**Lecture 2:Major Perspectives in Psychology**

**1. Introduction**

Psychology is a relatively young science with its experimental roots in the 19th century, compared, for example, to human physiology, which dates much earlier. Anyone interested in exploring issues related to the mind generally did so in a philosophical context prior to the 19th century. Two men, working in the 19th century, are generally credited as being the founders of psychology as a science and academic discipline that was distinct from philosophy. Their names were Wilhelm Wundt and William James.

**2. Early Schools of Psychology**

There are five early schools of psychology:

**2.1. Structuralism**: structuralism views psychology as a study of structure of mind. It is an expansion of Wundt’s ideas by his student named Edward Titchener (1867-1927). Titchener is the founder of structuralism. The goal of structuralists was to find out the units or elements, which make up the mind such as sensations, images, and feelings. The best-known method used by them was introspection ―looking inward into our consciousness.

* Analyzing mental structure alone was found to serve little purpose in helping humans deal with the environment. Hence, a new school of thought emerged, which is functionalism.

**2.2. Functionalism:** functionalism views psychology as a study of *function of the mind.* The founder of this school is William James (1848-1910). Unlike Wundt and Titchener, James focused on how the mind allows people to function in the real world: how people work, play, and adapt to their surroundings. He developed many research methods other than introspection including questionnaires, mental tests and objective descriptions of behaviour. Generally, according to functionalists, psychological processes are adaptive. They allow humans to survive and to adapt successfully to their surroundings.

* Examining human mind in terms of its structural elements and functions were, however, found to be simplistic to understand the complex human being. It was believed that human mind is more than the sum of sensations as well as adaptive functions. Hence, a new school of thought emerged to examine mind in a holistic manner-Gestalt Psychology.

**2.3. Gestalt psychology**: Gestalt psychology views psychology as a study of the whole mind. Max Wertheimer and his colleagues founded this school of thought in Germany in the 20th century. Gestalt psychologists argued that the mind is not made up of combinations of elements. The German word ***"gestalt"*** refers to ***form, whole, configuration or pattern.*** According to them, the mind should be thought of as a result of the whole pattern of sensory activity and the relationships and organizations within their pattern. In brief, the gestalt psychologists acknowledge *consciousness.* They held that “the whole”(mind) is greater than the sum of its parts (images, sensations, and feelings).

* Generally what is common to all the three schools of thought is the fact that they all try to examine the human mind, which is an internal, non-visible, and hidden experience of human beings. Although it could be useful to understand this experience, it was believed that this subjective, private experience can’t be observable, measurable, and hence can’t be studied scientifically. This has led to the emergence of a new paradigm of thought about psychology called behaviourism.

**2.4. Behaviourism:** behaviourists view psychology as a study of observable and measurable behaviours. John B. Watson is the founder of behaviourism. Other proponents include E. Thorndike and F. Skinner. For Watson, psychology was the study of observable and measurable behaviour and nothing more about hidden mental processes. According to Watson, we cannot define consciousness any better than we can define the soul; we cannot locate it or measure it and, therefore, it cannot be the object of scientific study. Watson believed that all behaviours are learned but not inherited and learners are passive and reactive (they are not initiating their learning but they respond when the environment stimulates them).

* All the four schools of thought discussed so far were focusing on human mind and behaviour as conscious experiences. But, an opposition to this assertion came from a physician in Vienna who, after working with so many patients, realized that human functioning was basically explained by more powerful forces which were not accessible to our consciousness.Hence, this led to the formulation of a new school of thought in psychology called Psychoanalysis.

**2.5. Psychoanalysis:** psychology studies about the components of the unconscious part of the human mind. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) is the founder of this school of thought. He was the most controversial and most popular in the study of behaviour and mental processes. As a physician, Sigmund Freud became convinced that some of the physical illnesses of his patients didn’t have medical or bodily causes; but non-physical or emotional causes. He called these kinds of illnesses as “hysteria” or conversion reaction to indicate the conversion of emotional problems into bodily problems. He also underscored that conflicts and emotional traumas that had occurred in early childhood can be too threatening to be remembered consciously and therefore they become hidden or unconscious and then will remain to affect later behaviour.The unconscious which is the subject matter of psychoanalysis contains hidden wishes, passions, guilty secrets, unspeakable yearnings, and conflict between desire and duty. We are not aware of our unconscious urges and thoughts and they make themselves known in dreams, slip of the tongue, apparent accidents and even jokes. Freud used clinical case studies (hypnosis and Dream analysis) as a method.

**3. Modern Schools of Psychology**

Modern psychologists tend to examine human behaviour through several views. The views that predominate today are psychodynamic, behavioural, humanistic, cognitive, biological, and sociocultural perspectives. These views reflect different questions about human behaviour, different assumptions about how the mind works, and different kinds of explanations why people do and what they do. The schools are presented below.

**Psychodynamic perspective:**It has its origins in Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis, but many other psychodynamic theories exist. This perspective emphasizes the unconscious dynamics within the individual such as inner forces, conflicts or instinctual energy. The psychodynamic approach emphasizes the influence of unconscious mental behaviour on everyday behaviour,the role of childhood experiences in shaping adult personality and the role of intrapersonal conflict in determining human behaviour. So, the psychodynamic perspective tries to dig below the surface of a person’s behaviour to get into unconscious motives.

**Behavioural Perspective:**It emphasizes the role learning experiences play in shaping the behaviour of an organism. It is concerned with how the environment affects the person’s actions. Behaviourists focus on environmental conditions (e.g. rewards, and punishments) that maintain or discourage specific behaviours. The behavioural perspective is sometimes called the *“black box” approach in psychology* because it treats the mind as less useful in understanding human behaviour and focus on what goes into and out of the box, but not on the processes that take place inside.

**Humanistic Perspective:** According to this perspective, human behaviour is not determined either by unconscious dynamics or the environment. Rather it emphasizes the uniqueness of human beings and focuses on human values and subjective experiences. This perspective places greater importance on the individual’s free will. The goal of humanistic psychology was helping people to express themselves creatively and achieve their full potential or self-actualization (developing the human potential to its fullest).

**Cognitive Perspective:**It emphasizes what goes on in people’s minds: how people reason, remember, understand language, solve problems, explain experiences and form beliefs. This perspective is concerned about the mental processes. The most important contribution of this perspective has been to show how people’s thoughts and explanations affect their actions, feelings and choices.

**Biological Perspective:**It focuses on studying how bodily events or functioning of the body affects behaviour, feelings, and thoughts. It holds that the brain and the various brain chemicals affect psychological processes such as learning, performance, perception of reality, the experience of emotions, etc. This perspective underscores that biology and behaviour interact in a complex way. It also emphasizes the idea that we are physical beings who evolved over a long time and that genetic heritage can predispose us to behaving in a certain way.

**Socio-cultural Perspective:**It focuses on the social and cultural factors that affect human behaviour. For instance, social psychologists examine how group membership affects attitudes and behaviours, why authority and other people (like spouse, lovers, friends, bosses, parents, and strangers) affect each of us. Cultural psychologists also examine how cultural rules and values (both explicit and unspoken) affect people’s development, behaviour and feelings. This perspective holds that humans are both the products and the producers of culture and our behaviour always occurs in some cultural contexts.