



## **THE “TERRORIST”: SELFHOOD DENIED AND FRAGMENTED**

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While analyzing the core factors responsible for the formation of a “terrorist personality, it becomes imperative to take a peep in to the personality profile of individuals lying on the extreme end of the same continuum. Such people who yet again defy the so called prevalence of “normality” even though in an optimistic way, justify their atypical nature by virtue of embodying highly desirable personality traits.

The researcher who plunged into the depths of investigating these near-perfect personality traits was Abraham Maslow. Born of uneducated parents Maslow speculated intensively on how dearth of care and love particularly at the hands of his mother spurred him in to the search for, the ‘angelic’ people. Through vigorous hard work of compiling large amounts of information via interviews, observations and partial testing coupled with impeccable deductions Maslow (1971) was able to sketch the picture of “Self Actualized” individuals. These Self Actualized(SA) persons displayed fifteen characteristics that appeared favorable and five negative i.e. appeared unfavorable to the common man and are described as follows:-

An accurate perception of reality with whole hearted acceptance of self, others and life in general are the hallmark of Self Actualization. They have an uncanny ability to detect the fake and dishonest. Self Actualizers have satisfactorily met the basic needs of food, shelter and sex. It’s the pull of the higher order virtues such as seeking beauty, truth and justice which form the essence of their existence. They prefer simplicity, resist identification with internal stereotypes and are able to marvel and enjoy the good things in life with childlike spontaneity. A very typical characteristic is the fellow feeling or strong interest in the welfare of others which is the anti thesis to the typical terrorist personality. The life of self actualizers is dispersed with mystical peak experiences which are characterized by feelings of limitless horizons opening up.

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Though self actualizers are capable of displaying surgical coldness, they are not apathetic which otherwise is a signature characteristic of the “terrorist” personality. In his own words, Maslow (1970) says “SA may be loosely described as the full use and exploitation of talents ,capacities ,potentialities etc.Such people seem to be fulfilling themselves and to be doing the best that they are capable of doing”. The same feeling emerges in the phrase “Become what thou art!”

Another psychologist who eulogized the human capacity to transcend its animal nature and attain almost god like attributes was Carl Rogers. He too highlighted the dignity and worth of the individual. Emphasis was laid on the inherent capacity of the person to direct his or her own life when the interpersonal environment provided adequate freedom from manifest and latent bindings. Rogers was reared in a family with very strict and hard working parents who instilled in their brood of six children, conflicting convictions regarding what was enjoyed as being sinful and that primarily they were especially set apart from other families. During the course of his life Rogers reached a stage where by virtue of rebellion in thought he demystified divine authority claiming that Jesus Christ himself was just a “man”. Thus Rogers had then freed himself from bonds of parental authority both subtle and evident. This was the time when the right chords were struck and Rogers stumbled upon the fountainhead where from emerged elaborate theorizing on the “Fully Functioning Person” capable of attaining ideal mental health. Extensive psychotherapy with clients provided all the practical evidence that was required to support his propositions.

For Rogers (1977) the road to becoming a fully functioning person was most aptly described in his own words, “We are talking here about the tendency of the organism to maintain itself-to assimilate food, to behave defensively in the face of threat to achieve the goal of self-maintenance even when the usual pathway to the goal is blocked. It moves in the direction of greater independence or self responsibility”. The fully functioning person is more fully open to experience, is non-determined and displays increased trust in its own organism. Since they tend to be non-conformists they are also highly creative and unafraid to express their own feelings.

A critical analysis of both Maslow’s Self Actualized person and Rogers Fully Functioning person provides a clear picture of ideal mental health. The striving towards ideal mental



health serves as more of a “pulling” towards goals rather than the push of the gratification of basic needs in shaping human behaviour.

Rampant flouting of conditions that would ideally lead to the attainment of perfect mental health serve as breeding ground for the development of the anti social or “terrorist” personality.

The build up of the terrorist personality can be attributed to factors which are personal, interpersonal and environmental. Research conducted by Cleckley, 1976 opines the classical psychopathic personality as an egoistic person who fails at appropriate judgment making. This person low on shame and guilt lacks empathy for others. Cleckley's insight led him to believe the constitutional factors more than socio-cultural factors were behind the emergence of the “black sheep” in the family of otherwise healthy and adjusted members. Elucidating on the cognitive functioning of the terrorist mind Cleckley discovered flaws in the semantic processing whereby the decoding of emotional content of words was delayed and inappropriate. Work done by Hare, 1993 and Cooke et al. 1998 resulted in the formulation of a checklist which earmarked poor anticipation of punishment and low anxiety levels as primary causes for the buildup of the psychopathic personality which in turn is a mirror image of the terrorist profile. Blair (1995) provided a neurological explanation for the deficiency in emotional processing and poor control over aggression. A weak violence inhibition mechanism (VIM) was cited to be an inherent biological feature influencing moral development from an early age rendering the individual incapable of emotional decoding resulting in. Feelings of guilt were replaced by those of ignorance and indifference amongst those individuals who had a weak VIM. Also poor functioning of the Limbic system emerged as a vital feature in the physiology where in deviations of anti-social nature was ascribed to personality differences.

Apart from personality variations, inter personal factors wherein lack of warmth, acceptance and positive regard first by immediate care givers and later by the society as a whole lead to feelings of alienation and isolation. These feelings of emptiness constantly provoke the individual to react in manner which temporarily or in the long run help to vent out his frustration for being left out of the mainstream. The rift between “what is” and “what should be” dis-inhibits behavior which is basically an attempt to assert an identity which is fragmented and highly disillusioned.



A study by Ferracuti and Bruno (1981) on 'Terrorism in Italy' concluded that there were nine characteristics shared by right wing terrorists, namely: Ambivalence towards authority, Defective insight, Adherence to convention, Emotional detachment from the consequences of their actions, Sexual role uncertainties, Magical thinking, Destructiveness, low education, adherence to violent subculture norms and weapons fetishes". Another study by West Interior Ministry of Germany collected information from 227 left-wing terrorists and 23 right wing extremists via interviews to conclude that "Twenty-five percent of leftist terrorists had lost one or both parents by age fourteen", "Thirty-three percent reported severe conflict with parents", "Thirty-three percent had a history of juvenile court conviction". The common thread running between all these causal factors of terrorism is the crippling ego trying to make ends meet in a society which is ruthless to one and all. The crippled ego wears the garb of torn identity aiming to prove its worth.

Erik Erikson (1968) had worked on the concept of identity and the factors responsible for establishment of its healthy manifestation. Erikson asserted that every person's ego progresses through a set of stages in the development of personality from infancy to adulthood. Every stage in the epigenetic plan sees the ego adding new methods of competency for dealing with characteristic "crises" attending that phase of life. Complete personality integration thus demands the maturing of ego strength acquired during an arduous but satisfying life. Establishing a sense of solidarity with humanity and the belief that the person has been able to become what he had to be, becomes the essential factor of attaining true wisdom. The 'terrorist' per se seems to have failed at resolving crises that threaten the ego and lag behind strengthening it. Environmental factors such as poverty, discrimination, prejudice add fuel to the race of establishing oneself as a reckonable identity. This path does not lead to the resolution of crises faced in life rather provides a fake platform to assert oneself. The existential crises then deepen and take the individual away from the path of realizing 'oneself' but rather put him on the road to 'terrorizing' others in the name of reasons which seemingly appear grandiose but are nothing more than attempts to vanquish the real "self" and lo and behold a "terrorist" is born.

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