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## How Quietness Works: Social Misconceptions and the Truth about Introvert Personality

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“Quiet people have the loudest minds,” as indicated by this popular quote (often loosely attributed to Stephen Hawking) on the internet, introverts indeed own a profound world inside their minds which is, most of the time, unfathomable from the outside. But our society has a tendency to mark introversion as a not-so-desirable trait. The introverts are generally looked upon as silent and withdrawn people reluctant to engage in social situations actively. But, is it actually how introversion works? Well, not really. That is why we should properly understand the mechanisms of the introvert personality to figure out its relation with the society and how an introvert navigates life.

First of all, we need to understand what introversion really is. The Myers-Briggs concept of introversion comprises “a tendency to derive energy from time spent alone; time spent around other people may be experienced as emotionally or psychologically draining”, as mentions Laura K. Schenck in “Myers-Briggs: 8 Introverted Personality Types”. Although there's no exact border differentiating an extrovert from an introvert, being an introvert refers to being an ardent admirer of solitude and one's own inner world. An introvert person generally tries to keep away from huge crowds and gatherings where a lot is happening with enormous hustle and bustle. For an introvert, alone-time is a necessity, not a luxury. They require certain amount of peaceful alone-time in order to recharge their social batteries so that they are prepared for the ensuing social interactions. Often described as quiet, calm, reserved or soft-spoken by other people, introverts are marked as people who prefer to choose minding their own business over literally anything else. As writes Francis Duggan in his poem “Just the Quiet Achiever” (2008):

One can say a dark horse he is clever and wise  
It is said empty vessels do make the most noise  
He is one who never has too much to say

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Just the quiet achiever in his own quiet way.

Generally, an introvert's social life begins with being complimented as a calm, composed and well-behaved child by the older people around. In a school classroom, an introvert kid would be a favourite of most of their teachers for naturally maintaining silence in the class, whereas other kids have to be constantly warned and scolded to keep them quiet. Mixed impressions can be found among their fellow-students: some would like the introvert child's calmness, some would consider them boring or nerdy and some would simply grow jealous of them as they have created a good impression with the elders. But, as the child grows up, the very same people who used to compliment on their introversion will start criticising them for being not-so-expressive. Sometimes, people will simply term them as shy, unsmart or unsocial.

Therein comes the misconception of the society regarding the introvert people. Introversion is often mistaken for shyness, unsocialness, and sometimes even for the audacity of avoiding speaking with others. But, to an introvert, it is extremely annoying when a person urges them to speak up more. People would often try to fix the introvert person by forcing them to drag themselves out of their composure and making them do loud and thrilling things. But what these people do not understand is that trying to forcibly change one's natural state is a terrible idea. Would a sensible person ever wish to bring a fish out of water, thinking it is for its own welfare? That is why someone wisely and quite humorously reflected on the social media, "Asking an introvert to open up is as rude as asking an extrovert to shut up." No doubt, we should try to overcome our social fear and hesitation, but these should not be confused with the word "introversion". Being an introvert is quite different from just being shy and unsocial. Although these terms are inter-related, they are not always the exact same thing. In fact, an introvert can be pretty comfortable with social interactions and even public speaking. But what makes them an introvert is that they need solitude to rest and recharge themselves. To explain this with an analogy, an introvert's inner world and solitude are their "home sweet home", whereas social interactions are like the places which they often visit. Now, the different places we visit create different impressions on our minds. Some places can be boring, some can be enjoyable, some can be greatly soothing. But they are still not our home. So, it does not mean that introverts dislike interacting with people. It simply means that they have to put some extra efforts and energy to participate in social situations. Therefore, considering introversion a defect is an utter misconception. Introversion is a personality trait just like other ones. That is why somebody humorously remarked on the social media, "Introversion is a different operating system, not a processing error."

In fact, being an introvert has its own splendour. Generally, introverts are reflective and

thoughtful. They have a rich inner world and a vivid imagination. According to the MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) concept, introverts enjoy focused alone-time which leads to deeper insights. If an introvert gets the proper opportunity to convey the ideas of their inner world, this could be a fascinating and engaging account. Moreover, introverts are generally good listeners. As they are quite selective with social relations, they tend to choose quality over quantity when making friends. So, they are generally genuine in friendships, and also in social and familial bondings. Also, the introverts do not talk just for the sake of talking. Therefore, whenever they say something, it turns out interesting and significant. As Francis Duggan wrote in another poem “Shy People” (2008):

For them sad to say there’s never an encore  
 They have little to say so them we tend to ignore  
 But I like shy people in their own quiet way  
 And when they do speak, I do heed what they say.

[However, the poet here uses the word “shy” to mean “introvert”, even though these two words have a difference in meaning, as mentioned earlier.]

Most of the introverts are well aware of their strengths. Still the negative remarks from people often influence our minds to self-doubt. Sometimes we wonder if it’s really our fault to be less outgoing. Should we actually try to push ourselves to become extroverts? With this dilemma engulfing our self-esteem, sometimes we try to go out of our way to break our boundaries and indulge in activities which require extra amount of social energy. But eventually we regret that decision. Going too far against our true character is utterly exhausting and awkward. Therefore, it is absolutely undesirable to push oneself too hard to become something they are not. Rather, we should allow ourselves to freely embrace our introversion which makes us what we are.

Still, often some situations arise where we find it quite difficult to maintain this ideology. We face such people who would really try to make us feel bad about ourselves. This basically stems from peer pressure and unsolicited advices. For example, while other people are going to have fun at a social gathering, an introvert may choose to stay at home as a form of self-care, which is nowadays referred to as “joy of missing out” (JOMO), as opposed to “fear of missing out” (FOMO). But some people would simply refuse to believe this concept and point out to the introvert as being self-centred or unsocial. Sometimes people even throw these negative remarks directly on their faces. Another one from the many more instances of difficult situations is trying to convince people that there is nothing wrong in staying a bit aloof from certain situations. Often our well-wishers, too, tend to think that we cannot attend fun-stuff because of shyness, while the truth is that we do not even want to do those because those are

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not really fun to us. And trying to convince them from our point of view turns out quite embarrassing. On the other hand, if the introvert refuses to explain their point of view and just ignores other people's opinions, the introvert would be regarded as a self-centred, rude and inconsiderate person.

Now, we can state that being an introvert is not an utterly undesirable trait. Instead, it has several glorious features too. But we cannot deny the prevalence of difficulties an introvert has to deal with within their own mind. In spite of having a rich inner world, introverts quite often suffer a lot with overthinking. Although all types of people suffer more or less from overthinking, the introverts are prone to experience it at a more intense level. The reason behind this is many-fold. The introverts naturally tend to prefer to explore their own world of thoughts rather than to engage in outward activities. They are generally very good at organizing their thoughts, feelings and emotions. But, when under stress, these thoughts, feelings and emotions get entangled among themselves and cause a lot of mental distress. For some people, these may lead to severe mental health issues with no apparent reasons found from outside. Therefore, according to some specialists, introverts are more prone than extroverts to have a decreased mental well-being. Well, it does not mean that the extroverts do not suffer. Neither does it imply that all introverts have to suffer emotionally. But several studies suggest that most of the introverts are victims of anxiety-related issues and difficulties induced from it.

Now the complexities of their own psyché often lead the introverts to thinking that the trait of introversion is the root of all these anguishes. Some of them even try to root out this trait in order to have a calmer mind. But again, altering one's true self and identity is not a good idea in this regard. We should not change who we are just to end some problems on our way. Rather, we have to develop and groom our true personality instead of trying to forcibly change it. We, as introverts, should educate ourselves and other people (including extroverts) regarding introversion and its bright sides. Instead of intending to do away with introversion, we should strive to become more capable introverts. In fact, whatever our personality traits are, we should teach ourselves to utilize those traits positively. As introverts, we should fill our alone-time with positive self-talk and feel peaceful with our inner world. As thinking is one of our favourite activities, we should drive our thoughts towards a pleasant and calming perspective, instead of catastrophizing. Thus, in order to be victorious in the battle with self, we have to stay true to our own authentic nature and feel peaceful with the world and ourselves. We should form glorious visions with our intellectual strength. As we love genuine connection, we should nurture the people around us and make cordial efforts to ease and comfort their lives. And whenever the negative remarks from society try to turn us down, we should remind ourselves that most people are still ignorant of the truth behind introversion. We should strive to spread

awareness and move on in our own true direction.

In short, introversion itself is not something we have to overcome. Rather, we need to overcome the difficulties coming along with it. If introversion is one's natural personality trait, they should remain true to it and embrace the strengths they have as an introvert. For introverts, loving and nurturing our inner world should be the first step here. Leading our thoughts to positive visions and sometimes conveying them to the people around us are great ideas of training ourselves to be more capable and confident. Also, the society should be more respectful towards the differences among people and accept them for what they really are. To end with the words of Carl Jung in *C.G. Jung Speaking: Interviews and Encounters* (1977), "...the introverted intuitive has in a way a very difficult life, although one of the most interesting lives..."

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### **BIO-NOTE:**

Piyasa Parvin is a second-year postgraduate student, currently pursuing MA in English literature at the Department of English, Jadavpur University, after having completed her BA (honours) in English from the same department. Her academic interests consist of Postcolonial Studies, Gender Identities, Mystical and Classical Studies, and Linguistics.

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Besides her studies, she takes interest in creative writing, contemplative photography, fashion and oratory. This paper is an updated version of her essay which secured the third rank in the national-level essay competition arranged by HM Patel English Studies Centre in association with HM Patel Institute of English Training and Research, Vallabh Vidyanagar, Gujarat, in 2022.

