

## **Sigmund Freud's Psychic Apparatus Theory:**

### **A Study of the Protagonist in Saul Bellow's Novel 'Herzog'**

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#### **Abstract**

“Psychology is the scientific study of the behaviour of humans..... The term ‘behaviour’ refers to both covert observable actions and covert observable mental processes and states such as perception, thought, reasoning, problem-solving, emotions and feelings (Encyclopaedia Britannica, P. 470) If the field of psychology is to study the mental processes and activities, art and literature give verbal expression to those mental and psychic processes. Sigmund Freud's Psychic theories have encouraged the literary artists to probe deeper into human psyche and thereby presenting the ideas, ideals, thoughts and feelings which are of human interest and universal significance. The present article aims to highlight how the Sigmund Freud's Psychic apparatus (Id, Ego and Super-ego) exercise a controlling and dominating influence on the personality, behaviour and character of the Protagonist Moses E. Herzog, depicted and portrayed by Saul Bellow, in his best known novel ‘Herzog.’

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**Keywords:-** Psychology, Psychic Apparatus, Id, Ego, Super-ego, Saul Bellow, Herzog

**Introduction:-**

Saul Bellow (10 June 1915 – 5 April 2005), a Canadian – American writer, is one of the greatest novelists of post-war American fiction. For his literary achievements, he was awarded The Pulitzer Prize, The Nobel Prize for Literature and The National Medal of Arts. He is the first to receive National Book Award for Fiction three times. His Works abound in man's encounter with maddening, materialistic, mundane, money minded and misleading modern Civilization. His Novel 'Herzog' (1964) is one of the most famous survivor novels, composed in large part of letters from the protagonist Moses E Herzog. About the novel, Saul Bellow himself said "Herzog is a realistic word and psychological novel."<sup>1</sup> It deals with midlife crisis and mental strife and struggle of Moses E. Herzog who is a professor of Political Philosophy and ever in Quest of the self identity in the harsh and hostile environment, the stifling atmosphere, the suffocating milieu of the modern age of anxiety and angst. He is particularly in the words of Gordon L. Harper, "the prisoner of a shameless and important privacy in whom reason and desire, romantic self knowledge and understanding of contingency are always at war."<sup>2</sup> The character portrayal of the protagonist Moses is suggestive enough to exemplify the identity crisis in modern man's life which is inflicted with the ailment of psychic and mental disturbance and instability due to the imbalance in Id, Ego and Super-ego, three constituent elements of human psyche and personality. The novelist has also substantiated, through the character sketch of Moses, the fact that a man who makes a reliable and convincing balance between Id, Ego and Super-ego lives a happy and peaceful life. The more a man's Ego develops, the more perfect he becomes.

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### Psychic Apparatus:-

The term psychic apparatus refers to a Central, dominant theoretical Freudian structural model of psyche wherein:

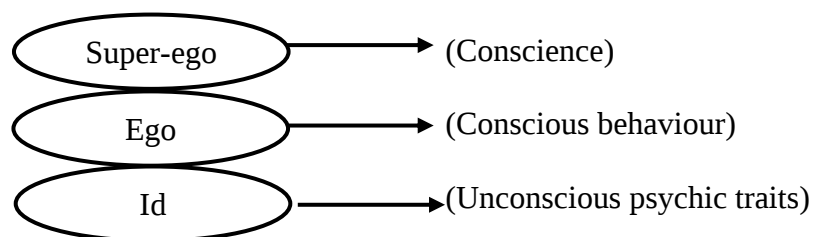
We assume that mental life is the function of an apparatus to which we ascribe the characteristics of being extended in space and of being made up of several portions (Id, Ego and Super-ego).<sup>3</sup>

Sigmund Freud forwarded the idea that the anatomy of our personality and behaviour is built around three unified and interrelated systems – Id, Ego and Super-ego – having their relative positions as shown in the following figure :

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<sup>1</sup> Saul Bellow “Two faces of a hostile world” New York Times book review. 26 Aug, 1956. P. 5

<sup>2</sup> Gordon L. Harper “Saul Bellow: The art of fiction, an interview” Paris review. 37, 1965, PP 48-73



The Id is the raw, wild, disorganized, immoral and instinctual driven stuff of a man's personality present from birth. It consists of such ambitions, desires, impulses, needs, tendencies, attitudes and appetites of an individual which are guided by pleasure principle. It is that unconscious psychic force which motivates a man only to gratifying his basic needs without any consideration for values, rules, regulations and right or wrong discrimination.

The Ego is the organized, well structured part of the personality which always gives a due consideration to reality guided psychic functions such as reason, common sense, tolerance, control, planning, defence, synthesis of information, intellectual functioning and memory.<sup>4</sup> It mediates between Id and Super-ego and thereby making an adjusted and balanced personality.

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- <sup>4</sup> Ruth Snowden. Teach yourself Freud. McGraw-Hill. 2006, PP 105-107.

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The Super-ego is the ethical, moral, didactic part of personality. It is too idealistic and severe to consider reality. Its main goal is perfection not pleasure. It is a decision making construct that decides what is good or bad, virtue or vice according to the standards and norms devised by society.

Psychic apparatus in the character of the protagonist Moses E. Herzog –

The novel 'Herzog' deals with the exploration of the mind or psyche of a Jewish American scholar, Moses E. Herzog, who is in his mid forties. He is in a condition of psychic disintegration and madness due to his excessive dominance of Id in his behaviour on the one hand, and the Super-ego made up of utopian dream bringing an order in the whole universe on the other.

Ego in his character does not play its role properly by making him realize the external world or reality. It is only at the end of the novel when his ego comes out to rescue him from further mental disintegration. A great deal of mental activity or inert or exert behaviour is affected by the unconscious part of mind which is  $\frac{9}{10}$  of the total. According to Psychoanalytic theory, Man's repressed, forbidden and unsatisfied impulses, desires, biological urges and wishes store automatically in the Unconscious mind and get expressed in dreams, neurotic symptoms (i.e. slippage of tongue, neurotic manners) as well as, in some literary, and artistic products and creations. Herzog is a confused intellectual who is obsessed with writing letters in order to seek coherence, to resolve the complex issues of the 1960's America, to get some sense or meaning of life. His mind is over burdened with the heavy weight of the survival of the whole humanity and abolishment of the problems of the

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mankind. The Super-ego in him resides on his Jewish heritage of severe morality. The mode of morality and code of conduct, according to him, should be based on the Jewish principles. The moral and spiritual vacuum brought about by the Upsurge in the scientific and technological revolution can be mended by the Jewish moral principles. To quote Herzog himself “The argument that scientific thought has put into disorder all considerations based on value. The peculiar idea entered my Jewish mind that we’d see about this.” (Herzog, P. 106)

He writes letters to philosophers and intellectuals like Rousseau, Freud, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Vinoba Bhave, Tolstoy, Marx, Nietzsche, Emerson, Spinoza, Friends, etc. who have made a deep influence on him and others. His letters to celebrities show his great anxiety for the survival of human beings and humanity in general. He writes to the president about tax problems, vague policies, lack of employment, racial discrimination, overpopulation, public security. He refers to charity and bums in his letter to priest. He writes to Commissioner Wilson, criticizing the inactive role of police forces in controlling the Crimes and Violence. He writes to New York Times about the burning issues of chemical pesticides, contamination of ground water, social and ethical requirements. But, surprisingly, he doesn’t mail these letters. He is only a man of ideas not of actions. Philosophies, ideas and ideals, if not acted on the ground of reality, become a psychic burden for a man. The same is with Herzog whose Super-ego doesn’t access to his Ego and there is a wide gap between Ego and Super-ego and that’s why he remains an imbalanced and neurotic personality. Herzog is imprisoned in self-imposed prison.

Herzog has strong obsession with the Id-immediate satisfaction of desires. He does not have control over his negative characteristic traits such as pride, anger, uncontrolled rationality, homosexual relationships, delusions, indecisiveness etc. He considers Gersbach and Madeleine to be the chief cause of his grief. He goes over Chicago in order to find them

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and kill them. He is so hasty in impulses that he justifies the idea of murdering them and says that:

It is not everyone who gets the opportunity to kill with a clear conscience. They had opened the way to justifiable murder. They deserved to die. He had a right to kill them. They would even know why they were dying: no explanation necessary. When he stood before them they would have to submit. Gersbach would only hang his head, with tears for himself.  
(Herzog, P. 204)

He doesn't face his problems directly, personally and on the ground of reality. He always tries to keep himself in the comfort zone of lofty ideas, and ideals inherited from Jewish traditions. Herzog's first wife Daisy is an ideal woman whose heart and mind is deeply rooted in the traditional Jewish Values and moral ideas. She performs her duty as a good wife, as in the words of Herzog "Stability, symmetry, order, contentment were Daisy's Strength" (Herzog, P. 126). Since Herzog's professional life, as an assistant professor, is so sound that their family life is running very smoothly. But he feels so bored that he leaves such a good lady in order to satisfy his animal desire of lustful love. He marries another woman named, Madeleine who is a wilful, ambitious lady in love with Herzog's Cousin Gersbach. Herzog's love affair with Sono, a Japanese woman of kind and gentle disposition, breaks up only because of her simple womanly demand in the words of Herzog. "She asked for no great sacrifices, she only demanded that I (Herzog) should be with her from time to time." (Herzog, P. 173). Sono, who sacrifices everything for Herzog, gets depressed when Herzog doesn't come to see her once at the time of her suffering from death threatening pneumonia. Similarly, He spent a night with Ramona in love relationship but doesn't sustain it for long in the Fear of the wavering Jewish moral ideas. In the words of Herzog:

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“He had two wives, there were two children: He had once been a scholar and in the closet his old valise was swelled like a scaly crocodile with his uncompleted manuscript. While he delayed, others come up with the same idea.” (Herzog, P. 207)

In the role of father, a man is supposed to be tender and caring towards his children, But Herzog doesn't fulfil this duty. He never pays sincere attention to Marco and Junie, his son and daughter respectively. In his academic and professional life also, he proves a failure. From the position of a reputed assistant professor, he turns a confused intellectual. He spends his parental property without paying his attention to safe and secure future. Thus, his passions, impulses and desires aren't lawfully controlled. They move like an uncontrolled and free horse into every direction of temporary pleasure.

The protagonist Herzog has always been wandering in the two worlds- one of Id ridden past and second of Super-ego influenced future of the lofty ideals to save humanity. But he overlooks and ignores the conscious real world of Ego in his mind. As the novel progresses, his mind seems to heal. He comes to recognize his own reality. One day, he overhears a court case in which a man and a woman are being accused of the murder of a child. He is overwhelmed by such an urgent urge to go to Chicago to kill Madeleine and Gersbach. But he is Surprised and stunned to see the scene of Gersbach bathing June. The next day, he goes to a museum in company of Junie but his car crashes. The police arrest him for carrying a gun and he has to spend a night in the Jail. These events bring him closer to the reality that he has never been a good husband and caring father while expecting the others to be the idealistic men and women. At the end of the novel, he seems to reconcile the web of ideals with the foundation of practicality, the intellectual world of absolutes and metaphysics with the ground of reality. Throughout the novel, Herzog seems to be wandering in the solitary and lonely thoughts but in the end he rejects both loneliness and solitude. He comes

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to know that a man can find beauty, Composure and Communion only in sharing his life with others and maintaining social relations. The basic lesson, he preaches, is that:

The first requirement of stability in a human being was that the said human being should really desire to exist. This is what Spinoza says. It is necessary for happiness (felicitas), he can't behave well (bene agere), or live well (bene vivere), if he himself doesn't want to live (Herzog, P. 96)

While accepting the National Book Award for Herzog, Bellow said, "Unless we think, unless we make a clearer estimate of our condition. We will continue to write kid stuff, to fail in our function: we will lack serious interests and become truly irrelevant."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The novel ends with his gaining mental balance. He collects a few flowers from the garden of Ramona and feeling a new kind of peace and poise:

Perhaps he's stop writing letters yes, that was coming, in fact, the knowledge that he was done with these letters. Whatever had come over him during these last months, the spell really seemed to be passing, really going. He set down his hat, with the roses and day lilies, on the half-painted piano, and went into his study, carrying the wine bottles in one hand like a pair of Indian clubs, walking over notes and papers; he lay down on his Recamier Couch. As he stretched out, he took a long breath, and then he lay, looking at the mesh of the screen, pulled loose by vines, and listening to the steady scratching of Mrs. Tuttle's broom. He wanted to tell her to sprinkle the floor, she was raising too much dust. In a few minutes he would call down to her, "Damp it down, Mrs. Tuttle There's water in the sink" But not just yet. At this time he had no messages for anyone, nothing, not a Single Word. (Herzog, P.340-341)

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### Conclusion:

Thus, Sigmund Freud's theory of psychic apparatus finds a due expression in the personality of the protagonist Herzog who has always been the Victim of the Id in his past by engaging himself in immoral acts and is an utopian dreamer who always pines for a true, ideal and moralistic community in the future. But at the end of the novel, the hidden Ego comes forward like the spark of light in the darkness and makes him realize that philosophical theories, web of ideals and utopian dreams cannot cure a man of the ailments of loneliness, tension, psychological pressures, neurosis, depression and death instincts. He can find peace, poise and pleasure only by making a delicate balance or equilibrium between self and the world around him.

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