UNIT-IV

Personal Growth:

- **Self and Personal Growth**
- **Developing Character Strengths and Virtues.**

Personal Growth:
Introduction

Personal development is also known as self-development or personal growth. It involves the growth and enhancement of all aspects of the person, the feelings the person has about himself or herself, and their effectiveness in living. It includes the development of positive life skills and the development of a realistic and healthy self-esteem. Personal development involves mental, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual growth that allows a person to live a productive and satisfying life within the customs and regulations of their society. This is achieved through the development of life skills.

These life skills, skills necessary for successfully living a productive and satisfying life, generally fall into one of several categories: feeling about self, intimacy, family, friends, community, job, leisure, and spirituality. They include being able to recognize and describe one's feelings, giving and receiving feedback, recognizing assumptions, setting realistic and attainable goals, and employing problem-solving strategies.

Increased personal growth and development is the goal of a wide range of men and women. It includes those who suffer from problems in their relationship with others, or who suffer emotionally with feeling of low self-

esteem, anxiety, or depression. It also includes individuals who are marginally successful or even very successful in life, but who want to improve their efficiency, their ability to be and feel intimate and relate to others, , and/or their general level of satisfaction with, and enjoyment of, living. Personal growth is a process of psychological maturation that involves learning from the mistakes we made and developing new strategies to get to know one another better and adapt better to the world. Personal development requires a high degree of awareness, the ability to look within oneself.

Positive psychology is responsible for studying the best personal growth techniques in order to achieve a state of wellbeing that will give us happiness. This branch of psychology watches over our mental health and is based not only on positive thinking but also on scientific studies that help us to have more self-esteem, to be more confident and to maximize our potential.

The pursuit of self-development lies in the understanding that we have the ability of change ourselves and our circumstances. If our thoughts, abilities and behaviors were all determined by just our genes and the way we were brought up, then there's no way people would have been able to undertake personal development to improve themselves.

Personal development has grown to become an entire field of professionals. As a result, people have made a career out of it. It goes to show that human beings have the ability to take charge of their lives, circumstances, opportunities and moods.

If you are willing to strive towards growth and betterment, then nothing can limit your capabilities. You can change yourself and your life dramatically.

Personal growth involves the growth and enhancement of all aspects of the person, his feelings about himself and their effectiveness in living. It includes development of positive life skills and the development of a realistic and healthy self-esteem. It involves mental, physical, social, emotional and spiritual growth that allows a person to live a productive and satisfying life with customs and traditions of their society. This is achieved through developing life skills.

- **Self and personal growth**

Self: In Psychology, the notion of the self refers to a person's experience as a single, unitary, autonomous being that is separate from others, experienced with continuity through time and place. The experience of the self includes consciousness of one's physicality as well as one's inner character and emotional life. People experience their selves in two senses. The first is as an active agent who acts on the world as well as being influenced by that world. This type of self is usually referred to as the "I" and it focuses on how people experience themselves as doers. The second is an object of reflection and evaluation. In this type of self, people search within themselves skills, attitudes, opinions and feelings that they may have. This type of self is referred to as "me" and it focuses on how people observe themselves from the outside looking in, much like people monitor and evaluate the competence and character of other people. The sense of self is different in different individuals. The sense of self that children develop may differ from the mature one they will attain when they are older. People in different cultures may also differ in their sense of selves. The self that people possess has profound impact on their thoughts, emotional reactions and behavior. The actions people take are shaped by the views they have of themselves.

Personal growth: personal growth, which can be defined as the life-long process of improving one's awareness of self and identity, developing talents and building human resources to ultimately enhance one's quality of life and performance at work, refers to the methods and techniques that support human development at the individual level. Carol Ryff describes autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, Purpose in life, self-acceptance and personal growth as six factors of psychological wellbeing. Nowadays, personal growth is more commonly achieved through life coaching, workshops, social interactions, time management techniques, self-help books and e-learning programs.

Personal growth is considered a change within a person that is affective (related to feelings), cognitive (related to thinking) or behavioral (related to behavior) and is generally thought of as positive, making the individual "more complete and fully

functioning". An individual may set personal growth goals to achieve a chosen goal, such as completing an academic degree or to change a particular behavior. Related to this construct, personal growth initiative is a term that describes the process through which an individual actively and intentionally engages in the self-change process in any part of life. Personal growth initiatives is a learned skill set which includes cognition, behavior, attitude and motivation. It has its roots in positive psychology (a field of research and applied science focusing on developing mental strength as opposed to curing mental illnesses. To bring desired change an individual should believe in his ability to bring that change and make appropriate plans and strategies to bring that change. Such changes might take place as greater mastery of one's everyday environment or it might arise as greater resilience in the face of obstacles and challenges. Personal growth might be experienced by the result of various life experiences, for example, the experience of trauma might result in one's growth. On the other hand, personal growth might be an activity that one is engaged in, like each day one sets aside time to play football or cook new dishes etc. Some individuals may self-consciously "work on themselves" to attain higher levels of those abilities, skills and characteristics that they value.

Certainly, when faced with a traumatic or stressful experience, individuals often report a sense of having growth from the experience. In some way or another, these experiences are thought as having taught us something about ourselves and about the world.

Concept and Application of character strengths:

Concept: According to Linley and Harrington; strength is defined as a capacity for feeling, thinking and behaving in a way that allows optimal functioning to obtain valued outcome.

According to Peterson and Seligman, "strengths are components of good character and they have been classified and organized by categories that can contribute to optimal development and well-being".

In positive psychology, strengths are built-in capacities for certain thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Work on the classification of illnesses had a 2000 year long history to the more recent efforts to classify strengths and positive outcomes.

Therefore it is easy to understand why we have better understanding of weaknesses than we have of strengths. The earliest attempt to define a set of virtues and character strengths is contained in Confucian teachings dating back to 500 BC, where Confucius systematically addressed Jen (humanity), li (observance of rituals and customs), Xin (truthfulness), yi (duty to justice) and zhi (wisdom).

There have been 24 character strengths identified that fall into six virtues, which include 1. Wisdom and knowledge

2. Courage

3. Humanity

4. Justice

5. Temperance

6. Transcendence.

People who use their signature strengths in a new way are more likely to report being happier and less depressed. For example, a store clerk whose character strength is curiosity might take the time to chat more with his customers and learn more about them- something that is not required of his job, but may give him pleasure out of his job. Using signature strengths in a new way was also one of the more effective interventions in a group aged 50-79 years, in increasing happiness and reducing depression. Discovering and building character strengths can help patients reveal their strong points, which can help them more effectively cope with their disease and build self-esteem.

- **Application of Strengths:**

 Some of the applications of Character strengths are as follows:

1.   Enhanced subjective well-being: using our signature strengths leads to a sense of general life satisfaction and happiness. It makes one understands his potentials and also makes him capable of achieving them.

2.   Personal Growth: it results in having goals and a sense of direction in life. Person thinks that past life is meaningful and he holds beliefs that give purpose to life. Individuals on applying character strengths experience flourishing as opposed to languishing.

3.   Increase in positive emotions: on applying character strengths, people experience symptoms that suggest enthusiasm, joy and happiness for life. They report absence of symptoms that suggest that life is undesirable and unpleasant. They have a general feeling of pleasure, joy and happiness.

4.   Environmental mastery: By using signature strengths, people feel competent and able to manage a complex environment; choose or create personally suitable community and attains confidence in living in it.

5.   Autonomy: one application of character strengths is that it makes an individual autonomous. Individuals become self-determined, independent and internally regulated. He resists social pressures to daily activities that are valued by their community.

6.   Positive relations with others: on applying character strengths, an individual can develop positive relations with others around him. He has warm satisfying and trusting relationships, is concerned about other's welfare, is capable of strong empathy, affection and intimacy, understands give and take relationships.

7.   Self-actualization: when people understand and apply their character strengths it leads to self-actualization. It makes them fully aware of what all they can do and make efforts to realize that potential.

8.   Lesser chances of developing mental illnesses: it is true that having character strengths increases our subjective well-being but its opposite also would not be wrong to say that having character strengths in one's life makes him less prone to mental illnesses.

9.   All round development: Realizing our character strengths makes us progress in life towards achieving all round development in our life. It helps us realize our strengths as well as weaknesses to embolden our strengths and Work on our weaknesses to have a fully functional personality.

10.   Job satisfaction: having developing character strengths makes one efficient in his work, increase in overall productivity, achieving goals more effectively and positively engaging in work which results in job satisfaction in one's life.

- **Character strength and virtues**

In 21st century, two classifications of illnesses have attained worldwide acceptance. First, the World Health Organization's (1992) International Classification of Diseases (ICD) is in its 10th edition and continues to evolve. 2) Second, the American Psychiatric Association's (2000) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) now as DSM-5. The ICD is broader in scope than the DSM in that it classifies all diseases, whereas the DSM describes only the mental disorders. Currently, no classification of strengths or positive outcomes has achieved worldwide use or acceptance. However, some classifications and measures have been created, refined and broadly described in the last decade. The 3 classification systems for strengths are:

1.   The Gallup Themes of Talent (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001) as measured by the Clifton Strengths finder and the Clifton Youth Strengths Explorer.

2.   The Values in Action (VIA) Classification of Strengths (Peterson and Seligman, 2004) as measured by the adult and youth versions of the VIA Inventory of Strengths.

3.   The Search Institute's 40 Developmental assets (Benson et al.,1998) as measured by the Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors.

Prominent among these are the values in Action (VIA) classification of strengths by Peterson and Seligman. Both virtues and strengths are important components of the model of character put forward by Peterson and Seligman. The study of various writings of philosophers and spiritual leaders in China, South Asia, and the West led to the postulate of six core virtues which are present everywhere, namely courage, justice, humanity, temperance, wisdom, and transcendence. Virtues are seen as the core characteristics valued by moral philosophers and religious thinkers. Peterson and Seligman argued that these virtues are universal, perhaps grounded in our genes through an evolutionary process to solve the important tasks

necessary for survival of the species. They did not measure the virtues as these are too abstract but laid focus on character strengths.

Character strengths were defined as the examples or instances of the virtues. Peterson and Seligman write that character strengths are "the psychological ingredients – processes or mechanisms – that define the virtues. In other words, they are different ways to express one or another of the virtues. For example, the virtue of wisdom can be achieved through creativity, curiosity etc. These strengths are similar in that they all involve the acquisition and use of knowledge, but they are also distinct." A little less abstract is the next level of the good character, namely situational themes. Situational themes are defined as the specific habits that lead people to show given character strengths in given situations, be it work-related or in family. The situational conditions that enable or disable strengths have not been studied a lot. Thus, Peterson and Seligman found it useful to recognize the components of the good character as existing at different levels of abstraction.

The entries for the classification were found in a separate step. The number of strengths was increased from 20 to 24.

  Seligman has written, "we will learn how to build the qualities that help individuals and communities not just endure and survive but also flourish" through the evaluation of positive human traits. The question of assessing the positive traits than facilitate human flourishing was a task taken up by Seligman, who asserted that two fundamental questions needed to be at the heart of any assessment program: how can one define the concept of a human "strength" and "highest potential"; and how does one know is the approach has worked?

It was with this question in mind that Peterson and Seligman attempted a scientific classification of human strengths. The Values in Action (VIA) Institute was set up. The result of the VIA Institute's first three years was the publication in 2004 of a preliminary classification of character strengths and virtues, Character Strengths and Virtues.

This manual represents a first attempt to scientifically classify human strengths and virtues, and is to a significant extent influenced by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and is divided into three conceptual levels:

virtues, character strengths, and situational themes. The text deals primarily with the first two levels (character strengths and virtues)

Virtues are defined as the central characteristics that have been valued moral philosophers and religious thinkers worldwide. Six central virtues were defined following extensive historical studies: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence.

Generally, a virtuous individual would only exhibit one or two strengths from a particular virtue group. 24 distinct strengths have been thus far identified. These strengths were also derived from extensive cross-cultural and historical investigations, and repeated reductions of larger trait lists. The 24 selected were deemed to have satisfied most of the following ten criteria:

- A strength contributes to various fulfillments that constitute the good life, for oneself and for others. Although strengths and virtues determine how an individual copes with adversity, the focus is on how they fulfill an individual.
- Although strengths can and do produce desirable outcomes, each strength is morally valued in its own right, even in the absence of obvious beneficial outcomes.
- The display of a strength by one person does not diminish other people in the vicinity.
- The opposite or contrast of that particular strength should not be there. Being able to phrase the opposite of a particular strength in a certain way will count against regarding it as character strength.
- A strength needs to be manifest in the range of an individual's behaviour- thoughts, feelings, and/or actions- in such a way that it can be assessed. It should be trait-like in the sense of having a degree of generality across situations and stability across time.
- The strength is distinct from other positive traits in the classification and cannot be decomposed into them.
- A character strength should be generally agreed upon by most of the people of a society and should set a perfect example of strengths.

- This feature probably cannot be applied to all strengths, but an additional criteria where sensible is the existence of exceptional qualities with respect to the strength.
- Conversely, another criterion for a character strength is the existence of people who show-selectively- the total absence of a given strength.
- The larger society provides institutions and associated rituals for cultivating strengths and virtues and then for sustaining their practice.

With these criteria in mind, the 24 strengths were identifies and classified under their respective virtues as follows:

1. Wisdom and knowledge

- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Open-mindedness
- Love of learning
- Perspective

2. **Courage**

- Bravery
- Persistence
- Integrity
- Vitality

3. **Humanity**

- Love
- Kindness
- Social Intelligence

4. **Justice**

- Citizenship
- Fairness
- Leadership

5. **Temperance**

- Forgiveness and mercy
- Humility/ Modesty
- Prudence
- Self-regulation

6. **Transcendence**

- Appreciation of beauty and excellence
- Gratitude
- Hope
- Humor
- Spirituality