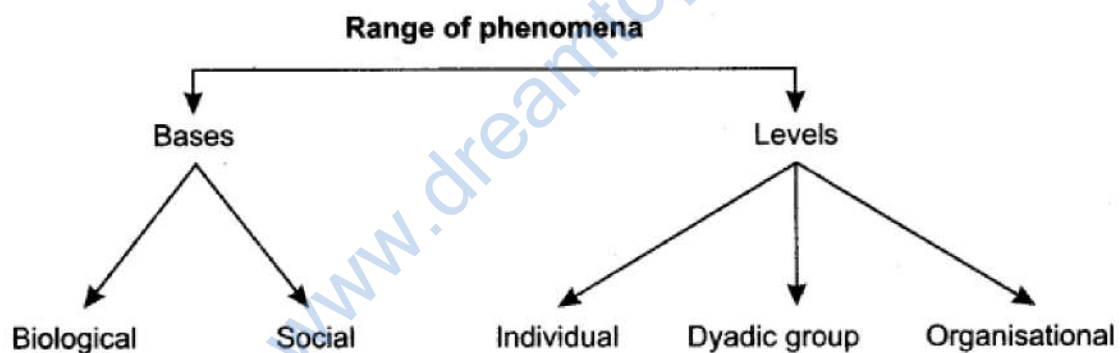


# What Is Psychology?

- Any knowledge discipline is hard to define because :
  - (i) It evolves continuously and
  - (ii) Any one definition cannot capture the range of phenomena involved.
- The term psychology is derived from two Greek words :
  - Psyche meaning soul and Logos meaning science or study of a subject.

Thus, it was a study of the soul or mind.

But since then psychology has moved away considerably and established itself as a scientific discipline which deals with processes underlying human experience and behaviour.



- Discipline is defined as :
  - (A) What it studies : Mental processes, Experiences and Behaviours
  - (B) How it studies ie. Methods : in different contexts.
- **Psychology** is defined as a science which studies mental processes, experiences and behaviour in different contexts.

In doing so, it uses methods of biological and social sciences to obtain data systematically.

It makes sense of the data so that it can be organized as knowledge.

• **Mental process:**

(i) Mental processes are the activities of the mind and brain, related to cognition.

(ii) We use mental processes when we think or remember something, or solve a problem.

(iii) However, these mental activities are -different from neural activities, though they are mutually overlapping processes.

(iv) The mind emerges and evolves as our interactions and experiences in this world get dynamically organized in the form of a system which is responsible for the occurrence of various mental processes.

(v) Mental processes include reasoning, learning, thinking, problem solving, perception, etc.

• **Experiences:**

Experiences can be defined as the learning acquired through everyday life situation.

(i) Experiences are subjective in nature, different for every individual.

(ii) We cannot directly observe or know someone's experience.

(iii) Only the experiencing person can be aware or conscious of his/her experiences. Thus, experiences are imbedded in our awareness or consciousness.

(iv) Experiences are influenced by internal and external conditions of the experiences.

(v) The nature of the experience can only be understood by analyzing a complex set of internal and external conditions.

(vi) Experiences are important because most of our learning is based on experiences.

### • **Behaviours:**

(i) Behaviours are responses or reactions we make or activities we engage in. Eg. One can feel the heart pounding before taking an examination.

(ii) Some behaviours such as thinking may be simple or complex, short or enduring.

(iii) On the other hand, some behaviours can be outwardly seen or sensed and are called overt, for example laughing.

(iv) All behaviours can be explained on the basis of S-R (Stimulus Response Relations). Any behaviour, overt or covert, is associated with or triggered by a stimulus.

(v) Both stimulus and response can be internal or external.

(vi) The same stimulus can have different responses, due to the organism variable. It emphasises upon an individual's uniqueness and variation that make him different from other.

### • **Psychology as a discipline**

(i) It studies behaviour, experience and mental processes.

(ii) It seeks to understand and explain how the mind works and how different mental processes result in different behaviours.

(iii) When we observe others, our own point of view or ways of understanding the world influence our interpretations of their behaviours and experiences.

(iv) Psychologists try to minimize such biases in their explanations of behaviour and experience in various ways.

(v) Some do so by making their analysis scientific and objective.

(vi) Others seek to explain behaviour from the point of view of those experiencing persons because they think that selectivity is a necessary aspect of human experience.

– Neuroscience and computer science borrow principles continuously from psychology.

There are fast developing brain imaging techniques like MRI, ECG, etc. which make it possible to study brain processes in real time, i.e, when they are actually taking place.

– **Psychology as hybrid science :**

Psychology is a hybrid science that draws its influence from both natural and social sciences.

• **As a natural science :**

(i) Modern Psychology has developed because of the application of the scientific method to study, psychological phenomenon.

(ii) As a physical science, it emphasizes on data that is systematic and can be studied under controlled conditions.

(iii) It is quantitative and requires analysis.

(iv) It takes influences from both physics and biology and believes in the Hypothetico Deductive Model (HDM).

(v) Every or any hypothesis can be accepted or rejected on the basis of factors available. The model suggests that scientific advancement can take place if you have a theory to explain a phenomenon.

(vi) A hypothesis is a tentative solution to a problem that helps in guiding a research or a theory.

(vii) Hypothesis has been successfully used for determining many theories related to learning and memory. For example, the way a child has been brought up in his family will shape his personality.

• Conscious means to be alert and aware of something. We are aware of all the outside environment as well as of the processes taking place in ourselves. Thus we are aware of the diverse sensations, perceptions, memories and feelings that take place in ourselves. In waking consciousness, we perceive time, place and events as real, meaningful and familiar.

- Psychology is a social science because it studies the behaviour of human beings in their social tests cultural context.
- Psychology as a social science discipline focuses on humans as social beings.
- It focuses on the individual and communities in relation to their social, cultural and physical environment.
- If we go back in History Psychology was defined as the science of the Mind. The use of the term mind was considered to be relevant since it represents all the mental phenomena such as perceiving, thinking, imagining, reasoning and so on. But, certain difficulties regarding the term mind, its nature and its relationship with the body continued to persist.
- Due to many researches particularly in Neurology the term 'mind' has returned in Psychology. It is true that Mind and brain are different and mind cannot exist without a brain. Recent studies in NeuroScience has proved that there is a relationship between Mind and Behaviour. These researches and neurological experiments proved that a person suffer from damage of some part of the brain but his mind had remained intact.
- Popular notions about the discipline of Psychology should be understood. Psychology as a science explains patterns of behaviour which can be predicted and explains behaviour before the act occur common sense. Psychology is based on hindsight. Professional Psychologists are trained, affiliated to some institution. They attain educational and professional qualifications and understand, predict and modify human behaviour by scientific methods.
- The emergence of Psychology as a science of mental processes, behaviour and experiences can be attributed to certain important development in Physiology and Physics as well as to the efforts of William Wilhelm Wundt who established first Psychological laboratory in 1879.
- The evolution of Psychology can be traced in the major schools of Psychological thoughts.
- **Structuralism:** It was proposed by Wundt and he studied the structure of conscious experiences by introspection.
- Introspection is a procedure in which individual or subjects in Psychological experiments are asked to describe their own mental processes or experiences scientifically in detail.

- **Functionalism:** It was proposed by William James and John Dewey. They studied the functions of conscious experiences in how people deal with the environment using introspection method. It shows the adaptation of human behaviour according to their changing needs.
- **Gestalt Psychology:** The school was proposed by Koffka, Kohler and Werthimer. It focussed on human perception. According to Gestalt Psychology, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
- **Behaviourism:** It was proposed by John Watson and Skinner. According to this, Psychology must focus on what is observable and verifiable.
- **Psychoanalysis:** It was proposed by Dr Sigmund Freud. He focused on the unconscious mind and childhood experiences.
- **Humanistic Perspective:** It was a revolt against Psychoanalysis and Behaviourism proposed by Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. It stated that humans strive to grow and unfold their inner potential.
- **Cognitive Perspective:** It 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.
- The modern era of Human Psychology began in the Department of Philosophy at Calcutta University where the first syllabus of experiment on Psychology was introduced and the first Psychology Laboratory was established in 1915. Calcutta University started the first department of Psychology in the year 1916 and another department of applied Psychology in 1938. It was greatly influenced by Dr N.N. Sengupta.
- Psychology as a science is closely related to other sciences. Behaviour is closely related to Biological make up, the hereditary predisposition and his level of maturity. Physiology, embryology genetics and biochemistry are relating knowledge with Psychological functioning of human beings. A large number of hospitals now employ Psychologists.
- The roots of Psychology are found in Philosophy particularly with respect to methods of knowing.
- Psychology is closely related to Economics, Political Science and Sociology. Psychology has provided knowledge related to micro level economic behaviour and

consumer behaviour. Psychology provides understanding of voting behaviour, exercise of power, opinion polls etc. Sociology is positively related to Psychology, e.g., Psychology studies human behaviour whereas Sociology studies human behaviour in society, i.e., socio cultural context.

- The information processing approach to cognitive Psychology, to explain memory and concept of Artificial intelligence is highly linked with computer sciences.
- Psychological principles explain crime, criminal behaviour, how well a witness remembers a crime, etc. Accordingly Psychology is closely related to law and criminology. Similarly Psychology has close bonds with Mass Communication, Music and Fine Arts, Architecture and Engineering.
- Psychology as a discipline not only provide understanding to the development of theoretical knowledge of human behaviour but it has close linkages across Psychological processes. Psychologists nowadays employed to help in diverse activities in different domains of Professional activities including hospitals, educational settings, industrial organisations, training institutes, military and government organisations.
- Psychology continuously provides knowledge and understanding of human behaviour in different domains. Some of the emerging perspectives are Evolutionary Psychology, Cultural Psychology and Positive Psychology.
- **Evolutionary Psychology** is an approach in social and natural sciences that examines psychological structure from a modern evolutionary perspective.
- It seeks to identify which human psychological traits are involved in adaptations—that is the functional products of natural selection or sexual selection.
- The goal of research in evolutionary psychology is to discover and understand the design of the human mind.
- It is a theoretical approach to Psychology that attempts to explain useful mental and psychological traits – such as memory, perception or language – as adaptations, i.e., as the functional products of natural selection.
- The purpose of this approach is to bring the functional way of thinking about biological mechanisms such as the immune system into the field of Psychology.
- In short Evolutionary Psychology is focused on how evolution has shaped the mind and

behaviour.

- **Cultural Psychology** is the study of how psychological and behavioural tendencies are rooted in and embodied in culture.
- It studies how mind and culture are inseparable and mutually constitute, i.e., people are shaped by culture and their culture is shaped by them.
- Cultural Psychology is the study of the way cultural traditions and social practices regulate, express and transform the human Psyche, resulting less in Psychic unity for human kind than in ethnic divergences in mind, self and emotion (Richard Shweder).
- Contemporary psychologists have shown increasing interest in understanding what makes life good and meaningful. This development is termed as positive psychology.
- There are some themes which provides direction to research and application of Psychology are to develop principles of behaviour and mental processes, function of the attributes of persons and environment, causality of human behaviour, culturally constructed human behaviour and controlling and modifying the behaviour.
- Psychology can be viewed in two fold perspective which are complementary to each other i.e. Basic Psychology and Applied Psychology. Basic Psychology provides theories through researchers whereas Applied Psychology is related to the category of application according to the needs of society.
- Psychologists study a wide range of issues related to mental and behavioural functioning. Psychologists study how the biological system works and socio-cultural bases shapes human behaviour. Contemporary psychologists study these processes from a perspective of lifespan. The basic psychological processes are parts of a dynamic regulated system. All these processes are interconnected and together help the organism to adapt to environment and grow. Knowing the environment requires several mental processes, which together are called cognition. Psychologists study how information is used in thinking, reasoning, decision-making, communicating and solving problems.

**1. Behaviour:** Any covert or overt action/reaction a person or animal does that can be observed in some way.

**2. Behaviourism:** A school of thought that emphasises objectivity, observable behavioural responses, learning, and environmental determinants.



**3. Cognition:** All the mental activities associated with knowing; namely, perceiving, thinking, and remembering, etc. These are associated with processing, understanding, and communication information.

**4. Cognitive economy:** A term to denote maximum and efficient use of the capacity of long-term memory through organisation of concepts in a hierarchical network.

**5. Consciousness:** Awareness of the general condition of one's mind, awareness of particular mental contents, or self-awareness.

**6. Constructivism:** Modern cognitive psychology views human beings as actively constructing their minds through their exploration into the physical and the social world.

**7. Developmental Psychology:** A branch of psychology which establishes the physical, social and psychological changes that occur at different ages and stages over a life-span, from conception to old age.

**8. Functionalism / Functional fixedness:** The tendency to think of things only in terms of their usual functions, impediments to problem solving. The school of psychology that emphasised the utilitarian, adaptive functions of the human mind or consciousness.

**9. Gestalt:** An organised whole, Gestalt psychologists emphasized our tendency to integrate pieces of information into meaningful wholes.

**10. Gestalt psychology:** A branch of psychology in which behaviour is viewed as an integrated whole, greater than the sum of its parts.

**11. Humanistic approach:** The approach to Psychology that emphasises the person, or the self, and personal growth and development.

**12. Hue:** Property of chromatic colours or name of the colours.

**13. Introspection:** The process of looking inward to one's feeling and conscious experience.

**14. Mind:** Mind is a concept, which refers to unique set of individual's sensations, perceptions, memories, thoughts, dreams, motives and emotional feelings.

**15. Neuropsychology:** It is the scientific study of behaviour and mental processes as a function of brain activity and the nervous system.

**16. Physiological psychology:** A scientific study of human and animal behaviour based on the relationship of physiological processes like those of nervous system, hormones, sensory organs and behavioural parameters.

**17. Psychoanalysis:** A method of psychotherapy in which the therapist attempts to bring repressed unconscious material into conscious.

**18. Sociology:** The systematic study of the biological basis for social behaviour.

**19. Stimulus:** Any well-defined element in the environment affecting the organism, which may lead to an overt or a covert response.

**20. Structuralism:** Associated with Wilhelm Wundt, the approach to psychology that seeks to understand the structure and operation of consciousness, or the human mind.