

## CHAPTER- 1

### WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGY?

The term psychology is derived from two Greek words: *psyche* means soul and *logos* meaning science or study of a subject. It is defined formally as a science which studies mental processes, experiences and behaviour in different contexts.

**MENTAL PROCESSES:** When our experiences are internal to the experiencing person then we refer to state of consciousness or awareness or mental processes. We use our mental processes when we think or try to solve a problem, to know or remember something. One level at which these mental processes are reflected is the brain activity. As we think or solve a mathematical problem our brain activities can be observed using different techniques of brain imaging.

**EXPERIENCES:** Psychologists also study experiences of people. Experiences are subjective in nature. We cannot directly know someone else's experience. Only the experiencing person can be aware or be conscious of her or his experiences.

**BEHAVIOURS:** These are responses or reactions we make or activities we engage in. When something is hurled at you, your eyes blink in a simple reflex action. You are taking an examination and can feel your heart pounding. You decide to go for a particular movie with a friend. Behaviours can be simple or complex, short or enduring. Some behaviours are overt. They can be seen or sensed by an observer. Some are internal or covert. When you are in a difficult situation while playing a game of chess you almost feel your hand muscles twitching trying to experiment with a move. All behaviours, covert or overt, are associated with or triggered by some stimulus in the environment or changes that happen internally. Some psychologists study behaviour as an association between stimulus (S) and response (R). Both stimulus and response can be internal or external.

### PSYCHOLOGY AS A NATURAL SCIENCE:

Since the origin of psychology is based on Descartes' Principle and later on follows the Hypothetico-Deductive model. So, psychology gave more emphasis on objectivity and in order to establish the objectivity of the phenomena. It uses various scientific research methods starting from problem, hypothesis, objectives, qualitative and quantitative research methods.

## PSYCHOLOGY AS A SOCIAL SCIENCE:

In psychology human behaviour is not only influenced by socio-cultural context, but also it creates them i.e. culture influences the individual and individuals influence the culture.

Psychology is a social science which focuses on the individuals and communities in relation to their social culture and physical environment. It studies topics like relationship, friendship, group and leadership.

## EVOLUTION OF PSYCHOLOGY:

We mentioned earlier that the formal beginning of modern psychology is traced back to 1879. When the first experimental laboratory was established in Leipzig, Germany by Wilhelm Wundt. Introspection was a procedure in which individuals or subjects in psychological experiments were asked to describe in detail, their own mental processes or experiences. An American psychologist, William James who had set up a psychological laboratory in Cambridge, Massachusetts soon after the setting up of the Leipzig laboratory, developed what was called a functionalist approach to the study of human mind. According to William James, consciousness as an ongoing stream for mental process interacting with the environment formed the core of psychology.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a new perspective known as Gestalt Psychology emerged in Germany as a reaction to structuralism of Wundt. It focused on the organisation of perceptual experiences instead of looking at the components of the mind, the Gestalt psychologist argued that when we look at the world our perceptual experience is more than the sum of the components of the perception. In other words what we experience is more than the inputs received from our environment. When, for e.g., light from a series of flashing bulbs falls on our retina we actually experience movement of light. When we see a movie, we actually have a series of rapidly moving images of still pictures falling on our retina. Structuralism came in the form of behaviourism. Around 1910, John Watson rejected the ideas of mind and consciousness as subject matters of psychology. He was greatly influenced by physiologist like Ivan Pavlov on classical conditioning. For Watson, mind is not observable and introspection is subjective because it cannot be verified by another observer. According to him scientific psychology must focus on what is observable and verifiable. He defined psychology as a study of behaviour or responses which can be measured or studied objectively.

Although behaviouristic dominated the field of psychology for several decades after Watson, a number of other approaches and views about psychology and its subject matter were developing around the same time. One person who shook the world with his radical view of human nature was Sigmund Freud. He viewed human behaviour as a dynamic manifestation of unconscious desires and conflicts. He founded psychoanalysis as a system to understand and cure psychological disorder. While Freudian psychoanalysis viewed human beings as motivated by unconscious desire for gratification of pleasure seeking (and often, sexual) desires.

Humanistic psychology took a positive view of human nature and psychologists like Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow emphasised free will of human beings. Aspects of gestalt approach and structuralism combined together to form cognitive development.

Cognitive Perspective focuses on mental processes. It views human beings as actively constructing their mind through their exploration into the Physical and Social world. Piaget stated that children actively construct their own minds whereas Vygotsky suggested that the mind is a joint cultural construction and emerges as a result of interaction between children and adults.

Modern cognitive psychology is constructivist and views human beings as actively constructing their minds through their exploration into the physical and the social world.

## PSYCHOLOGY IN INDIA:

- The development of psychology in India is influenced by western psychology.
- Indian psychology began in the department of philosophy at Calcutta University in 1915.
- The beginning of modern experimental psychology at Calcutta University was influenced by the Indian psychologist, Dr. N.N. Sengupta who was trained in USA in the experimental tradition of Wundt.
- Professor G. Bose was trained in Freudian psychoanalysis and established Indian Psychoanalytical Association in 1922. The four phases of psychology in India were related to its development, expansion, application and indigenisation.

## BRANCHES OF PSYCHOLOGY:

- **Cognitive Psychology:** It investigates the mental processes involved in acquisition, storage, manipulation and transformation of information received from the surroundings with its use and communication.
- **Biological Psychology:** It focuses on the relationship between behaviour and the physical system.
- **Neuropsychology:** Psychologists and neurologists study the role of neurotransmitters and neural communication in different areas of brain in mental functions.
- **Developmental Psychology:** It studies the physical, social and psychological changes occurring in different stages of the life-span.
- **Social Psychology:** It explores the effect of social environments on people.
- **Cross-cultural and Cultural Psychology:** It examines the role of culture in understanding behaviour, thought and emotion.
- **Environmental Psychology:** It studies the interaction of physical factors like temperature, humidity, pollution and natural disasters on human behaviour.
- **Health Psychology:** It studies the role of psychological factors in the development, prevention and treatment of illness.
- **Clinical and Counselling Psychology:** It studies the causes, treatment and prevention of different types of psychological disorders.
- **Industrial/Organisational Psychology:** It deals with the workplace behavior and focuses on both the workers and the organisation that employ them.
- **Educational Psychology:** It studies the learning pattern within human beings of all ages.
- **Sports Psychology:** It applies the principles of psychology to improve performance in sports by enhancing motivation among players.

## BASIC VS APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY:

There are no clear distinctions between the two branches. They are identified on the basis of their subject matter.

Basic psychology provides us with theories and principles that form the basis of application of psychology and applied psychology provides us with different contexts in which the theories and principles derived from the research can be meaningfully applied.

## PSYCHOLOGY AND OTHER DISCIPLINE:

- **Philosophy:** Though psychology has emerged as a scientific discipline, it is influenced by philosophy.
- **Medicine:** A large number of hospitals employ psychologists to prevent people from engaging in health hazardous behaviours. The psychological aspect of health is as crucial as the physical aspect.
- **Economics, Political Science and Sociology:** Psychology has contributed to the study of micro-economic behaviour, issues related to exercise of power, political conflicts and voting patterns and behaviour of individuals in socio-cultural contexts.
- **Computer Science:** The development of computer science and psychology has brought about significant advancement in the field of cognitive science.
- **Law and Criminology:** Lawyers and criminologists require the knowledge of psychology to understand motives behind crime, the degree of punishment that is just and the factors that affect judgment.
- **Mass Communication:** A story by the mass media has more impact if it is based on the background of psychological knowledge.
- **Music:** Studies have been conducted about the role of music in emotions and therapies.
- **Architecture and Engineering:** Psychological knowledge helps in designing mechanical devices and displays

## PSYCHOLOGISTS AT WORK:

- **Clinical Psychologists:** They help the clients with behavioural problems by providing them with therapies.
- **Counselling Psychologists:** They work with people who suffer from motivational and emotional problems.
- **Community Psychologists:** They focus on problems pertaining to community mental health and work for mental health agencies.
- **School Psychologists:** They work in the educational institutes and help students with their problems.
- **Organisational Psychologists:** They deal with the problems faced by executives and employees of an organisation, related to their roles.