
Chapter 1

What is Psychology?

❖ Psychology–Introduction

- Psychology is derived from two Greek words ‘psyche’ that means soul and ‘logos’ that means science or the study of a subject.
- Psychology can be defined as a science which studies mental processes, experiences and behaviour in different contexts.
- The experiences that are internal to the person experiencing them are referred to as states of consciousness or awareness or mental processes. Psychologists study the experiences of people those are subjective and embedded in the consciousness.
- The nature of experience can only be understood by analysing a complex set of internal and external conditions.
- Behaviour refers to responses or reactions that are made or activities that the people are engaged in.
- Overt and covert behaviour are associated with some stimulus in the environment or changes that happen internally.

❖ The Discipline of Psychology

- Often personal views influence the understanding the experiences of other.
- Psychologists try to minimise this bias either by seeking to make their analysis scientific and objective, or by seeking to explain behaviour from the point of view of the experiencing person because they think that subjectivity is a necessary aspect of human experience.
- Psychology as a discipline today has two parallel streams. One uses the method of physical and biological sciences, and the other uses method of social and cultural sciences in studying various psychological and social phenomena and predicting behaviour.



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- The scientific branch of psychology follows hypothetico-deductive model while the social branch studies human behaviour in socio-cultural contexts.

❖ Relationship of Mind and Behaviour

- Recent studies in neuroscience have established a relationship between mind and behaviour.
- Using positive visualisation, techniques and feeling, positive emotions can bring significant changes in the processes of body.
- Psychoneuroimmunology emphasises the role played by mind in strengthening the immune system.

❖ Psychology and Common Sense

- Psychology is different from common sense as the latter explains human behaviour based on hindsight while the former looks for patterns of behaviour which can be predicted and not explained after their occurrence.
- Scientific knowledge of psychology is often against common sense.
- Psychologists are different from astrologers, exorcists and palm readers because they systematically examine propositions based on data to develop the principals about human behaviour and other psychological phenomena.

❖ Evolution of Psychology

- The subject matter of psychology grew out of ancient philosophy.
- The beginning of modern psychology took place in 1879 with its first laboratory in the University of Leipzig established by Wilhelm Wundt.
- Structural psychologists analysed the structure of mind through introspection.
- The method of introspection was not considered as scientific because the introspective reports could not be verified by outside observers.
- William James developed a functionalist approach to the study of human mind.



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- The functionalists believed that it was more important to study the function of mind and adaptation to environment instead of its structure. Gestalt psychology focused on the organisation of perceptual experiences.
 - The behaviourists attempted to study behaviour or responses to stimuli in measurable terms.
 - The psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud viewed human beings as motivated by an unconscious desire for gratification of pleasure.
 - Humanistic psychology took a positive view of human nature and emphasised free will. Aspects of gestalt approach and structuralism combined together to form cognitive development.
 - 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.
- 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.



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- **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 behaviour 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.

❖ Themes of Psychology

- Following are themes upon which the applications of psychology are based:
- **Theme 1:** Psychology like other sciences attempts to develop principles of behaviour and mental processes.



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- **Theme 2:** Human behaviour is a function of the attributes of persons and environment.
 - **Theme 3:** Human behaviour is caused.
 - **Theme 4:** Understanding of human behaviour is culturally constructed.

❖ **Basic versus Applied Psychology**

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

❖ **Psychology with other disciplines**

- **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:** Subject matter of psychology has contributed to all of them. 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.



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- **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.

❖ **Psychology in Everyday Life**

- Psychology plays an important role in everyday life by not only contributing as a discipline, but solving problems at different levels, such as schools, colleges, organisations, hospitals etc.

❖ **Important Terms and Definitions**

- **Behaviour:** Behaviour means the reactions that are made towards the activities, in which people engage. It also implies the covert or overt action or reaction that is done by a human being or an animal that can be observed.
- **Behaviourism:** A school of thought that defined psychology as the study of behaviours that could be measured and studied objectively.
- **Cognition:** It helps to deal with the environment as cognition is associated with all mental activities of 'knowing', namely, perceiving, thinking and remembering, etc. These activities help in processing, understanding and communicating information.



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- **Cognitive Approach:** This view emphasises human thought and all the processes of cognition as central to the study of psychology.
 - **Consciousness:** Mental processes that are internal experiences of an individual, it also means the awareness of the general condition of one's mind or self-awareness.
 - **Gestalt psychology:** A branch of psychology in which behaviour is viewed as an integrated whole, greater than the sum of its parts.
 - **Humanistic Approach:** The approach views an individual with a desire of personal growth and fulfils human potential with development.
 - **Introspection:** It was a psychological study in which individuals were asked to describe their personal experiences in detail. However, it was later criticised as subjective and unscientific study.
 - **Mind:** It is a concept that has been debated intensely. However, it refers to unique set of individual's sensations, perceptions, memories, thoughts, dreams, motives and emotional feelings.
 - **Physiological Psychology:** It studies the neural mechanisms of perception and behaviour of human and animal which is based on the relationship of psychological processes like those of nervous system, hormones, sensory organs and the behavioural parameters.
 - **Psychoanalysis:** A method of psychotherapy in which the therapist attempts to bring represses unconscious material into conscious to cure psychological disorders.
 - **Sociology:** Study of human society and its various institutions.
 - **Stimulus:** Any well-defined external element or an activity in the environment that affects the organism, which may lead to an overt or a covert response.
 - **Structuralism:** Associated with Wilhelm Wundt, the approach to psychology that seeks to understand the structure and operation of every psychological phenomenon.

