

## *Guest Editorial*

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### REMEMBERING SIGMUND FREUD ON HIS 150TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was one of the world's most influential thinkers who had an impact on art, literature and social thinking. He proposed radically new model of the human mind. He was the inventor of modern psychology and psychoanalysis, and changed the way we all think today. Drawing upon both nineteenth-century science and nineteenth-century romanticism, Freud created a description of the mind that emphasizes the major role played by unconscious drives. His theories, which struck many contemporaries as sordid and threatening, represent a recent secularization of the old hierarchical conception of mind. Freud theories were blow against human vanity, like Copernican cosmology that displaced humankind from the center of the astronomical universe, like Darwin's evolutionary theory that removed humankind from the center of the biological universe. As Darwin destroyed the basic opposition between human and animal by placing human beings within biological continuum, Freud similarly destroyed the traditional basic opposition between sanity and madness by locating normality on a continuum.

Sigmund Freud was born on May 6, 1856, in Freiberg, Moravia, now in the Czech Republic. His father was an acquisitive textile businessman who married thrice and was forty when he had Freud. His mother Amalia Nathansohn was twenty years younger than his father and his third wife. Freud's childhood was very traumatic. When Freud turned four, his family had to move to Vienna, Austria. This was the initial stage of the Hapsburg Empire's liberal era. A lot of religious restrictions and undue taxes targeted on the Jewish community were abolished. The new generation of Jews, including Freud greeted such a change with lot of optimism. Freud was a bright student and always placed at the top of his class. In 1873, Freud entered the University of Vienna to initially study law. However, as Freud would put it later, his 'greed for knowledge' made him change his major to medicine. His innate desire to study nature and resolve unexplained mysteries in the contemporary science gradually surfaced. The philosophical-scientific aspects of the mind always intrigued him. But he became gradually interested in neurology and physiology as well. In his three year at Vienna University Freud began his research in central nervous system in the physiological lab under the direction of German Physician Ernst Wilhelm Von Brucke. Freud's research was based on close observations and scientific skepticism. In 1881 after completing a year compulsory military service he received his medical degree. After he received his degree he remained at the university as a demonstrator in the physiological laboratory. From 1882 to 1885 Freud worked at the General Hospital, and experimented among others with cocaine, also

using it himself. He devoted himself to psychiatry, dermatology, and nervous diseases. He went to Paris in 1885 to study under Jean Martin Charcot at the Salpêtrière Hospital. After returning to Vienna Freud married Martha Bernays; they had six children. In 1886 Freud opened his own private clinic. He shifted to Berggasse in 1886, where his family lived until 1938.

The man who would become an atheist was brought up in religious surroundings. Freud was of the opinion that the human body, including the mind, could be rationally explained through the scientific methods. Religion, in Freud's vision, was simply a poor cover up for failed human relationships. He expressed this idea in his 1927 book, *The Future of an Illusion*, and extending his arguments from individual to society in his long 1930 essay, *Civilization and Its Discontents*. He wrote, "To be truly civilized, humanity had to be set free of its delusions and construct a better order than religion could give it". Freud's atheism was not shaken by personal tragedies, though he experienced plenty of them. The proud father of six children, Freud saw two of his sons sent to fight in World War I and lost his daughter Sophie to the flu epidemic shortly thereafter. Cancer of the mouth plagued him for most of his adult life, and led to over 30 operations. Freud's Jewish heritage made him a target under Hitler's regime, and ultimately forced him to flee with his family to London in 1938. After Hitler's seizure of power, psychoanalytic work came to an end in Germany, and Freud's books were burnt in Berlin. His views also were condemned in the USSR. He died of throat cancer three weeks after the start of World War II in 1939. His death on September 23, 1939 was eased by mercy killing – Freud asked his doctor to give him a morphine overdose.

His work can be divided into four stages :

- The exploration of neurosis (1886-1895)
- Self-analysis (1895–1899)
- Id psychology (1900–1914)
- Ego psychology (1914–1939)

Freud turned to the issue of psychology after reading in 1884 about Breuer's treatment of hysteria by hypnosis. Breuer cured hysterical patients by encouraging them to 'talk out' their past under hypnosis. In 1895 they coauthored a book on Hysteria, a vivid account of the treatment of 'Anna O', a hysterical patient. He faced resistance and even ridicule for some of his bizarre ideas until a group of young doctors began to follow him. It led to the creation of the Viennese Psycho-Analytic Society and then later in 1910, the formation of the International Psycho-Analytic Association. Many of his ardent supporters later objected to psychoanalytical theories and they even set up their own schools – as in the cases of Alfred Adler (Individual Psychology) and C.G.Jung (Analytical Psychology). Freud's self-analysis started in the mid 1890s. Freud once said, "My life is interesting only if it is related to psychoanalysis". His discoveries during his first stage of self-analysis have been included in two of his main books: *The Interpretation of Dreams and the Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. His technique for self-analysis was that of free association and the data derived from his own dreams. But he didn't stop there: Freud also made a collection of his memories, of speaking or spelling mistakes, slips concerning verse and patients' names and he allowed these clues to lead him from one idea to the other, through the "usual roundabouts" of free association. In 1902 Freud was appointed *Ausserordentlicher Professor*, and in 1905 appeared *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. In 1909 Freud traveled with Carl Jung in the United

States, lecturing and meeting among others American philosopher and psychologist William James. Jung's close collaboration with Freud lasted until 1913. By the beginning of the 1920s, Freud's writing had given rise to several schools of psychoanalysis. He published *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929), all dealing with large cultural issues.

Freud's discovery of Oedipus complex is depicted in a historic letter he wrote to his friend, Fliess, "I have found, in my own case too, the phenomenon of being in love with my mother and jealous of my father, and I now consider it a universal event in early childhood, even if not so early as in children who have been made hysterical". The idea that our conscious experiences originate from unconscious processing of sensory inputs, seems quite reasonable to us today. But it unsettled many Victorian scientists who assumed that inference and thinking, as well as ethics and morality, require consciousness. To them the idea that thinking could go on without consciousness seemed to undermine the moral or spiritual superiority of Man. Freud postulated that unconscious consisted of the impulses of the 'id' including biological desires and needs (hunger, rage and sex), the defense mechanisms and neurotic processes of 'ego', and all the mass of unwanted or unacceptable material that had been repressed by the 'superego' which is internalized norms, morality and taboo. The ego mediates between the two and may include or give rise to the sense of self. Although in his early writings Freud equated the ego with the sense of self, he later began to portray it more as a set of psychic functions such as reality-testing, defense, synthesis of information, intellectual functioning and memory. Freud believed the

drives of the id work according to the pleasure principle, requiring immediate gratification or release without concern for external exigencies. The super-ego acts as the conscience, maintaining our sense of morality and the prohibition of taboos. The effects of all these unconscious feelings, images or forbidden wishes might then appear in dreams or cause neurotic symptoms.

Freud completed his last book, *Moses and Monotheism* in 1939. In it he dismissed Jung's concept of a 'collective unconscious' and offered instead his own idea of 'archaic inheritance'. He always distinguished his ideas from medicine and biology and was especially interested in establishing a scientific basis for his theories. He often turned to biological models in order to highlight the experimental basis for his subjective observations. Some psychologists treat Freud's writings as a sacred text – if Freud said it, it must be true. Freud frequently referred to his work and to psychology as a 'new science', although his theories have been questioned by many scholars. The knowledge of brain's electrical behavior has brought new views in the interpretation of his theories. But Freud revolutionized Western thoughts more than any other thinker in the past century. Freud's aim in life was to 'agitate the sleep of mankind'. He succeeded in his aim, founding a new field of psychology and creating a new, scientific conception of the individual. Though much of his scientific work and many of his observations and theories have been debunked by the modern psychologists, Freud singly initiated a new, exciting, dynamic, and often threatening theory of the mind and of the world, a theory which to this day, even 150 years after his birth, has been taken to the hearts of scientists, and other intellectuals as well.

SANJAY KUMAR SOOD

*Department of Physiology,  
A.I.I.M.S., New Delhi – 110 029*