

The akan concept of personality

Psychology, Personality



Introduction

Personality is said to have originated from as early as the late 14 centuries from Medieval Latin ‘personalitas’ and the term meant “quality or fact of being a person,”. There are many different definitions of personality.

Raymond B. Cattell, a British and American psychologist, who proposed 16 personality factor analyses defined personality as “That which permits a prediction of what a person will do in a given situation.” According to A. N. Leontiev, a Soviet developmental psychologist, “personality is a relatively late product of social-historical and ontogenetic development of a man”

The Akan Ethnic Group of Ghana

The Akans are an ethnolinguistic grouping of the Ghanaian people who speak Akan languages. Most Akan peoples live in Ghana, where they settled in successive waves of migration between the 11th and 18th centuries.. To the Akan every person, especially the child, has the potential to become an important person irrespective of the beginning of his life or the location where he starts his life. This belief is expressed with which literally means ‘Nobody knows the beginning of a great man/person’.

Factors Affecting the Development of Personality

Following the Philosophical thought of Gyekye, Elizabeth Anokyewaa Sarfo, Akans of Ghana believed that personality is shaped by three broad factors; social, biological and spiritual factors. In this article the focus will be on one of the spiritual factors, specifically personality based on soul names (kradin) which is a unique tradition and has a multifaceted significance for the Akans of Ghana. In addition to the character of a person, Akan also believe that

names possess the spirit and strength of the true self of the person and it serves as a basis to establish truth in the society.

As noted above, Akans have a tradition of giving names to their children according to the day of the week on which they are born called Soul Day (Okra da). Such names, called the Soul Name ('Kradin') are deemed God given, since no individual can choose the day on which he or she should be born. In connection with the day names, the Akan believes also that the forefathers painstakingly studied the trend of life of persons and have laid out distinct personality traits and characteristics in consonance with the respective names. Soul name as a person's soul possesses some level of influence also on the personality of the person. Based on this all important ancient tradition, an Akan child is expected to have a name based on the day of the week on which he or she was born.

Giving of Names: Ceremony

The ceremony is called "adinto" or "abadinto" in Akan, which literally means "to cast name". The ceremony is usually in the father's house on the eighth day, that is, a week after the birth of the child. Thus, there are seven days of waiting until the name is given. The essence is for the family to be convinced that the child has come to earth definitively and will not soon return to his or her ancestors. The child is thus considered a "stranger" (ɔhɔho) until the day of the ceremony. The eighth day after birth, actually falls on the exact week day the child was born and it is called the person's "soul day".

Some Contemporary Influences on Traditional Names and Personality

In the contemporary, so called ‘ Global Village’ a trend has developed where it is becoming easy to accept and live with different worldviews. Thus it has become acceptable for some contemporary Akans parents to choose name from different corners of the earth together with the ‘ kradin’ and the family name for their children, while other choose to completely do away with the ‘ kradin’ in their official documents. However, it is significant to note that people do not completely forget the ‘ kradin’ as they tend to periodically use it to affirm themselves.

In the light of modern enlightenment, we also see a situation where people chose names outside the traditional names based on the motivation strivings and attraction. For example, in recent times, some people may choose names like “ Kofi Ghandi”, “ Yaw Obama” or “ Akwesi Putin”. In this sense they seek after the qualities of such personalities.

Conclusion

It is significant to note, there may not be scientific basis for the listing of the Akan personality since these were passed on by oral tradition and observations done by the forefather, however, our people see a consistent influence of the ‘ kradin’ on the personality of the individual because it is related to the soul and it is energized by his or her unique spirit. It can also be noted that, in as much as the factors of Globalization, modern enlightenment and religion, may have significant influences on the traditional names and for may seem to present new focus for the Akan personality.