

CHAPTER II

MEASUREMENT OF PERSONALITY

2.1 TECHNIQUES OF PERSONALITY ASSESSMENT

This chapter deals with the different techniques of personality measurement. The purpose of this discussion is to give a comparative picture of these techniques as contrasted with personality inventories. It is not intended to enter into depth and larger details of the subject. A brief introduction of each is written because of its relevance to the present work. This is in logical sequence to the discussion on theoretical background in the last chapter. As the personality inventories are of greater concern to the present work, they are treated in some details separately in the next chapter.

Measurement of personality is not restricted to psychological or clinical laboratories. Judgments of personalities are frequently encountered in

everyday life. Almost everyone says something either about his own personality or that of someone else. He arrives at such judgment by a variety of ways. He may observe the behaviour of the person he is describing; he may ask for others' opinions about him; or he may ask him some questions on the basis of which he may arrive at some conclusions. Such procedures are not new and do not necessarily belong to the province of psychology alone. They have been used for ages, and are still used by all irrespective of their training in psychology or psychological measurement. Psychology borrowed these techniques from common sense of a common man and studied their merits and drawbacks, how far they served the purpose, and how reliable are the judgments based on these. In this process, there has taken place a gradual refinement of these leading to the development of new techniques. Different techniques were developed in different situations and today there exist a wide variety of them. The chief ones are classified in the following categories:

- (1) Interview
- (2) Case study method
- (3) Rating scales
- (4) Personality inventories
- (5) Projective techniques
- (6) Situational tests
- (7) Objective tests

These are neither the only categories nor are they exclusive ones. Some overlapping is present from one technique to another. Yet there are certain distinctive attributes which are characteristic of each. In this chapter an attempt is made to introduce these briefly.

2.2 INTERVIEW

Interview is a one-to-one relationship between two persons who get together with a variety of purposes. One such purpose is to know about the interviewee or the person interviewed. Interviews are conducted for selection in educational and vocational fields and for guidance and counselling

purposes, where it is used to assess the personality characteristics of an individual through the observation of his manner and speed, his expressions and ideas. Vernon¹ has described the interviewing process in the following way:

The interview is also the most comprehensive of methods, since it makes more or less use of all the techniques,.....though in a haphazard manner: observations of external appearance, of gestures, voice and other modes of expression, and of behaviour under the stress of interview situation or in response to difficult questions; evidence regarding behaviour and achievements in the past; self-descriptive data regarding the interviewee's interests, social attitudes, etc.; and reference is usually made to testimonials or assessments provided before hand by associates.

The interview may include the results of some projective material, such as TAT, free association test or sentence completion. It is this very multifariousness of the techniques used, which makes its results so uncertain; there is a large scope for the interviewer to jump to wrong conclusions. Personal

¹ P.E.Vernon, Personality Tests and Assessments (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1953), p.20.

ideosyncracies and biases play a very dominating role especially when the interviewers lack the knowledge of scientific and objective interviewing procedures.

In spite of its obvious drawbacks mentioned above and those to be mentioned in connection with its reliability and validity, interview still remains to be the most frequently used technique because of its ease and acceptability. The tests have not yet become popular and people are still suspicious about their value.

The Reliability and Validity of the Interview Method

Reliability: On the whole, this technique is said to have poor reliability. Various reasons are responsible for this. The prejudices of the interviewers are one such reason. A notorious instance of this is quoted by Rice.² Two interviewers were

² S.A.Rice, "Contagious Bias in the Interview". Amer. J.Sociol., XXXV: 420-423, 1929.

investigating into the causes of destitution among people who had applied for relief. One of the two interviewers was a socialist and the other was a prohibitionist. The socialist attributed 39 per cent of his cases to the industrial conditions, and 22 per cent to alcoholism. The prohibitionist on the other hand attributed 62 per cent to alcoholism and only 7 per cent to the industrial conditions.

Vernon and Parry³ have reviewed several studies in this connection by Webb, Magson, Fearing, Camtril, Hill and Williams, and the work carried out in the services (British) during the war. In most of the cases, the interjudge reliability is between .5 and .6. Vernon⁴ has reported other studies which also point to the very low reliability between the judgments of the different interviewers.

3 P.E.Vernon and J.B.Parry, Personnel Selection in the British Forces (London: University of London Press, 1949), As cited in P.E.Vernon, 1953, Op.Cit. p.24.

4 P.E.Vernon, 1953, Op.Cit. p.25.

Validity: The evidence for the validity of the interview procedures is more scarce than that for its reliability. Vernon and Parry⁵ have reviewed studies about the validity of the various selection procedures in the British Armed Forces, and have arrived at the conclusion that the predictions based on the combination of tests and interviews were even worst than those based on the best tests alone. McClelland⁶ arrived at the conclusion that the primary teachers' judgments about the personality qualities of their students had no predictive validity. Stuit⁷ reports that the interviewers did no better, rather they did even worse, than the tests of ability. Himmelweit and Summerfield⁸ conducted a research into the selection practices in the

5 Vernon and Parry, as cited in Vernon, Op. Cit. p.25.

6 W.McClelland, Selection for Secondary Education (London: University of London Press,1942), pp. 152-53.

7 D.B.Stuit, (ed.), Personnel Research and Test Development in the Bureau of Naval Personnel. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press,1947), As cited in P.E.Vernon, 1953, Op.Cit. p.25.

8 H.T.Himmelweit and A.Summerfield,"Student Selection: An Experimental Investigation: II". Brit. J.Sociol., II: 59-75, 1951.

London School of Economics. They found that the results of the interview by the board of university teachers showed zero correlations with the later success in the course; the short entrance test had a small positive validity coefficient and a battery of aptitude tests had larger validity index for the prediction.

Kelley and Fiske⁹ investigated most thoroughly the predictive validity of the interviews, ability and personality tests in case of the selection of candidates for the clinical psychology course. Here again the evidence was unfavourable for the interview method.

However, Vernon's¹⁰ findings in connection with the validity of the selection procedures of the Civil Service Selection Board present more favourable

9 E.L.Kelley and D.W.Fiske, The Prediction of Performance in Clinical Psychology (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1951), As cited in P.E. Vernon, 1953, Op.Cit. p.26.

10 P.E.Vernon, "The Validation of Civil Service Selection Board Procedure", Occu.Psychol., XXIV, 75-95, 1950.

evidence of the validity of interviews.

The investigations¹¹ have also pointed to the fact that there are large individual differences in the efficiency of the interviewers to make the judgment of potential success of the candidates. This method cannot have wide application because it is difficult to differentiate a good interviewer from a bad one and also very little is known about the training necessary for good interviewing.

2.3 CASE STUDY METHOD

Case study method has not been used largely in the assessment of personality even though it is the most comprehensive and thorough of all the methods. It is used generally by the clinical psychologists and the psychoanalysts while dealing with the cases of abnormal behaviour. When a child or a person encounters some problem which can be solved only by a trained psychologist, the latter is approached for

¹¹ Vernon and Parry, as cited in P.E.Vernon, 1953, Op.Cit. p.30.

help. He then attempts to understand the psychodynamics of the abnormal behaviour of his client by studying his case thoroughly. Three kinds of data are included in a case study: (1) information about the developmental history; (2) information about the present status of the individual; and (3) his ideas or plans about the future or his orientation to it. All this information is gathered from a variety of sources. The subject himself is observed and interviewed; his relatives, acquaintances or others who know him are also interviewed; if there are certain records available about his behaviour and achievements, e.g. school record card, they are collected; different tests including the personality tests are administered. The information collected is then put together to get a composite view of the subject's personality. Thus case study technique is not a unitary method of personality assessment. Rather it employs all other methods whenever suitable, to get a complete picture of the individual. It is thus an approach rather than an independent technique.

According to Allport,¹² "Unskilfully used, it becomes a meaningless chronology, or a confusion of fact and fiction, of guesswork and misinterpretation. Properly used it is the most revealing method of all." He further says that the content of any case study is determined by the essential purpose of the writer. The social worker's case study is overbalanced by an unduly large data about family budget and health; a probation officer is interested chiefly in the facts pertaining to probationer's whereabouts and his misconduct; the employment manager seeks evidence of ability; the clinical psychologist tries to find out more about illness than about health; and writers of journalistic case studies for the Sunday papers or popular magazines produce all sorts of entertaining distortions. Taken in its purest form, as a medium of understanding, the case study is a method that falls primarily within the psychology of personality.

Though, this method has its limitations

¹² G.W.Allport, Personality - A Psychological Interpretation (New York: Henry Holt and Co.,1949), p. 390.

especially in the hands of the untrained workers, it has the potentiality to provide the complete and the best possible picture of the individual's characteristics. They become more understandable in the context of the whole life history and the mental make-up of the individual. Of course, this presupposes adequate training in the compilation of the case study data and their interpretation, the fact which restricts greatly the scope of its application.

2.4 RATING SCALES

This is the most extensively used method in the assessment of the scholastic as well as the non-scholastic factors within the individual. Standardized tests are fast replacing it in the field of assessment of scholastic and ability factors, but so far as the personality characteristics are concerned, its use is still the most popular. The reason for its extensive use lies mainly in its simplicity of procedure. Even a layman without any kind of training in the psychology of measurement uses it in his everyday life. When someone asks your opinion about

a third person or some movie, he is relying on the rating technique. This ease and simplicity of its use has made its users blind to the precautions that are necessary for the reliable results. This, essentially a simple technique, is in fact susceptible to a great many errors in the hands of raw persons and there has been devastating criticism about its free and unrestricted use. In fact, it has become more notorious for its unreliable results than for its actual contribution in the field of personality measurement.

In a rating scale of any variety, a person A's reaction and observation of person B's behaviour are utilized as a measure of the latter's personality qualities. In order that the observation of A (the rater) is reliable and that his description of it is valid, it is necessary to consider the following main points:

- (1) The rater must have had an opportunity to observe the ratee over a long period of time and in a variety of situations

in which the trait or the characteristic on which he is rated, is manifested.

- (ii) The trait or characteristic in question should be defined and explained clearly in terms of specific behaviour descriptions so that the different raters mean one and the same thing by that trait name.
- (iii) The number of raters should be as large as possible. Just as the reliability of a test increases by the addition of items, the reliability of ratings increases by the addition of more judges. Of course, all the judges must fulfil the above mentioned first condition of sufficient acquaintance with the ratee's behaviour.
- (iv) The ratings by the different judges should be obtained independently of

each other. They should not have an opportunity to discuss the ratee among themselves before rating him. In a school, where pupils are to be rated by teachers, it is natural that they may discuss the causes and the dominant ones may carry their opinions through. This kind of situation should be particularly avoided.

- (v) The stereotyped or popular trait names should be avoided in ratings. Persons are, many times, labelled by such popular trait names and they are likely to be rated on that basis instead of on the basis of actual trait description.
- (vi) The halo effect is a tendency of the raters to rate an individual consistently high or low on several traits. To avoid this, ratings on more than one trait should not be taken at a time. Or

when the whole class is to be rated by teachers, they may be asked to classify pupils on a five point scale. Thus the focus of attention is the trait and not the individual.

- (vii) There is a tendency of the judges to concentrate ratees in some categories or in some part of the rating scale, and thus not to utilize the whole range. This decreases the discriminating potentiality of the scale. In such cases, the judges may be asked to adhere to a distribution, akin to a normal one, while assigning the individuals to various categories.

The rating scales are of different types and they have their own merits and drawbacks. The important types according to Guilford¹³ are numerical

¹³ J.P.Guilford, Psychometric Methods (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1954), p. 263.

scales, graphic scales, standard scales, cumulated points scales, and forced-choice scales. All the types require the rater to assign the ratee one of the ordered categories or a position on an unbroken continuum, but all of them are ultimately interpreted in terms of numerical scores.

The chief advantages of these techniques are that they are less time consuming, simple in use, and applicable in a wide variety of situations. The main point of criticism against ratings is their unreliability, which is due to the working of raters on the basis of their own prejudices and biases, popular conceptions of trait names, and their tendency to rate either high or low on all the traits - the halo effect. The ways of improving over these drawbacks are already discussed but in practice very few are so careful and systematic to avoid these common pitfalls.

2.5 PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUES

During past three decades these tests have shown a fungus-like growth. The underlying principle

is that an individual (i) attributes his own thoughts, attitudes, wishes, emotions or characteristics to objects in his environment or to other persons, and (ii) expresses his personality in whatever he does, especially his creative and imaginative activities such as his artistic or literary productions, play, etc. This is based on Freud's concept of projection - a process that goes on within an individual unconsciously. In these tests the subject is presented with a relatively unstructured situation to which he has to react freely in his own way. By an unstructured situation is meant a stimulus which is vague and does not call for a predetermined response from the subject. Thus it is said to allow for the individual differences to a maximum extent and permits an individual to express his personality fully in his own way. The subject also expresses his needs and complexes more freely as he is not aware of this. He does so unconsciously attributing these to the characters or things in the stimulus situation. Thus the projective tests reveal something which is not accessible to the ordinary -

inventories or other structured tests. By these tests the picture that is obtained is in terms of complex processes within the whole person with all the dynamic interrelationships and interactions, within and without. From the point of view of the Gestaltists, this is a very important merit of these tests as against those that measure personality bit by bit.

The chief tests among those which are based on this principle are the Rorschach test, the Thematic Apperception test, the Rosenzweig Picture-Frustration Study, the Szondi test and the various sentence completion and word association tests. The psychodrama and play also are called projective techniques. There are number of other tests that have been developed such as Children's Apperception Test for children, Symond's Picture Story Test for adolescents, and so on.

Evaluation of the Projective Techniques

In spite of their widespread use, the -

projective techniques are not without critics. According to Eysenck¹⁴ projective techniques are "nonsense" in psychology. He questions the validity of these techniques and says that:

Projective technique experts started out by emphasizing the ways in which they would provide validation for their methods. Gradually they persuaded themselves and those whom they could induce to listen to them, that the validation has already been accomplished. However, when finally the realization dawned that nothing of the kind had already happened and they were forced to try to hunt for some tangible and palpable evidence, they set out boldly, only to return with mangy, moth-eaten, and useless data, based on logical fallacies and completely lacking even the most elementary types of control necessary in this kind of work.¹⁵

Another point of criticism is levelled

14 H.J.Eysenck, Sense and Nonsense in Psychology (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1957), p. 230.

15 Ibid.

against the claim of the projective techniques that they reveal much more information than is revealed by the test scores. Often this more information is in the form of intuitive judgment of the interpreter, the validity of which is questionable. With this more information, there is made another claim that they assess the personality as a whole. According to Cattell, this is a "charming misconception". The results of the projective tests are always interpreted in terms of specific traits just as in case of other techniques. However, the users of other techniques begin with clear concepts of the traits to be measured which have specific meaning and unambiguous communication value. The users of projective techniques are far less particular in defining the trait concepts used by them, and rely on their popular meaning rather than a technical definition. A test is like an experiment and uniform conditions should be obtained for all the individuals in taking the test, as well as in administering it. The projective tests being unstructured by the very nature do not

fulfil this condition satisfactorily and need radical improvement to remedy this drawback.

Goodenough¹⁶ has pointed out the possibility of an examiner's projecting of his own personality into the interpretation of the subject's data.

Smith, Bruner and White¹⁷ studied ten cases intensively with the help of various techniques only to arrive at the conclusion that "projective" techniques underrate capacities, strengths and stability of the subjects. They fail to reveal creative ways in which the individuals learn to cope up with their problems and they fail to show ways in which attitudes affect conduct.

According to Guilford, if it is not quite reasonable to predict vocational success on the basis of projective techniques, they should at least show

¹⁶ F.L.Goodenough, Mental Testing (New York: Rinehart, 1949), pp.440-441.

¹⁷ M.B.Smith, et al., Opinion and Personality (New York: Wiley, 1956), As cited in Guilford, Personality (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co.,1959), p.310.

some success in connection with the diagnosis of psychopathology. "But here again there is not enough success to justify the apparent faith in the methods."¹⁸ He further says that the information provided by them is patchy and needs to be supplemented by other methods. As already indicated they are not designed to measure specific traits, but they may give suggestions of general traits that may be profitably investigated further in the individual by better methods.

2.6 SITUATIONAL TESTS

These tests present the subject with a problematic situation to which he has to find an answer. The situation may be presented either verbally or in the form of an actual lifelike situation. For example, in the tests of social intelligence a situation is presented in a verbal form as follows:

¹⁸ J.P.Guilford, Personality (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1959), p. 310.

You are a supervisor of an office force of ten people. One member is habitually late.

You would:

- A. make an example of him by discharging him,
- B. bawl him out in front of the whole group,
in
- C. call him/and try to find out the reason
for the tardiness,
- D. call a meeting of the office force to
explain that everyone owes it to the
company to be on time,
- E. call him in privately for a lecture on
the importance of being on time.

The subject has to choose a correct one of the alternative courses of action. These types of tests correlate highly with the tests of general intelligence and are criticized on the point that a subject may have the knowledge of the appropriate course of action, but when the actual situation arises he may not necessarily adopt the same course

of action. Woodworth and Marquis¹⁹ say, "It is easy to test an individual's knowledge of the rules of good conduct or good manners or tact, but sometimes one who knows the rules does not obey them." To overcome this criticism, tests that would sample actual behaviour are necessary.

The tests which utilized actual lifelike situations for measuring personality were first devised in Germany for the selection of the military personnel in 1920s. By 1935 it was a common technique used in all the branches of military services and also for the selection of teacher trainees. It was adopted later on in England and the United States in the military as well as civil services. In the latter country the Office of the Strategic Services used it elaborately during the Second World War. Its use is extended at present to the industries and various other types of services.

The essential procedure in such testing

¹⁹ R.S.Woodworth and D.G.Marquis, Psychology, (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1947), p.105.

consists in observing the behaviour of a subject in a real lifelike situation, noting down the specific behaviour descriptions according to a predetermined scheme and arrive at the ratings on general behaviour traits such as leadership, persistence, honesty, and so on. Ratings are matter of inference by the observers and should not be treated as direct objective data. The observers are psychologists and psychiatrists who observe and record the behaviour independently and meet in a case conference to pool their observations and to arrive at a common judgment. If there is disagreement, more observations are considered necessary.

The common problem situations used by the Office of the Strategic Services are described below for the sake of illustration:²⁰

Upon arrival at the testing station, each candidate was judged according to the ease with which

20. F.S.Freeman, The Theory and Practice of Psychological Testing (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1955), p.589.

he used the fictitious name under which he went and his physical agility in getting off the truck.

On the first day, during the welcoming talk, each candidate's attitudes, postures, questions, and comments were noted.

During the first meal, each recruit's conversation was noted, as was his ease of establishing contact with others.

Crossing a brook: The task was for a group to carry a delicate instrument over a "raging torrent" with "sheer banks" and to return with some material from the other side. Available were a few boards, a log, a heavy rock, lengths of rope, a pulley, and a barrel with both ends knocked out. All members of the group were on an equal footing, no one having been designated as leader. The actual setting was a shallow, quiet stream, about eight feet wide.

Construction: Ostensibly a test of the candidate's ability to direct two helpers in building

with him a frame structure out of simple wooden materials. Actually it was a test of leadership, emotional stability, and frustration tolerance. The two helpers were junior staff members. The job of one was to act passive, sluggish, and even as an obstacle. The job of the other was to be aggressive, offer poor suggestions, express dissatisfaction and criticism.

From the above description of the technique it should be clear that the setting for testing requires elaborate arrangements and a team of trained psychologists. Secondly, in the situational tests the real purpose of the test is hidden and if the subject knows it, he can beat the examiners. Thirdly, the evaluations from the situational tests are inferences derived on the basis of data obtained by observation during the limited period of testing. These ratings are open to the same criticism as are the usual rating procedures.

2.7 OBJECTIVE TESTS

The term objective test has not yet gained

an unequivocal meaning as a category of personality tests. Many times objective tests are conceived as a very broad category of tests as against the subjective tests, and include the personality inventories, situational tests, etc. which are relatively objective approaches to personality assessment. But this term is being used now-a-days in a more restricted sense to denote only those experimental procedures which stand the tests of empirical validation. The application of experimental procedures in the field of personality assessment has been very limited. It might be due to the fact that this field is not amenable to treatment by experimental methods, or may be that those who worked in this field lacked this bias in their work. Whatever be the reason, those working in this direction have created a ray of hope that this approach is likely to yield better results than other methods, all of which are relatively subjective. However, so little work is done in this direction that its real worth still remains to be proved.

Those who have been working with such techniques are mainly Eysenck, Benker, Harrington, and Sears. These investigators tried to correlate the underlying psychological attributes of personality with more tangible and measurable characteristics such as autonomic activity, dark vision, effects of aspiration, perseveration, suggestibility, resolution of conflict, physiological measures of respiration, basal metabolic rate, the effect of success or failure on activity, and so on. The usual procedure has been to see if the objectively measurable characteristic is associated with that not directly or objectively measurable. For example, the introverts and extraverts differ between themselves with respect to the amount of salivation. The introverts as a group secrete more saliva on the average.

Many of these studies have been inconclusive. This approach has the chief merit that it is subject to greater control. At the same time these techniques are very elaborate, cumbersome, expensive and time-consuming. As against these, the inventories and

ratings are easier and less expensive and can be administered to large populations. When there is a need to cater for the needs of large numbers, the latter procedures are more suitable. Of course, the need for achieving greater control and objectivity cannot be overemphasized while applying these techniques.

2.8 SUMMARY

Assessment of personality is done through different techniques, singly or in combination. Each one of them has specific merits and drawbacks. Nobody claims that any particular technique is infallible and should be preferred to all the rest. In fact, each one has its place under particular circumstances. Their suitability would depend upon the purpose of measurement. For example, if personality characteristics of all the school children are to be entered into their cumulative record cards, the most suitable methods would be either rating scales or personality inventories. But if one of them comes

for counselling on some personal problem, case study method would be necessary. Often, a combination of different techniques is employed if necessary. As stated in the first chapter, personality inventory method is preferred to other techniques, because of the specific purpose of the investigator to apply it to the large college population, and the suitability of the method for it. Detailed discussion of inventories follows in the next chapter.

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