

Sigmund Freud's Journey through the Unconscious: Unveiling the Secrets of Psychosexual Development

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Abstract

Sigmund Freud has deeply meditated on the psychosexual development of any child. In his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud destroys the naïve picture of a child as innocent creature without any sexual desire. He considers neonate as a package of uninhibited desires. He proves that the view sexuality arrives for the first time during puberty is wrong. Rather, the infantile sexuality is present right from the birth. The child is born with these feelings. Sexual life is largely dependent on the infantile sexual development. The reason for the infantile sexuality is, what Freud calls, 'infantile amnesia' (34). Sexual lives of humans are affected grossly by this amnesia of first six to eight years of childhood. The infantile amnesia causes humans to put relatively less value to early childhood sexual processes that play a very important role in the development of sexual life.

Key Words: psychosexual, psychosexual, sexuality, infantile amnesia etc.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) is considered a revolutionary Austrian psychologist. He has made huge contribution to psychoanalysis. His books like *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), *Totem and Taboo* (1912-13) and numerous essays are the outcome of his long reflection on the mysteries of human mind. He brings facts from different disciplines like anthropology, literature, psychology and medical sciences together to understand human civilization. He seeks answers to the questions regarding religion and civilization in, what he calls, 'primal scenes'. In his theory of psychoanalysis, he lays emphasis on unconscious which is 'primarily the storehouse of instinctual desires and needs' (Thurschwell 4). According to Freud, human

mind is divided into Id (Unconscious), Ego (Conscious) and Superego (Conscience). Human psyche is a result of the ever-present tussle or conflict between these three layers of the mind. The ego has to work as a mediator between id and superego. This puts the ego under pressure relentlessly. As a result, the psychological condition is always affected by two principles, the Pleasure Principle and the Reality Principle. The Pleasure principle relates to id or libido i.e. instinct whereas the reality principle is associated with ego or the conscious mind. Superego stands for the external authority, law and cultural and societal norms that instruct ego to inhibit those pleasure seeking wishes like sexual urges which are socially prohibited or impossible to realize. In his *The Interpretations of Dreams* (1900), Freud argues that these wishes can be fulfilled only in dreams. Dreams are the symbolic representations of the unfulfilled wishes repressed in the unconscious that come awake when one's ego is asleep. Humans have to adopt the reality principle, for safeguarding one's ego is more important than preservation of the species. Every individual has a natural instinct to preserve his species through transmission of genes through sex. However, it has also to protect himself. The child, in the course of his childhood, learns how to repress his natural instinct in order to be aligned with society. Freud is usually accused for putting more emphasis on childhood libido.

In his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud destroys the naïve picture of a child as innocent creature without any sexual desire. He considers neonate as a package of uninhibited desires. He proves that the view sexuality arrives for the first time during puberty is wrong. Rather, the infantile sexuality is present right from the birth. The child is born with these feelings. Sexual life is largely dependent on the infantile sexual development. The reason for the infantile sexuality is, what Freud calls, 'infantile amnesia' (34). Sexual lives of humans are affected grossly by this amnesia of first six to eight years of childhood. The infantile amnesia causes humans to put relatively less value to early childhood sexual processes that play a very important role in the development of sexual life. The infantile sexuality becomes clearly apparent when child reaches age 3 or 4. The child's sexual development begins with the learning of sexual inhibition. The sexual inhibition is learned through education and, particularly in Freud's words, 'psychic forces' as 'loathing, shame, and moral and aesthetic ideal demands' (Freud 35), which are the upshots of our civilization. It is through sublimation that the sexual aims are deviated to other socially

accepted aims during childhood. As a result, the infantile sexuality becomes latent; only to reappear in its new form during puberty. Infantile sexuality is, in Freud's view, autoerotic i.e. achieving sexual satisfaction to and with one's own body. Thumb and breast sucking are the manifest activities of child in the oral stage when mouth is an erogenous zone. The aim of infantile sexuality, according to Freud, is gratification of erogenous zones. Another erogenous zone that Freud emphasizes is 'Anal Zone' which is also a source of sexual pleasure. Child retains bodily waste i.e. excrement in order to generate 'violent muscular contractions' (Freud 40). Releasing the excreta from anus gives pleasure to the child. The third erogenous zone that Freud explains in the essay is the genital zone. Children learn about their genitals through their accidental excitation when the penis and clitoris is rubbed by towel in everyday life. It gives them pleasure and thus they learn to masturbate. Freud believes that, 'the sexual activities of this erogenous zone, which belongs to the real genitals, are the beginning of the later normal sexual life' (41). After the genital phase in the infantile sexuality, child goes through latency period during which self-gratification disappears and the infantile sexual activities are forgotten.

Puberty brings infantile sexuality to its normal mode. The infantile sexuality aims at autoerotic gratification through pleasure, whereas puberty aims at 'discharging of the sexual products' (55). There is an external and internal reproductive growth in children. Children become capable of reproduction. The feeling of love is also germinated during this phase. According to Freud, usually a mature elder of the opposite sex is the first love object during puberty. The resolution of Oedipus complex leads the normal development of the child. Freud has given relatively less attention to puberty and phallic genital stage. He views childhood as bedrock for normal or abnormal human development. His concept of Oedipus complex is also the result of his curiosity in infantile sexuality. Freud bases the idea of Oedipus complex on Sophocles' play *Oedipus the Rex* (429 BC) (A play based on Greek Myth of King Oedipus who unknowingly kills his father and marries his mother). Scholars have different opinions regarding this complex. In Freud's view, every child has mother as his first libidinal wish. The male child desires to have sex with his mother. However, the child learns that father is a great obstacle between his love object and him. Consequently, he starts loathing his father. It creates an unconscious death wish for his father. Nonetheless, he

also has a fear for his father as a powerful authority. Here, father stands as a superego that paves the way to, what Freud calls, 'Castration Complex', in which child suffers a covert fear that his penis would be castrated by his father. Soon he abandons the idea to have sex with his mother and kill his father. Therefore, he begins to identify with his father. This identification with the image of father and abandonment of libidinal wish for mother brings the resolution of Oedipus complex as male child learns to get someone like mother in future. In delineating female Oedipus complex, Freud states that it is reverse with female child. The moment she realizes that she does not have penis like her mother, she begins to hate her mother. Believing that she is the one who is responsible for her plight, she turns towards her father. This causes, in Freudian term, penis envy. She feels that she is castrated and desires to have penis and realizes that her father has it. However, realizing that her father can't give penis, she desires to have a gift of a baby from her father to replace the wish to have penis.

Freud's lack of understanding of feminine sexuality is highlighted by Pamela Thurschwell in her book *Sigmund Freud* (2000). She points out that it is quite comprehensible that boy stops desiring his mother and identifies with his father due to fear of castration. But Freud could not answer 'How does the little girl give up desiring her mother and begin desiring her father? What if she does not give up desiring the mother?(Thurschwell 58). Sean Homer has also raised the issues regarding the female Oedipus complex. According to Homer, Freud 'could not then explain why a girl should give up the father as a love object and re-identify with the mother' (97). Freud could not answer these questions and feminine sexuality remained enigmatic for him. He is famously known to have asked Marie Bonaparte after his long research on feminine sexuality 'What does woman want?' He really did not understand it. Despite all this, according to Freud, in infancy, children must desire the opposite sex so that they achieve normal course of development during their sexual life.

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