurant at Hotel Taj in Mumbai. On 26/11 during the terrorist attack, he had 38 guests and he made them hide in the store that had an exit outside the hotel. A young couple requested him for their son who had gone to the toilet. They wanted him back. In an interview, he said that he thought that if any of them would have gone to bring the boy back, the terrorists in the corridor would have known the

hide out and all 38 people would have been killed. So, he promised them that he will bring their son back but they should not go out. He went in the corridor and saw the terrorist; the terrorist shot at him; he escaped and then the terrorist threw a hand grenade at him but fortunately it did not explode. But he said that the sound of grenade falling on the floor still echoes in his ears. Since then he considers every moment of his life to be grace period. He narrated that his life ended that day and every moment since this episode is grace period which he celebrates. Transient situational reactions are those type of reactions when you are caught in a situation where the calculation between life and death does not have too much of remainder left. You react in that state of situation.

Say, you are caught in a building which falls in an earthquake. You see your home turning into rubbles. You see your family dying. These are the experiences which are of extreme order. Your reaction in this situation could be of extreme order. However, such reaction should not be classified as behavioural aberration. This is actually transient situational reaction. Even if you come forward with extremely weird behaviour it cannot be used to determine whether you are adjusted or maladjusted. As the situation was exceptional the response was also exceptional. So, when you cry, scream, shout or become extremely agitated it is acceptable considering the fact that the situation triggering this behaviour was exceptional. The same behaviour in normal situation would be considered detrimental for the evaluation of your level of adjustment. Say, if you raise your hand to ask a question in the class and I do not entertain you, still you will not overreact. You do not walk out of the class because you were not given the opportunity to speak. You even do not shout arguing that the visual signal was unattended therefore you added the screaming sound to drag the professor's attention. In case you do so, it might be detrimental in terms of evaluating your status of psychological adjustment. So, it is extreme behaviour in extreme situations that are designated as transient situational reactions.

Then we come to three types of defences— biological, psychological and socio-cultural defense. Biological defence means maintenance of your homeostatic mechanism when you try to maintain the equilibrium of your bodily systems. For example the balance between sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems which is designed to strike a balance. Even in immunological reactions, you have a set of antigens and the antibodies trying to strike the state of balance within the body. If you are in a stressful state, extra secretion of cortisol in the blood and then the bodily process of maintaining the baseline level is an example of biological defense. Failure of biological defense could be a cause of concern as it might trigger psychosomatic disorders.

Psychological defense are used to cope with the situation or to defend oneself in such a way that the ego is safeguarded. Little ahead we shall talk about the defense mechanism at length. Socio-cultural defense refers to the exploitation of group resources. Let us look at the rituals we follow in our culture. When a baby is born in a Hindu family, on the 6th day you invite people, perform some rituals and throw a party. This is a celebration of having a new member in the family. If somebody dies in your family once again you invite people, perform some ritual, and offer food. The situation is both the cases are very different but there is also a similarity in terms of offering food and accepting gifts or social donations (mostly cloth and money). Member of your immediate society comes to you and you share your joy and sorrow with them. This is exploitation of the group resources. Remember, here exploitation is used in positive sense.

This could be witnessed in different situations. As an extreme example, an individual whom thinks he/she has been denied social justice organizes people to fight for the cause. Gradually a group of people gets convinced and they form an organization to fight for it. Here a set of individuals are trying to bank on strength of each other knowing that individually they might be incompetent but when organized they become a critical group.

This is again exploiting the group resource. Compare this with the other situation where you are deserted. Your family has abandoned you and you are all alone without a single coin. You beg for food and shelter exploiting the group resources. These are two very different examples but basically what you are banking upon is the group resource. You must have seen many places of worship where needy people are offered two meals a day free of cost. This serves people indulged at both the ends. The ones who receive food are benefited by this community activity as it helps them satisfy one of their biological needs. The ones who are affluent and do not depend on this system for food also take pride in being instrumental in contributing to this service. A single system caters to the needs of people who otherwise stand on two ends of the continuum.

Psychologically speaking we are more interested in individuals and how they react in different types of situations when we are discussing the psychology of adjustment. Therefore, we refer to all the three defences. Of course, biological defenses are not deliberately used; rather they are programmed functions that get affected by our behaviour. On the other hand, psychological defenses are unconsciously employed to safeguard the ego structure. In the case of socio-cultural defense, you decide to bank on the resources which are available to your community. You use any of these defences; as an ultimate outcome if you are able to maintain equilibrium and retain mental health there is no harm doing so.