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PSYCHOLOGY : AN INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

We human beings often experience moods of anger and joy. We have remarkable ability to learn and memorize poems, stories and events. We often notice powerful effect of leaders on the behaviour of followers. While interacting in groups we often experience conflict and cooperation. Some of us suffer from depression, hyper-anxiety etc. All of us are curious about the causes of these happenings and make sense in our own way. Psychology helps in providing insights into these and other aspects of behaviour scientifically in our own life and in the life of the people surrounding us. In this lesson we are going to learn about the nature of psychology, activities of psychologists and the different branches of psychology.

1.2 Objectives

After reading this lesson, you will be able to :

- explain the nature of psychology;
- describe the job of psychologists;
- describe major approaches to the study of psychology;
- state the relationship of psychology with other allied disciplines;
- describe the different branches of psychology.

1.3 Nature of Psychology

In our everyday life we behave in different ways and we use the term behaviour to refer to the verbal and physiological responses and

actions. Interest in psychological issues has a long past, but their scientific study has a short history. To be more precise, attempts to formalize the understanding of psychological phenomena in modern sense started only during 19th century. It was influenced by the developments in the disciplines of philosophy as well as natural sciences. Today psychology is considered as a science as well as a profession contributing to the improvement in quality of life. It focuses primarily on the study of various aspects of mental and behavioural functioning. The psychologists use scientific methods to understand the causes of behavioural phenomena and develop principles and theories about them. They attempt to understand questions about

How human beings receive information from environment and perceive objects ?

How people, learn and remember experiences ?

How do they think, reason and solve problems ?

How do people choose goals and make efforts to achieve them ?

How do they differ in various characteristics like intelligence, personality, interest ?

How do people cope with various problems in life ?

In the course of its growth, in this century, psychology has expanded in many directions and has encompassed almost all areas of human life. Thus we can say that psychology is a scientific study of behaviour and mental processes.

★ Psychology is the scientific study of behaviour and mental processes.

1.4 What Psychologists do ?



Many people carry the impression that psychologists can read the face of a person and tell one's mental make up, cure people suffering from mental abnormalities, can guess what is one's future, and change one's mind instantaneously, like a magician. As we will see there is no magic in the hands of psychologist. The psychologist uses certain procedures and tools to collect information, and to draw inferences and conclusions about probable behaviour. Psychologists share twin goals :

- (1) understanding and explaining the complexities of behaviour and
- (2) contributing to the improvement of the quality of human life.

The academic psychologists are interested in the first goal. They try to test hypotheses about the diverse aspects of behaviour and mental processes. They develop principles, laws and theories on the basis of various methods such as observation and experiments. They make efforts to describe, explain, predict and control behavioural phenomena. In contrast, applied psychologists are practitioners. They try to use psychological knowledge in solving various human problems. They are engaged in activities like counseling, therapy, personnel selection, career guidance, consultancy in organizational behaviour (e.g., team building, leadership training), consumer surveys, psychological assessment and training in various skills (e.g., communication, self presentation). Psychologists are now seen working not only in academic institutions doing research and teaching but also in institutions like hospitals, schools, industries, sports-complexes, military establishments, community centres and so on.

Intext Questions 1.1

Choose the correct alternative

1. Psychology is most appropriately defined as the :
 - a. study of the mind.
 - b. scientific study of unconscious mental processes.
 - c. science of behaviour and mental processes.
 - d. science of behaviour and knowledge.
2. Which one of the following is not used by psychologists ?
 - a. interview
 - b. reading lines of one's palm
 - c. experiment
 - d. observation

1.5 The Divergent Psychological Perspectives

Unlike physical objects and animals, human beings are self-conscious and can, therefore, subject themselves to their own study. This capacity to reflect about oneself makes the study of human behaviour complex. The complexity of studying human behaviour is largely due to multiple causes involved in it. For example, let us see the case of someone who complains that a colleague of his/her is not working or performing upto the mark. This behaviour can occur due to many factors independently or jointly. It may be due to lack of ability or lack of motivation or lack of supportive climate at the workplace or some problem at home. Any one of these factors or their combination may result in poor performance. This is true for most of the behavioural phenomena. As a result

phenomena. As a result psychological predictions are complex and have certain limitations. Their accuracy is limited by the stimuli used, type of tools used, environmental conditions and by the nature of psychological process under study. The dynamic nature of psychological processes makes generalizations difficult.

While studying human behaviour we must remember the following :

- (i) Changes are observed in individuals due to maturation, learning and ageing.
- (ii) Human behaviour at any moment is a joint function of the personal characteristics and the properties of environment.
- (iii) The measurement of psychological characteristics (e.g. personality, intelligence, interest, attitude) is usually indirect and based on inferences.
- (iv) Many aspects of social behaviour are rule-governed and culture-specific.
- (v) Human behaviour is usually determined by several causes.

The analysis of psychological phenomena essentially implies some model of human being. These models are often rooted in certain cultural and philosophical assumptions. This is why there exist many approaches to understand human behaviour.

The major approaches can be summarized as follows :

1. The biological perspective views human behaviour as a function of a biological entity. The structure and functions of this entity provide the basis of behavioural functions.
2. The behaviourist perspective analyzes behaviour in terms of organism's responses to environmental stimuli. It views human nature as a function of environmental characteristics and learning.
3. The psychodynamic perspective emphasizes on unconscious aspect of mind and views human nature as one involving conflicting tendencies.
4. The cognitive perspective emphasizes on the processes of receiving information from environment and using it for performing various actions.
5. The humanistic perspective views human beings as a positive force full of potentialities.

You can study more about these perspectives below :

Biological Perspective : It considers human being as nothing but a biological structure. Treating behaviour in purely physical terms, it looks at the internal physiological structures (e.g., brain, nervous system). Subscribing to a materialistic view, it asserts that all behaviour has

system). Subscribing to a materialistic view, it asserts that all behaviour has a physiological basis. In this view the working of nervous system and the role of heredity in determining behaviour become major concerns. It is held that all social and psychological processes are derived from biological processes. This view prefers analysis of complex phenomena in terms of smaller units. It has revealed the mysteries of brain functioning. The studies on effects of drugs on behaviour, consequences of electrical stimulation of various parts of brain, influence of meditation and altered states of consciousness have shown interesting results.

Behavioural Perspective : This perspective stresses the role of environmental stimuli in determining the way people act. It argues that what we become is largely the result of learning. It considers behaviour mainly as a response to the environmental stimuli. Accordingly, the overt behaviour becomes the subject matter of psychology. As you can notice, this approach does not give importance to consciousness and internal subjective states. According to this perspective observable behaviour and its relationship with environmental conditions became the main focus of study. Its proponent Watson and exponent Skinner believed in the objective study of behaviour. Behaviourism has many variants but all share common interest in learning and use explanations based on observable events.

Psychodynamic Perspective : We often are unaware of the true reasons for our actions. Freud, the founder of psycho-analysis, is closely associated with this view. Focusing on motivational questions about behaviour this perspective examines the role of internal processes. It believes that each behaviour has a cause and that cause is to be found in the mind. It is held that much of our behavior is governed by the unconscious processes that lie outside of our awareness. This view uses the observations of people suffering from mental disorders. It stresses on early childhood experiences in determining adult behaviour. According to this view, human being is driven primarily by sexual and aggressive instincts, violence being a natural way of expressing these primitive urges. Carl Jung and Alfred Adler and neo-Freudians like Horney, Erikson and Erich Fromm have developed psycho-analysis in various forms.

Cognitive Perspective : It focuses on how people know, understand and think about the world. Much of our behaviour involves mental or cognitive processes such as perceiving, remembering and thinking. They are as important as environmental stimuli in understanding our behaviour. They mediate between stimuli and responses. They function in an organized and systematic way. As active organisms, we process information and act upon it. Our cognitions determine the course of our behaviour. We observe the environment and respond on the basis of

its interpretation. Our thoughts are both causes as well as results of our overt actions. It has links with the emerging fields of cognitive science and artificial intelligence.

Humanistic Perspective : Often termed as a third force, this perspective views humans as basically good and responsible beings. It is also held that one's behaviour is not simply determined by either past experiences or the current circumstances. People can make choices. The emphasis is on 'free will' The subjective experiences and interpretations of the people are important in determining the course of their action. Thus the theories must be useful not only for understanding people but also for understanding one's own life. In this perspective, self-actualization and spirituality are considered important. It tries to see patterns in life histories of the people. It emphasizes the phenomenal or experiential world of the person. Maslow and Rogers were the chief proponents of this view.

1.6 Relationship of Psychology with other Disciplines

As a behavioural science, psychology is situated at the intersection of many subjects.

The psychological studies share interest with different branches of biological sciences, social sciences and humanities. All these knowledge areas are collectively known as behavioural sciences. In recent years linkage of psychology with different subjects has been recognised. Now multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary studies are increasingly receiving greater attention. Let us see how psychology is related to other disciplines.

Sociology

The social aspect of human behaviour is a matter of common concern for the students of sociology as well as psychology. However, the levels and approaches of the two are different. Both the disciplines help us to understand the influence of social context on human behaviour. Both analyze social phenomena such as leadership, social movements, interpersonal attraction, communication, socialization etc. However, sociology is molar and focuses on broader units. It stresses on the study of groups and communities, while psychology focuses on individuals. It also uses survey and observational methods for collecting information.

Anthropology

Anthropology tries to understand the evolution of mankind and development of civilization. It also focuses on the characteristics and processes of culture through detailed observation, recording the life of people and participant observation of different cultural groups. In contrast psychology tries to establish generalizations about human behaviour.

These generalizations are often limited by the culture in which the research is conducted. Psychological studies which respond to the needs of the culture have shown that there are important differences and similarities in the nature and expression of emotions, self concept, motives, personality, norms, morality and child-rearing across cultures.

Education

Education and psychology have history of very long association. The theory and practice of education is based on principles and findings about the psychological processes like learning, memory, motivation, personality and intelligence. Also effective class-room teaching and learning is possible only when teachers are trained in the principles of human development. Children are active learners who process information and act accordingly. A teacher, therefore, is required to be skillful in the techniques of motivation and communication. Teachers are often required to offer guidance and counselling to the students and parents. Similarly evaluation of student performance requires basic understanding of the principles and procedures of psychological assessment.

Biology

One of the dominant concerns of psychologists is to understand the biological foundations of behaviour. Many breakthroughs in understanding, controlling and modifying behaviour have come from the knowledge of the functioning of brain and nervous system. The localization of brain functions, nature and properties of nerve impulse, biological factors in arousal and motivation, role of various parts of brain in determining psychological functioning constitute an exciting area of enquiry.

Intext Questions 1.2

A. Match the following statements :

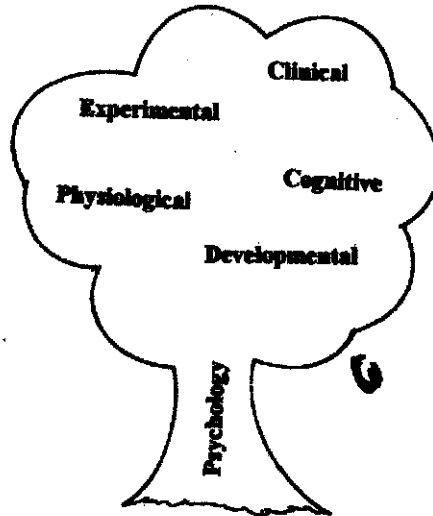
- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| (1) Biological perspective | (a) human beings as positive force |
| (2) Behavioural perspective | (b) behaviour involves mental process |
| (3) Psycho dynamic perspective | (c) function of biological entity |
| (4) Cognitive perspective | (d) unconscious aspect of mind. |
| (5) Humanistic perspective | (e) function of environmental characteristics |

B State whether the following statements are True or False

- (i) Sociology and psychology help to understand the influence of social context on human behaviour.
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- (ii) Anthropology studies the evolution of mankind and development of civilization.
- (iii) Education and psychology do not have any association.
- (iv) The behaviour does not have any biological foundation.

1.7 Branches of Psychology



In the course of its disciplinary journey, psychology has diversified and expanded in many directions. Beginning with experimental and physiological psychology which focus on the basic psychological processes, attention was shifted to the applications of psychology in different spheres of life. In the following paragraphs we shall briefly study the different branches of psychology.

(a) Experimental and Cognitive Psychology

Traditionally experimental psychology has been concerned with the study of basic psychological processes such as sensation, perception, learning, memory, motivation, emotion etc. The goal was to understand the principles governing these processes with the help of experimental method. For a long time this area has dominated the scene. With increasing information this field has diversified. The new field of cognitive psychology happens to be the closest one to experimental psychology. This field tries to explain processes involved in the perception, comprehension and use of information for various purposes. Thus reasoning, problem solving, attention and related processes are being analysed with sophisticated methods and tools. This branch tries to understand the fundamental causes of behaviour.

(b) Physiological and Comparative Psychology

This field of inquiry is devoted to the analysis of biological foundations of behaviour. It asserts that all behaviour can be reduced to various physiological processes. For instance, activities in cerebral cortex and hypothalamus are found to be systematically related to thinking and motivation. The field of comparative psychology investigates the dimensions and complexities of behaviour among animals like rats, pigeons and monkeys and compares those across species.

(c) Developmental Psychology

This subfield of psychology addresses to the problem of changes in behaviour throughout the lifespan. These changes take place in physical,

motor, cognitive, personality, emotional, social and linguistic domains.

Study of these changes may be undertaken by following the same person for a longer period. Alternatively one may study people of different age groups. The first approach is called longitudinal and the second is cross-sectional. Important divisions of this branch include child psychology, adolescent psychology, psychology of adulthood and aging. The study of developmental psychopathology has great significance for rehabilitation of the children with disabilities and behaviour problems.



(d) Social Psychology

Interactions with other human beings is one of the most significant aspects of our life. Social psychology tries to understand the influence of other individuals and groups on our behaviour. Perceiving other individuals, forming attitudes, persuading others to change their views, prejudice, interpersonal attraction, group decision, social motivation and leadership are important themes in social psychology. More recently great concern has been shown for applications and a new specialization entitled applied social psychology is emerging. This field is particularly benefited by contribution from sociologists.

(e) Educational and School Psychology

As an applied field this branch of psychology tries to help solve the problems of teaching and learning in classrooms. It helps both students and teachers to deal more effectively with the learning situation. Much of the work of educational psychologists is devoted to the areas of curriculum planning, teacher-training and instruction-design. Psychology of learning and motivation supplies the necessary theoretical and empirical data regarding learning process, the principles of learning, reinforcement, transfer of training, retention and forgetting. Educational psychologists plan and suggest curriculum to a school board in the light of student's interests, abilities, and needs. The job of the school psychologists is to deal with more immediate problems in the school. The school psychologists are particularly concerned with diagnosis of learning difficulties and their remediation, and vocational and other forms of counseling.

(f) Counselling Psychology

A counselling psychologist deals with people who have milder emotional and personal problems. S/He tries to enable an individual to utilize his/her present resources most effectively in solving personal problems. Thus a counsellor's task is to modify behaviour in areas like marital life, delinquency, school maladjustment, dispute in work setting etc. The counsellor systematically changes the behaviour through various procedures including behaviour modification, modelling, sensitization and rational thinking.

(g) Clinical Psychology

The general image of a clinical psychologist is that of a doctor who diagnoses psychological disorders and treats them using psychotherapy. But s/he is not a doctor and should not be confused with a psychiatrist who holds a medical degree. S/he uses various techniques to relieve the symptoms and to help people understand the reasons of their problems. A clinical psychologist strives at changing the personality in order to enable a person to cope with his/hers situation in an adaptive manner. A clinical psychologist mainly aims at identification of negative or problematic aspects in development and their alleviation. For example, a clinical psychologist, treating phobia—a kind of unreasonable fear behaviour, tries to remove reinforcements that maintain the behaviour, and at the same time provide other reinforcements in order to promote learning of more rational and effective coping patterns in the patient.

(h) Industrial and Organizational Psychology

Psychologists working in this area help industries and other organizations in personnel selection, training, solving problems related to communication, productivity, and interpersonal and intergroup relations. Various interventions for organizational development (e.g., team building, development of communication skills, goal setting, job designs) are currently employed to improve the conditions of work setting and enhancing products.

(i) Environmental Psychology

This is a relatively new field of psychology which specializes in understanding the relationship between human beings and environment. Environmental planning, environmental perception and attitude, design of environments, environmental stressors (e.g., crowding, pollution, disasters) and environmental attitudes are being studied. The goal is to save the environment and improve its quality.

(j) Engineering Psychology

Human life in the modern world is dominated by machines of various kinds. The human-machine interaction raises many problems. Engineering psychology or human factors engineering tries to specify the capacities and limitations of human-machine-environment system so that the system can be operated safely and efficiently. Therefore, the task of engineering psychologists is to help in designing instruments and machines and developing the layout of work settings. With the advent of computers and innovations in the area of information technology, many new methods are being used to solve the related problems.

Intext Questions 1.3

A. Choose the correct alternative :

1. Which of the following of psychologists is most involved in the treatment of psychological problems
 - a. counselling psychologist
 - b. community psychologist
 - c. clinical psychologist
 - d. social psychologist
2. Suppose you are writing an article on the factors that attract people to one another and lead to friendship. It is likely that you will try to read books written by a :
 - a. developmental psychologist
 - b. educational psychologist
 - c. social psychologist
 - d. community psychologist
3. You are attending a meeting/seminar of psychologists. You find that one talk is on infant perceptual abilities, the second is on adult socialization, the third deals with physical changes in the elderly. What is your guess about the specialization of these psychologists ?
 - a. physiological
 - b. cognitive
 - c. social
 - d. developmental

B. Fill in the blanks with appropriate words :

- (i) The cognitive psychology explains processes such as _____, and _____.
- (ii) The Biological foundations of behaviour are studied in the field of _____ psychology.
- (iii) The two approaches used in developmental psychology are _____ and _____.

C. State whether the following statements are True or False :

- (i) Social psychology analyses the influence of individuals on behaviour.
 - (ii) Counselling helps in solving problems.
 - (iii) Engineering psychology deals with environment.
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What you have Learnt

Psychology is a science which studies mental and behavioural functioning in a systematic manner. Using scientific methods, psychologists describe, predict and control the processes like perception, motivation, cognition, memory, learning, personality and intelligence. As professionals, they apply psychological knowledge towards the solution of problems in various settings including schools, industries, hospitals and organizations. It is closely related to allied disciplines such as education, anthropology, sociology and biology. The study of psychological issues and problems has been characterised by several approaches including behavioural, cognitive, psychodynamic, humanistic and biological. These approaches rooted in varied philosophical assumptions, describe human nature in different ways. Important psychological insights are available in the ancient Indian texts. As a growing discipline, psychology is expanding across various branches which specialize in providing psychological services in different walks of life.

Terminal Exercises

- (1) Describe the scientific and professional roles of psychologists.
 - (2) What are the diverse psychological perspectives.
 - [3] How is Psychology related to other disciplines of knowledge.
 - (4) Outline the role of psychologist in-
 - (a) Schools
 - (b) Industries
 - (c) Hospitals
 - (d) Engineering
 - (e) Environment
-

Key to Intext Questions

1.1

- (1) c
- (2) b

1.2

(A)

- (1) (c)
- (2) (e)
- (3) (d)
- (4) (b)
- (5) (a)

(B)

- (i) True
- (ii) True
- (iii) False
- (iv) False

1.3

- #### (A)
- (1) c
 - (2) c
 - (3) d

(B)

- (i) perception, comprehension.
- (ii) physiological psychology
- (iii) longitudinal and cross sectional.

(C)

- (i) True
- (ii) True
- (iii) False

Hints to Terminal exercises

- (1) Refer to section 1.4
- (2) Refer to section 1.5
- (3) Refer to section 1.6
- (4) Refer to section 1.7