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CHAPTER-1

Introduction

Introduction:

Any discipline is difficult to define because it evolves continuously and the range of phenomena it studies cannot be captured by any one definition each of us is curious to know and comprehend our ownself as well as about others.

It includes various aspect of environment around us—the objects, persons, natural events and ever changing environment in which we live. Psychology as a discipline, is also concerned with these curiosities. It has evolved as a systematic discipline out of the curiosities of mankind which is in existence ever since the evolution of man on earth. Primitive people used to depend largely upon superstitious beliefs to explain the term 'what', 'why,' and 'how' of behavioural events of man.

But with the advancement of knowledge, such superstitious beliefs gradually started fading away and scientific notions began to replace them.

Definition of psychology:

Psychology is relatively a recent science which has separated from philosophy and metaphysics. It has been variously defined over the years reflecting changing concepts about the subject. The word psychology has been derived from two Greek words 'psyche' meaning 'soul' and 'logos' meaning 'Science'. Hence, psychology was a study of the soul. But later psychologists could not remain satisfied with this definition. To them soul is ungraspable for man as it can neither be visualized nor can be described in concrete terms. They opined that in order to understand the nature of the organism, the mental activities of the organism should be the main concern of psychology. Hence study of mind was proposed as the definition of psychology. Wilhelm Wundt established a laboratory at Leipzig University in Germany and introduced the term conscious experience to define psychology. The term conscious experience refers to the awareness of mental activities of the organism. However, many psychologists considered Wundtian thought as despicable on the ground of scientific criterion of objectivity. Psychologists insisted on the term behaviour as the most suitable domain of psychological enquiry. According to them the term behaviour refers to the activities of the organism. They defined Psychology

as the science of behaviour. Accordingly Psychology is defined as— “A systematic science of experience and behavior both” or more clearly— “Psychology is a systematic science of the study of behavior interpreted in terms of experience.”

Development of psychology as a modern discipline :

Psychology has a short history because it has emerged as an organized body of scientific enquiry recently. The most early people were not able to understand and predict natural events objectively. The beliefs of ancient Greeks brought some notable changes in ideas about the universe that people hold. People began to realize the efficiency of reasoning in calculating and understanding the natural events. Such beliefs were the basic thoughts of western thinkers and it is believed that modern psychology also began in western philosophical thoughts.

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) promoted the idea of elementalism meaning thereby that anything complex maybe understood through reducing it to elements.

The view of Plato (420-348 B.C.) emphasized the rationalism as opposed to empiricism. This view lay emphasis on reasoning. For him, knowledge is derived from reason which is as valid as the knowledge itself.

Rene Descarte (1596-1650) is another important figure who influenced the development of modern psychology. He proposed that mind and body are separate but interact with each other. His emphasis on induction and reasoning influenced psychology in moving towards empirical concepts of psychological facts. His contributions are considered significant in founding of modern psychology as an empirical science.

Later philosophers also made significant contribution in founding of psychology as a systematic body of knowledge. They advocated the concept of ‘dualism’ i.e. mind and body are two distinct aspects of human being.

Some British philosophers such as John Locke and David Hume come forward to protest against dualism and launched a movement known as empiricism. A movement, called associationism was derived from empiricism. This movement had a profound impact on founding psychology as a prosperous science.

The work of Charles Darwin brought revolutionary changes in the area of genetics. His theory helped to establish that much can be known about human behavior by studying the behavior of other organisms. This paved the way for psychologists to conduct experiments using animals.

Advances made in the field of physiology gave rise to a new field of experimental psychology called psychophysics. W. H. Weber (1795-1878) and G.T. Fechner (1801-1857) contributed a lot in evolving psycho-physical methods.