



328en16



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WHAT IS SELF?

Self is focus of our everyday behaviour and all of us do have a set of perceptions and beliefs about ourselves. This kind of self concept plays important role in motivating us and organizing our behaviours. It starts evolving early in life. A sense of self awareness grows among us when we grow. In fact, all of us engage in experiences which enhance our sense of self. As Rogers said we want positive regard from others. In other words we have a strong need of being loved and valued by other people. The study of self and its functioning is a fascinating topic. In this lesson you are going to learn about the way self is conceptualized and the different aspects of self are related to human behaviour.



OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain the concept of self;
- explain the different levels of self as conceived in Indian thought;
- describe the different aspect of self;
- appreciate the value of self awareness;
- describe the relationship of self with other processes.

16.1 CONCEPT OF SELF

If some one asks: who are you? We often describe that physical features, traits, goals, motives etc. The self concept is a collection of diverse information. It



constitutes a central aspect of psychological functioning. However, its definition has been approached from many angles. A close scrutiny of these views indicates that **self is subject as well as object**. The self as a subject includes the person's experience of self as thinker, feeler and actor. Thus, when I feel anger or think about the idea of freedom, it is "I" – the self as subject. On the other hand, the self as object is the other person's view of the self or "me". In recent years researchers have tried to understand the representations or mental models of self.

The experience of self is very common but complex phenomenon. Its structure and contents are shaped by the society and culture in which people live. Based on the cultural context people divide the world into the categories of "self" and "non self". In the individualistic cultures people prefer **independent self construal** while people in collectivist cultures prefer an **interdependent mode of self construal**. The independent self construal considers self in terms of a bounded, separate and individual entity which is central to all the activities of a person. In contrast, the interdependent self construal emphasizes on connectivity, interdependence and sharing. In this case the boundaries between self and non self are overlapping. It may, however, be noted that the two modes of self construal are broad trends and within a given culture people may display both kinds of self construal in different degrees.

Some researchers think that the idea of self emerges and shaped in social interaction. In particular when a child is addressed by some one s/he starts thinking about self. Thus, self originates in social experience. Gradually people internalize a particular view of self which becomes a powerful source that influences behaviour. Some part of our self is private to us and only we know about that. Another part is public which is known to others. Also, there is a part of self which comes from our membership of a group. This kind of self is called collective self or social identity.

16.2 LEVELS OF SELF

Self is experienced at different levels, William James, who started serious study of Self talked about **material self, social self** and **spiritual self**. More recently Neisser has talked about **ecological self**. Let us try to learn more about these types. The ecological self refers to the self in the embodied form that can be physically identified in time and space. The **inter personal self** involves the self which exists in the social relations when we interact with others. The **extended self is the self which is in our memory**. It is personal and private. Finally, there is **conceptual self** which is the idea of self that a person holds. All of us have acquired a set of ideas about what can be included within the category of self. This kind of conceptualization is nurtured in each culture in a given way. It is a comprehensive network of ideas about self. In order to illustrate this point we may



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consider the concept of **Panch Koshas** as developed in the Indian thought. Here the term Kosh means layers or sheath like the sheath of an onion. The Jiva consists of five such Koshas and self should be considered in terms of a multi layered structure of hierarchically organized sheaths. A brief description of these sheaths is as follows:

1. **Annamaya Kosh:** This involves the gross physical body. This is the outermost layer of existence. It is called **annamaya** because it is grounded in the food that we eat and consume.
2. **Pranamaya Kosha:** This layer deals with life (Prana) and represents the functions of breathing and metabolic processes. The five effectors are also included in it.
3. **Manomaya Kosha:** It consists of sense organs. It is the seat of ego and leads to personal involvements which bind people with the desires and activities.
4. **Vigyanamaya Kosha:** It consists of five sense organs and intellect. It regulates the worldly life. The **feeling of “I-ness” present in it relates Jiva to past actions**. Also, the feelings of pride take place.
5. **Anandmaya Kosha:** It is the joyous sheath. The experience of bliss is has spiritual basis also, the pleasure that one gets from obtaining the desired objects is part of it.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 16.1

Fill in the blanks with suitable words:

1. In individualistic culture people prefer _____ while in collectivist culture they prefer _____.
2. _____ has talked about material self, social self and spiritual self.
3. According to theory of Panch Koshas, as described in Indian thought, Annamaya Kosh involves the _____.

16.3 ASPECTS OF SELF

In the psychological studies of self the researchers have explored many aspects of self. They show that self is multi-faceted. As you will find in the following description



our ideas about self, its evaluation, its presentation and its monitoring vary among the people and shape behaviour in important ways. In fact the ideas held by the people about self shape and organize our personal lives and allow participation in group life.

Self Esteem

It is the evaluative component of self concept. It basically deals with internalized social judgments and ideas about how worthwhile a personal quality is. Self esteem is an important factor in one's psychological health. People who feel good about themselves or have high self esteem are found to be more active, motivated, persistent, and happy than the people with low self esteem. It has been noted that unhappiness, and despair are related to low self esteem. Thus our affective evaluation of ourselves, positive and negative both, have important consequences for the way we are going to conduct ourselves in future. Research has shown that low self esteem is related to depression, and self doubt.

Self Efficacy

Self efficacy refers to our belief about what we are capable of achieving. In other words it refers to perceived competencies of a person. They determine how we interact with our environment and other people. High self efficacy children solve problems more quickly than those who had low self efficacy beliefs. According to Bandura self efficacy beliefs have power of four major influences as given below:

- (a) **Cognitive:** It refers to the effect on thought patterns. Self efficacy influences evaluation of capability and preparation to make an attempt.
- (b) **Motivational:** It influences how long we will keep trying.
- (c) **Affective:** It deals with stress, anxiety, and feeling of control.
- (d) **Selection:** It includes choosing challenging activities.

Self Presentation

This deals with the behavioural expression of self. We are often concerned with the images we present to others. The growing importance of cosmetic and fashion industry clearly shows the degree to which we are preoccupied with our physical appearance. We are often quite concerned with the impression what we convey in public. The term self-presentation technically means the strategies people use to shape what others think of them. If life is viewed as theater, we act out certain lines as they are taken out from a script. Researchers have tried to study the process through which we attempt to shape what others think about us. The process of self-presentation can take many forms. It can be conscious or unconscious, accurate or misleading, and intended for real audience or for ourselves. In general two main



motives have been identified for self-presentation. They include strategic self-presentation and self-verification. The strategic self presentation is our effort to shape other's impression to gain power, influence or sympathy. Ingratiation and self promotion often make us liked and respected by others. The goal of self-verification help people to affirm their existing self concept.

Self Monitoring

Self monitoring means the extent to which external situation and the reactions of others help one to regulate behaviour. Thus politicians, sales persons and artists are high self monitoring persons. The people who are low self monitors regulate their behaviours on the basis of internal factors such as beliefs, attitudes and interests. It has been found that high self monitors pay attention to others and low self monitors pay attention to themselves. Also, the high self monitors select a companion on the basis of how well the others perform and low self monitors choose a companion on the basis of liking. People who are high on self monitoring seem to have a repertoire of selves from which to draw. They are quite sensitive to the concerns of strategic self-presentation.

Self Consciousness

If we examine our daily life we find ourselves busy with many activities. During these activities we are often away from ourselves. We think very little about ourselves. In other words we are not always self-focused. However, certain events do compel us to turn to our own selves. Thus when we glance into a mirror, talk to ourselves, stand before an audience or a camera or occupy an important position in a group we become self aware. When we become self aware we start comparing our behaviour with internal standards. Such a comparison reveals negative discrepancy. Under these conditions our self esteem decreases. In order to deal with this situation we may attempt to reduce self discrepancy or withdraw from the state of self awareness. It has been found that some people have tendency to introspect the inner thoughts and feelings (private self consciousness) while others have tendency to be aware of outer public image (public self consciousness).

16.6 AWARENESS OF SELF: HOW ACCURATE ARE WE IN SELF APPRAISAL?

It is often taken for granted that we know ourselves very well. However, in reality this is not true. Studies show that there are many aspects of our self concept which are known to us and others also know about that. In other words it is public. But there are three other possibilities as given below:

1. there are attributes of self that are known to the person but unknown to others.



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2. there are attributes of self that are not known to the person but known to others.
3. there are attributes of self that are neither known to the person nor known to others.

You can easily imagine the situations where there is discrepancy of any kind in terms of the attributes known to the person and known or not known to others. In order to live a healthy life proper appreciation of one's attributes is necessary. Also, it must be a realistic appraisal. It is on the basis of an impartial knowledge and understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of oneself that proper course of action can be planned.

While discussing self it should be pointed out that people often show self serving bias. This implies that they try to defend themselves and view things in a way that positive attributes of self are enhanced. For instance people explain success on any task to their ability and effort and attribute failure to external factors like chance or luck. Also, every body likes positive appreciation from others, whether it is correct or incorrect. This may lead to building false self images and a number of related problems.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 16.2

Match the terms of column A with the appropriate description given in the column B.

Column A

- (a) Self esteem
- (b) Self efficacy
- (c) Self presentation
- (d) Self monitoring
- (e) Self consciousness

Column B

- (i) behavioural expression of self
- (ii) the extent to which external situation and the reactions of others help one to regulate behaviour
- (iii) evaluative component of self concept
- (iv) thinking about oneself
- (v) belief about one's competency

16.5 RELATIONSHIP OF SELF WITH OTHER PROCESSES

A moment's reflection will make it clear that self is involved in almost all kinds of psychological processes. Our learning, perception, motivation, memory, all are shaped by the nature and state of self. One must recognize the fact that these and other psychological processes are not mechanical. They are activities or functions of self. For instance, when some one finds self at stake, he or she may put in



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maximum efforts. Similarly, we attend and perceive objects and people in a manner which is compatible with one's self.

In recent years researchers have become interested in relating self construal or one's idea about self with various psychological processes. In this connection attention has been paid to the cultural differences in self construal and its implications for various processes. In an earlier section it was pointed out that these are two main types of self construal i.e., independent and interdependent. Let us examine how these two types of construal are related to cognition, motivation and emotion.

Self and Cognition : The effects of self construal on cognition are found in a variety of ways. It has been found that people with independent self construal emphasize on their internal attributes as important features. In contrast, the people with interdependent self think more about relationships and contexts. Similarly while explaining behaviours of other persons, people with interdependent self recognize the significance of situational factors. Research has shown that situational and context dependent explanations are used more frequently by the Indian people as compared with Americans.

Self and Emotion: Some emotions emphasize inner attributes. For example, pride or feelings of superiority are often found when some one has accomplished something. Similarly frustration occurs when the personal goals or desires (internal attributes) are blocked. In these situations the emotional experience tends to separate or disengage the self from one's social relationships. On the other hand, there are certain positive emotions like friendly feelings or feelings of gratitude and respect. Such emotions occur when one is in close or congenial relationship with others. Experiencing such emotions promotes an interpersonal bond. The same is true in case of negative emotions such as feelings of indebtedness or guilt. They occur because of failure in maintaining relationship with others. This set of emotions reflects **socially engaged emotions**. It has been found that persons with interdependent self construal with tend to experience socially engaged emotions more frequently than the people with independent self.

Self and Motivation: It has generally been thought that the issue of motivation deals with internal processes pertaining to a person. The ideas of needs and motives deal with these processes. This view is very close to the independent self construal. All of them refer to the motivation related to the person or "me". In case of interdependent self, it is noted that behaviours are directed or guided by the expectations of significant others (e.g., parents, teachers, other family members), obligations and duties toward others. In this context studies of achievement motive provide a useful illustration.

Achievement motivation deals with the "desire to excel". This desire is present in all cultures. However, it is conceptualized in different ways in different cultures. In



cultures where independent self is predominant this need is personally based while in the cultures emphasizing interdependent self, this need is interpersonally and socially structured. In the Indian context where collectivism and interdependent self dominate social concern emerges to be an important aspect of thinking about achievement.



TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. Describe the concept of self.
2. Name five koshas discussed in the Indian thought.
3. Describe the possible ways of self appraisal.
4. Discuss the relationship of self construal with emotion and motivation.



ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

16.1

- (1) Independent, interdependent.
- (2) William James
- (3) Gross physical body

16.2

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|-----|-------|----------|---------|
| (a) | (iii) | (b) (v) | (c) (i) |
| (d) | (ii) | (e) (iv) | |

HINTS TO TERMINAL EXERCISE

- (1) Refer to section 16.1
- (2) Refer to section 16.2
- (3) Refer to section 16.4
- (4) Refer to section 16.5