
UNIT 1 ORIGIN OF PSYCHOLOGY*

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Psychology is concerned with almost all aspects of our lives. The field of psychology deals with behavioural aspects of human beings and that is probably the reason why everyone is interested to know about psychology. On the other hand, there are many misconceptions about psychology also. Many people think that psychology deals with dealing of abnormal people only. Some others feel that psychologists can read your mind just by looking at you or your face/forehead. They tend to equate psychologists with astrologers, gemologists, numerologists, palmists or graphologists, who claim to solve your problems of life and predict your future. You might have heard the terms ‘psychology’, ‘psychological’, ‘mental’ etc., but do you know what is the meaning of psychology and how did it evolve? Is psychology a ‘science’ or ‘art’? What is science and what are its characteristics? What is the subject matter of psychology? In this chapter you will find answer to these and many more such questions. By studying psychology, you will be able to understand what psychology is and what it is not. This unit introduces the subject of psychology.

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- Define psychology;
- Describe the historical background and perspectives of psychology;
- Illustrate the methods and subfields of psychology; and
- Delineate the researches of psychology in Indian context.

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1.2 DEFINITION OF PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology has been defined in a number of ways by various authors. Psychologists have been debating on whether psychology should focus on “mind”, “consciousness” or “behaviour”. Let us look at how the definitions of psychology have come a long way over the past years.

1.2.1 Early Definitions

Earlier, psychology was part of Philosophy. Ancient philosophers were interested in the study of the soul. Thus, it was first defined in terms of ‘the science of soul’. However, since the term ‘soul’ has very wide and comprehensive meanings, it was considered as a vague term and was criticized severely, in the middle ages. There were questions regarding the physical existence, weight, and volume of soul.

Dandapani (2004) states that “people were rather naïve to believe in esoteric terms such as Soul, Mind and Consciousness. It was believed, and rightly so, that every human being is endowed with a soul that would remain sublime at all times. To a philosopher soul is the firm foundation upon which ethical values are erected. Realisation of one’s soul was considered the chief mission of life. Definition of Psychology as the study of soul became unacceptable primarily because no convincing proof or evidence of the precise nature of soul was furnished. It was discarded because of its METAPHYSICAL nature. It was found inadequate to satisfy the canons of science;.....”.

Thus, this definition was not accepted by psychologists. Next, psychology was defined in terms of ‘the science of mind’, by some ancient Greek philosophers. According to them, psychology was held as a branch of mental philosophy. Since this definition does not include overt behaviour of human beings and mind cannot be measured directly, this definition was also dropped by psychologists.

Later, psychology was defined as ‘the science of consciousness’. According to Bagga & Singh (1990), at one time during the history of Psychology, it was felt that the main business of Psychology was with the conscious experience.

Consciousness makes us conscious or aware of the situation or a thing around us. This definition too is now obsolete and it has been rejected due to the following reasons:

Consciousness cannot be studied objectively as it is more personal and subjective. Second objection came from the fast developing branch of the abnormal psychology which brought the study of unconscious part of our mind within the province of Psychology. The term consciousness does not include animal or human behaviour.

The term consciousness also was supposed to have a philosophical-tinge and not accepted by the modern scientific minded psychologists. Finally, the modern era has defined Psychology as ‘a science of behaviour.’ In the early decades of twentieth century, Watson, the father of the school of ‘Behaviourism’, defined psychology as ‘the study of behaviour’. According to Morgan et al. (1986), Watson rejected mind as the subject of psychology and insisted that psychology be restricted to the study of behaviour – the observable (or potentially observable)

activities of people and animals. Watson held the opinion that there are no essential differences between human and animal behaviour and that we can learn much about our own behaviour from the study of what animals do. Watson emphasised that nothing is innate and everything can be learned. In this context, Woodworth (1948) had earlier stated that, first psychology lost its soul, then its mind, and then it lost its consciousness. It still has behaviour of sort. As we will see below, the term 'behaviour' is still there in almost all the modern definitions.

1.2.2 Current Definitions

Hilgard, Atkinson, & Atkinson (1975) have compiled the changing definitions of psychology starting from that of William James (1890) to that of Kenneth Clark and George Miller (1970). Bagga & Singh (1990) have also cited the following two definitions of Woodworth and Munn, respectively: "Psychology is the scientific study of the activities of the individual in relation to his environment".

"Psychology today concerns itself with the scientific investigation of behaviour, including from the stand-point of behaviour to much of what earlier psychologists dealt with as experience". Some of the more recent definitions of Psychology, in chronological order, are as follows:

- Psychology is the science of human and animal behaviour. It includes the application of this science to human problems. (Morgan et al., 1986)
- The scientific study of behaviour and mental processes. (Feldman, 1996)
- The scientific study of behaviour and mental processes and how they are affected by an organism's physical state, mental state and external environment (Tavris and Wade, 1997)
- Psychology is all about human behaviour, about mental processes, and about the context in which behaviour and mental processes occur. (Das, 1998)
- The science of behaviour and mental processes. (Lahey, 1998)
- The science of behaviour and cognitive processes. (Baron, 1999)
- Scientific study of behaviour and mind. (Nairne, 2003)
- A science in which behavioural and other evidence is used to understand the internal processes leading people (and members of other species) to behave as they do. (Eysenck, 2004)
- The scientific study of behaviour and mental processes. (Ciccarelli & Meyer, 2006; Coon & Mitterer, 2007, 2008)
- The science that studies behaviour and mental processes. (Rathus, 2008)

As is evident in the above definitions, study of behaviour (human and animal) has been emphasised in all of them. In addition, most authors have also included 'cognitive/mental processes' in their definitions of psychology. But, what is behaviour? We will now look at the nature and characteristics of behaviour.

1.2.3 Nature and Characteristics of Behaviour

Behaviour is a broad term and a complex phenomenon. In this section, we will discuss the nature and characteristics of behaviour. According to psychologists,

behaviour is everything or anything that a human being or animal does that can be observed in some way. In other words, behaviour includes all actions and responses of organisms that can be measured directly or indirectly. Behaviour not only means bodily movements but also can include mental and cognitive processes such as feelings, attitudes, thoughts, emotions, and all other internal vents, which cannot be observed directly but can be measured indirectly through what people say (vocal behaviour) and how they react to different problems and situations.

We will now consider some of the general characteristics of human behaviour, as described by Parameswaran & Beena (1988, 2002). These are:

- *Behaviour is influenced by a number of factors*

Behaviour is influenced by a number of factors such as biological, cultural, social, environmental, past experience, motivational, emotional, cognitive (e.g. feelings, emotions, motivation, thoughts) etc.

- *Behaviour varies in complexity*

Behaviour can be as simple as picking a pen, waving a friend or reflex responses like sneezing etc. Some other behaviours include certain skills which become a habit over a period such as playing guitar, cycling etc. Yet some other behaviours involve complex activities like repairing a car. Activities such as landing on the moon, flying a fighter plane, rock climbing etc. are some of the examples of highly complex behaviour.

- *The factors influencing behaviour are of different kinds. Behaviour is influenced by two large sets of factors:*

- i) Those belonging to the individual; and
- ii) Those belonging to the environment.

Factors pertaining to an individual can be categorized under physiological (biological needs such as hunger, thirst etc.) and psychological (ideas, opinions, attitudes etc.).

The environmental factors include physical surroundings, family and friends, the larger society and even the overall cultural and social background.

- *Individual differences*

Behaviour also varies from one person to the other as well as from one group of people to the other group of people. People differ in their physiological and bodily conditions, in their past experiences, in their abilities, in their background etc. It is therefore, natural that if ten people are put in same situation, each person's behaviour differs from that of others, in some respects or in some degrees.

- *Behaviour also shows similarities*

Though behaviour differs from person to person but this does not mean that all people differ from all others, at all times, and in all situations. There is also a considerable degree of similarity in behaviour among people. For instance, if a particle of dust falls into a person's eye, he/she tries to remove it. This type of behaviour is universally found.

- *Behaviour is always purposeful and goal directive*

Human behaviour is always purposeful and one's actions are always directed towards some goal or the other. A boy sitting and studying suddenly gets up and takes a glass of water. Here, the goal is to have a glass of water and the purpose is to quench his thirst. On the other hand, a boy is sitting and studying and feels cold. He gets up and switches off the fan. Here the goal is to switch off the fan and the purpose is to avoid the discomfort of cold. So, all our behaviours can be categorized under:

- i) Approach behaviour (Positive goal directed) or
- ii) Avoidance behaviour (Negative goal avoidance)

- *Behaviour is changeable to a large extent*

It was mentioned earlier that a number of factors influence behaviour. In view of this, it is possible to change behaviour by modifying these factors. It is this changeability which enables a bad man to become a good man and a good man to become a bad man. It is again this very characteristic which helps people to adjust to new surroundings. These changes are the results of one's practice or experiences (learning).

- *Behaviour also shows stability*

Though emphasis has been laid on the possible changes in behaviour, it must be mentioned that life is not always full of all sorts of changes. While behaviour changes, at the same time there is also a certain stability in behaviour. It does not change with every change in the environment nor do all forms of behaviour change. Human behaviour shows a lot of stability. For instance, you may still find your grandmother preferring old ideas and old ways of life, though she is living in an ultra modern society.

- *Behaviour is integrated*

As already mentioned, behaviour is influenced by a number of factors and a variety of purposes. Every human being has physiological, psychological, personal and social purposes. He/she has also been the subject of different learning experiences. In spite of all this, behaviour always shows an order and a hierarchy of purposes. Every individual behaves as a total person and this process of the organisation of different purposes, different learnings and different influencing factors results in an integration of behaviour.

Thus, an individual put in different situations, still shows certain characteristic ways and styles of behaviour which help us to understand and predict his/her behaviour. We often say, Ram is a pleasant person. Gobind is an unpleasant person, Krishna is a sociable person and so on. Psychologists use the term Personality to describe this process of integration. The greater the degree of integration in a person's behaviour, the more effective her/his behaviour is likely to be. It can therefore be appreciated that behaviour is a complex phenomenon and studying behaviour is not an easy task.

1.3 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

The origin of psychology dates back to 1870s. The term 'Psychology' is derived from two Greek words; *Psyche* means "soul or breath" and *Logos* means

“knowledge or study” (study or investigation of something). The word ‘Psychology’ was not in common use before the nineteenth century, and the field of psychology did not actually become an independent science until the middle of the nineteenth century.

Psychology emerged as an independent academic discipline in 1879, when a German Professor Wilhelm Wundt established the first psychology laboratory at the University of Leipzig, Germany. According to Bolles (1993), Wundt was a medical doctor by training and early in his career, he was fortunate to work with some of the great physiologists of the nineteenth century. The intellectual roots of psychology lie at the union of philosophy and physiology. Wundt is traditionally recognised as the founder, or father of the modern psychology. The year of 1879 is seen as a remarkable year when psychology finally emerged as a unique field. Prior to Wundt, it was not possible to major in psychology, because there were no official psychologists or psychology departments. Wundt started studying the structure of *mind* which referred the immediate (conscious) experience, the contents and processes of subjective experience such as sensations, thoughts, feelings and emotions.

Thus, formally, psychology was recognised as an independent science in 1879.

Self Assessment Questions (SAQ-I)

Fill in the following blanks:

- 1) established the first psychology laboratory at the University of Leipzig, Germany.
- 2) includes all actions and responses of organisms that can be measured directly or indirectly.
- 3) held the opinion that there are no essential differences between human and animal behaviour
- 4) Human behaviour is always purposeful and one's actions are always directed towards.....
- 5) Modern era has defined Psychology as

1.4 PSYCHOLOGY: AS A SCIENCE

Psychology has been defined as a science of behaviour. But is it a science like physics, chemistry, biology and zoology or some thing different? In this section we will look at some of the definitions of science. We will also discuss the nature and characteristics of science and understand psychology, as a science. Let us look at the following definitions of science:

- Science is a systematized body of knowledge gathered through carefully observing and measuring events (Morgan et al.,1986).
- Science is an approach to knowledge, based on systematic observation (Lahey,1998)

The sole aim of science is to classify, understand, and unify the objects and phenomena of the material world. By using a combination of accurate observation and experimentation, logic and intuition, scientists seek to understand the rules that govern all levels of the natural universe.

Let us now look at the characteristics of science.

The observation of events are systematized in various ways, but mainly by classifying and establishing general principles and laws to describe and predict new events as accurately as possible. Psychology studies behaviour in the same way as the other sciences study their subject matter and therefore shares a number of features with them. In common with other sciences, psychology, as a science, has the following characteristics, as described by Morgan et al. (1986).

- *Empirical observation*

Like other disciplines of science, the discipline of psychology, rests on experiment and observation, rather than on argument, opinion, or belief.

- *Systematic approach and theory*

Data from observations and experiments are essential to science in order “to make some sense” in helping us to understand events. The scientist tries to find a limited number of principles which will summarize the data economically. Like other scientific theories, psychology also follows a systematic procedure of observation, data collection, analysis and interpretation.

- *Measurement*

Another distinguishing feature of many sciences is measurement, defined as assignment of numbers to objects or events according to certain rules. Physics is ranked highest (most scientific) among the sciences as it has developed the most precise measurements.

- *Definition of terms*

Careful definition of terms is essential to clear thinking in science. The procedure in psychology is to define concepts by relating them to observable behaviour (operational definition). When we define a concept operationally, we define it in terms of measurable and observable operations. For example, the concepts of length, height in physics, and concepts like intelligence, motivation, personality in psychology are defined in terms of observable operations, which can be performed to measure them. However, psychology cannot measure many behaviours such as bravery, friendship, love, beauty etc. as these cannot be defined operationally. The above characteristics are common to all sciences including psychology. However, psychology is a different type of science (Behavioural science). In physics or chemistry, researchers investigate processes and events which remain stable and constant to a large extent. This makes it possible to measure and predict with a reasonable degree of accuracy. But it is not the case with human behaviour, which is highly complex, not easily controllable, and appears to be much more unpredictable than the reactions of physical and chemical substances. Whereas other sciences investigate things around man, psychology studies man himself. The methods used in psychological research include observation, interviews, psychological testing, laboratory experimentation, and statistical analysis.

Thus, psychology is categorized under the youngest group of scientific inquiry, the ‘Social/Behavioural Sciences’, which also includes subjects like anthropology,

economics, education, geography, history, linguistics, sociology etc. (Rush, 1972). The first group of sciences are the 'Physical Sciences', which include subjects like physics, chemistry etc. Next is the 'Biological / Life Sciences' that include such subjects as biology, botany, zoology etc. The application of knowledge to practical problems is an *art*; it is the skill or knack for doing things which is acquired by study, practice and special experience. Since principles and laws of psychology are applied to solve human problems in a number of situation (families, schools, organisations, environment) as well as treating behaviour disorders and emotional problems, it is also an art.

Self Assessment Questions (SAQ-II)

State whether the following are 'True' or 'False':

- 1) The 'Biological / Life Sciences' that include subjects such as anthropology, economics, education, history, linguistics, sociology etc.
- 2) Like other disciplines of science, the discipline of psychology, rests on experiment and observation, rather than on argument, opinion, or belief.
- 3) The sole aim of science is to classify, understand, and unify the objects and phenomena of the material world.
- 4) Psychology has been defined as a science of behaviour.....
- 5) Psychology is categorized under the physical sciences group.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

It can be summed up from the above discussion that the psychology emerged as an independent academic discipline from philosophy. In this unit, the term 'Psychology' was defined and the nature as well as its historical development was also discussed. Lastly, characteristics of psychology as a science were also discussed in this unit.

1.6 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Discuss the origin and evolution of psychology.
- 2) Enumerate the nature and characteristics of behaviour.
- 3) Describe the historical development of psychology.
- 4) Describe the characteristics of science.
- 5) Can we consider psychology as science? Support your answer with appropriate justifications.

1.7 GLOSSARY

Behaviour : Observable actions and responses of human beings and animals. Behaviour also includes not so directly observable activities, such as, inner mental (cognitive) processes (e.g. feelings and thoughts) as long as they can be observed and measured in a systematic way.

Behaviourism	: Emphasises that psychology should focus on behaviour rather than on mind.
Critical thinking	: Critical thinking means reasoned judgments (logical and well thought out judgments).
Pseudo-psychology	: Any unfounded system that superficially resembles psychology.
Psychology	: The science of human behaviour and cognitive (mental) processes.
Science	: Science is a systematised body of knowledge gathered through carefully observing and measuring events.

1.8 ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS (SAQ)

SAQ-I

- 1) Wilhelm Wundt
- 2) Behaviour
- 3) Watson
- 4) Some goal or the other
- 5) A science of behaviour

SAQ-II

- 1) False
- 2) True
- 3) True
- 4) True
- 5) False

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