

# CONTEXTUALIZING SELF AND CULTURE

An Enquiry into Some Philosophical Issues

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the award of the Degree of*

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

**SANTOSH I. RAUT**

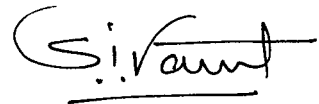


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2007**

## Declaration

This dissertation titled "**Contextualizing Self and Culture: An Enquiry into Some Philosophical Issues**" submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any Institution and University.



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**CERTIFICATE**

*This is to certify that the dissertation titled "Contextualizing Self and Culture: An Enquiry into Some Philosophical Issues", submitted by Santosh Ishwardas Raut in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is to the best of my knowledge an original work and may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.*

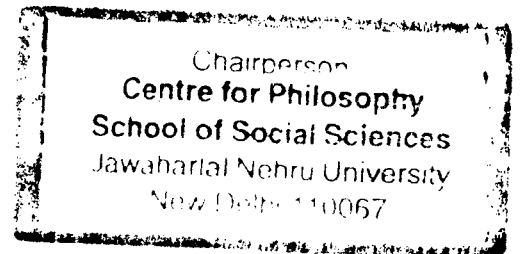
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*Dedicated to*  
*Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar*  
*&*  
*Urgyen Sangharakshita...*

*Blessings of*

*Aai*

*&*

*Babuji...*

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**Santosh I. Raut**



## **Introduction**

1. Why Self?
2. Why Culture?
3. Scope of the work
4. General Introduction to the Chapters
5. Conclusion

# Introduction

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## 1. Why Self?

The concept of self, as we know, is one of the most debated concepts in philosophy. Almost every philosopher has touched upon the idea of 'self', in their endeavor to address metaphysical, epistemological, as well as ethical questions. Descartes' often discussed statement, "I think, therefore I am", seeks to establish the existence of self in certainty. His 'Method of doubt' was a means to grasp certainty as embodied in the 'thinking I'. Similarly other philosophers, like, Kant, through his transcendental notion of self, Hegel through the idea of soul, Heidegger through explanation of being-in-the-world, Sartre through the idea of being-in-itself and being-for-itself, and many other philosophers, constantly tried to understand self. The very purpose of philosophy, the love for wisdom, is the aim to achieve a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of reality. In this sense, studying various aspects of the Self also includes the foundational investigation for some other 'contested-concepts' (like, culture, identity, etc.) in philosophy. The systematic understanding of the self could be connected to an understanding of such 'contested-concepts'.

Apart from philosophers, each one of us as reflective human beings, encounter ourselves through our unique experiences and try to address the question 'who am I'? Philosophical discussion on the self tries to systematize these rather amorphous ideas of the self-reflective humans. For Socrates, "know thyself" was the highest goal of human life. For him, this was the starting point of any philosophic enquiry. Similarly, Descartes' quest for truth led him to understand self in certainty. However, even for Descartes, Self is the thinking, experiencing self, which actively perceives the things

and responds to a given situation. Similarly, Kant, in his explanation of the transcendental nature of self, proposes the rational doctrine of the soul. In spite of these essentialists understanding of the concept of self, Self is not fixed, imprisoned in any particular situation. It has the capacity to re-construct itself, and renew its nature. Furthermore, Kant says, “I have no knowledge of my self as I am, but merely as I appear to myself. The consciousness of self is thus very far from being knowledge of the self.”<sup>1</sup> Hence the conscious, experiencing self is what we ultimately try to understand.

The idea of self is also the base to understand culture and identity. The other that I come in contact with is not only material entity but also another creature like me, another subject. It is this intertwined and interwoven subjects that forms the basis of culture, and therefore, the other cultural object as a whole. Each individual’s construction of self is unique. But self, in its maturity is able to, differentiates between who she or he is and who is the other. The question ‘Who am I?’ itself presupposed the differentiation the self from the other. In thinking about the idea of a person, we certainly start thinking about ourselves. But we also try to understand ourselves as person in relation with the other, which J.N. Mohanty calls ‘self’s other’.<sup>2</sup> ‘Who are you?’ or ‘Who am I?’ are questions relating to the search for identity. These specifications and forms of expression are the concepts of subjective-objective, what, Hegel called ‘objective spirit’. As Mohanty says, in his explanation of Hegel, ‘my world is a world of culture— everywhere I see the hand of man, and hear his voice.’<sup>3</sup> The idea of a subject can be understood by taking an intersubjective stance. The theories of inter-subjectivity require the concept of human subject as “self”, which

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<sup>1</sup> Kant, 2003, p.169.

<sup>2</sup> Mohanty, 2000, p.xi.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in, Ibid., pp.18-19.

opens the window to the various ideas like 'identity', 'others', 'ourselves', 'themselves', 'our culture', 'their culture', and so on. Thus my self and other self are not different in kind, but different in degrees of understanding.

Self thus can act as an essential philosophical tool to understand the other. It is capable of providing an invisible link to an understanding of the other.

For example, Sartre says that the Cartesian '*I think therefore I am*', which discovers the self in *cogito*, is not only a discovery of one's own self in the *cogito*, but a discovery of others too.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Why Culture?

Culture emanates from the self. Human beings create certain conditions to fulfill their desires and aspirations in terms of basic needs. Our active response is to meet these basic needs unitedly and fulfill these desires. For this fulfillment we create certain conditions, and cultivate the environment accordingly, which we call culture. Our creative exchange manifests the structure of certain sets of values, beliefs, and customs; the process consequently results in what is known as 'culture'. Thus, culture results from a creative human being's response to her environment.

Culture, thus, as we commonly understand, is not an idea 'out there', but is constituted by a set of values, belief, mode of behavior etc., which are native to the self. The self-realization and expression in a particular situation create the necessary background for it. The values in a way show the integrity of the self in certain conditions and situations. Human society thus develops by cultivating itself, which, in one sense, is the cultivation of mind, and can be distinguished from the mere satisfaction of physical wants.

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<sup>4</sup> Sartre, 1960, p.45.

As Raymond Williams in his understanding of the word ‘culture’ puts it: “I see the history of this word, in its structure of meanings, a wide and general movement in thought and feeling. Where *culture* meant a state or habit of the mind or the body of the intellectuals and moral activities, it means now, also, a whole way of life.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, culture is not the mere mechanical process of building, but culture is articulated primarily in terms of values and meanings. Though the meanings and values vary from context to context from particular group to another, they however have their own independent significance.

Culture indicates cultivation, (as the term is derived from the Latin word, ‘*cultura*’), of human development and particularly the human mind. Culture thus becomes the expression of self, and self becomes the living interpreter of the culture. Therefore, looking at the self as the interpreter of culture and culture as an expression of self, in terms of set of values; contextualizing both the ideas (the ideas of ‘self’ and ‘culture’) is an important philosophical task. Philosophical enquiry regarding this contextualisation is not unproblematic. Attachment with a particular group and identifying oneself in particular circumstances is always a matter of being ‘in context’ and discussions from the context, is always a *positioned* discussion.

Anthropological studies while discovering culture enquire: ‘How do we live together?’ but not, ‘How we ought to live together as humans?’ This normative enquiry, which is philosophical in nature, is no less important. Human (‘we’) beings are social beings and not just accidental facts of nature. Values, which give a sense of belongingness to human life, are in sense sentiments rather than mere references to actuality of particular culture. Certain moral and intellectual activities of human beings have thus provided impetus to shape themselves in a certain pattern. As a

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<sup>5</sup> Williams, 1968, pp. 17-18.

result of this self-realization culture take its shape in terms of values. Hence, culture is an outcome of the people's need to fulfill their aspirations vis-à-vis the self. Thus, the word 'culture' means both, what is around us, and inside us. Culture is both matter of self-overcoming, as much as self-realization. Being self-cultivators, we are clay in our own hands.<sup>6</sup>

Cultivation, however, is not merely something that we do to ourselves, but it is also something that is done to us. This particular position creates a *split* between the aspirations buried within each of us, and the expression of cultures in different contexts. The word 'culture' thus, contains the dichotomy between making and being made; between freedom and necessity; between individual and group. It also denotes the kind of self-division by which our clash of interests begins. Thus, every group and its culture are unique in terms of its character, and as Herder suggests: "It cannot be judged on any standard scale. It is a process of evolution not unilinear narrative of universal humanity, but a diversity of specific life forms, each with its own peculiar laws of evolution."<sup>7</sup>

Both the concepts (culture and self) are context specific and are not static concepts. There are no permanent grounds as such, for the self or the culture, but both the ideas are, in a sense, goes through a evolutionary processes, not based on either *fixed* or permanent grounding, but based on a continuous process of grounding and ungrounding. Cultural givenness therefore, can always be transformed into new situations. This results in the formation of a new identity, as self is always open or ready to transcend itself.

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<sup>6</sup> Eagleton, 2000, pp.4-6.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in, Ibid., p.12.

### 3. Scope of the Work

This research work is an interrogation and not a formal interpretation of ideas of the self vis-à-vis that of the culture. It is also an attempt to see the shaping of an identity for the individual as the self. Understanding the contextual interaction between these ideas is not smooth or uniform philosophical enterprise, but what could be termed as ‘in context’ or *positioned* discussion.

There are certain concepts, which are ‘contested-concepts’ which vary from tradition to tradition and philosopher to philosopher. For example, Descartes’ *self* is not the Plato’s *self*, Kant’s *self* is not Hegel’s *self*, and so on. Each of the philosophers wanted to understand the concept of self, as whole; but came up with very different concept (idea) of the self. Each of them aspired to attain the understanding of the concept as whole, as distinct from the specific context of their historical time and space.

We all respond to situations in our own terms. Though the situation for us may be of a similar kind, we observe the difference from our degrees in experiences. As the Cartesian view suggests, there is deep tension between what our reason tells us about ourselves and what ordinary everyday experience tells us; and there is corresponding tension between desire and sensory experiences.<sup>8</sup> Each one of us in this sense is unique to each other and understands the situation in one’s own style. Understanding of self thus varies for each individual in different contexts.

Similarly, the idea of culture is also not uniform. Culture, in spite of being a human expression, is attached to a particular group or community, which determines not only ‘what’ is culture but ‘whose’ culture it is. To repeat once again, as a result of

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<sup>8</sup> Conttingham, 1992, p.132.

the process of human realization, humans create a certain set of values, customs, beliefs, and so on, within a historically given context and thus brings forth a cultural context. Moral values, meanings of the symbols, and behavioral pattern change as all these categories are incorporated into a particular group of people.

With the reference to preceding discussion, the emergence of an identity is also an equally contextualized idea. Identity is a position where a person is submerged in certain circumstances and particularity, which helps in defining meaning for himself. Identity therefore is psychologically grasped, socio-culturally rooted, geographically located, and politically given. It captures the sense of *belongingness* than just knowledge.

This research therefore, seeks to investigate the relation between these concepts. At the very end we want to take up a particular event from the Indian historical and cultural context to show how self, culture, and identity, get reconstituted and redefined.

#### **4. General Introduction to the Chapters**

**Chapter I** deals with the concept of Self. The idea of self in philosophy has a long history of having been discussed, by almost every philosopher. It tries to engage into a discussion on the self, mainly against the background of the philosophies of Descartes, Kant, and Hegel. The Cartesian view tries to find the existence of the self on the basis of 'thinking' (*Cogito*). His thirst in search of self lies in certainty. As against this Kant asks, 'How can I, as a thinking subject, know myself as an object?' On the other hand, for Hegel, self has the tendency to transcend into something universal. Hegel expresses this universality in terms of higher activity.



The discussion in this chapter, therefore tries to understand the nature of the self by trying to bring into the forefront the dynamicity involved in the construction of the idea of self.

**Chapter II** deals with the discussion on the idea of the Culture. As culture begins with the self, to fulfill the desires of the human beings and it therefore creates certain sets of values, which we call as 'culture'. 'Phenomenology' as a philosophical tool has been made use of, in order to understand the contextual relation between both the concepts self and culture. The experiential aspect of the individual as a self can be best explained through 'Phenomenology' as a philosophic enterprise, particularly as it looks out for totality of experience. Culture always talks with the parameters of the realm of values and meanings. Undoubtedly, Phenomenology as a philosophical method helps to understand the nature of culture, and culture formation, vis-à-vis self. Here we shall take clues from the writings of Heidegger and Sartre to understand culture. Phenomenologists' thirst leads her to enquire: 'What is culture?' and 'How culture is experienced by the 'self'? Philosophical enquiry into these issues requires phenomenologists to overcome their preconceived ideas and traditional ways of thinking, and try to develop new methods for interrogation.

**Chapter III** discusses the idea of Identity, as it helps in defining and re-defining the idea of self, and its contextual relation with the idea of culture. Self-identity, always understood in the context of 'in relation with' something. This chapter thus tries to seek the question of the identity vis-à-vis the self and the culture. By considering the concept of identity, self is always in a certain process of its own renovation and keeps open the possibilities of its transcendence. In the light of aforementioned reason, identity, is also a highly contextualized category, and maintains the evolutionary character.

After having tried to understand these three concepts and their relationship, we take up, Dr. B.R.Ambedkar's act of conversion into Buddhism, as an emancipatory project to overcome the Caste-Identity of an individual in order to redefine 'self' as Human-Self.

This case study tries to show, how the ideas of Self, Culture, and Identity, are highly contextualized in the modern Indian society. Dr. Ambedkar's attempt to embrace Buddhism is an attempt to transform the 'Untouchable-Self' into 'Human-Self'. This case study seeks to understand, how he tries to create an *arc* of a *new culture*, by a process of transcendence, and thus redefine Self-identity.

Finally, **Conclusion:** If everyone acts as individualized individuals, no society is possible. If every one acts in complete conformity with others, there will be no difference between human beings and bees. Human ways of life are situated or exist obviously somewhere in between these extremes. To avoid swings- from one extreme end to the other- we need to develop a more precise formulation of how man lives as a social and cultural being. One cannot have the perfect solution for any philosophical problem. Each theory in the history of philosophy has its own distinct contextual relevance. If I could put it in the words of Wittgenstein:

If anyone should think he has solved the problem of life and feels like telling himself that everything is quite easy now, he can see that he is wrong just by recalling that there was a time when this "solution" had not been discovered; but it must have been possible to live *then* too and solution which has now been discovered seems fortuitous in relation to how things were then...If there were a "solution" to the problems of logic (philosophy) we should only need to caution ourselves that there was a

time when they had been solved (and even at the time people must have known how to live and think).<sup>9</sup>

Human life thus goes on, in search for an understanding the true meaning of the life in the backdrop of reality as well as unreality.

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<sup>9</sup> Wittgenstein, 1980, p.4e.

## ***Chapter I: Self***

1. Introduction
2. Self as *Cogito*
3. Self as the Transcendental Unity
4. Self: Universal versus Particular
5. Self as Individual

### **1.1 Introduction**

The moment we come across the word ‘Self’, we start thinking about ourselves. The Self, which may be referred to as ‘I’, is taken to be a person, a body, a human being, an individual, an agent or a subject. We think about ourselves as a subject who knows, experiences, acts, performs a certain role in life- as father or son, as teacher or student, as poor or rich, as good or bad, as black or white- and so on. When I think of myself thus, what am I thinking about? When I say, I am self-conscious, what am I conscious of? When one thinks about himself; is he thinking of himself as part of a mental world, a physical world, or both?

*‘Know thyself’* for Socrates, was the highest goal of human life. In our day-to-day life we are often told that we should try to know ourselves better than we do. When I try to know myself, do I mean I need to know, my body or my Soul or my Spirit or Ego or do I mean a combination all these aspects? Also, for Socrates, this was regarded as the starting point of any philosophical enquiry. ‘Who am I?’ is the age-old question discussed in philosophy. Socrates urge since ancient time, gives us a foundation upon which to think and reflect. My awareness about myself therefore opens a curious gap between me and others, as well as me and the world.

Do we understand ourselves only in terms of our own experiences or do we understand ourselves with reference to how others understand us or with reference to how I understand others. Thus, when I try to know my 'self' with reference to others, the question that may be asked are: what are they thinking about me? Am I similar to others or in contrast to others? Or am I a mere creature like my 'self'? I don't object to the fact that I am a person, a human being like others. Each one of us has this individuality as a person. Although my sister and I have the same mother, each one of us as a person is not the same in the natural sense. Thus, what sense makes me a person? Do I certainly know my 'self'? Can we know ourselves as we really are? Or is it a mere philosophic fiction?

Thus knowing my 'self' may be conceived as:

- a. knowing myself through my own experiences;
- b. knowing myself on the basis of how others understand me;
- c. knowing myself through the differences of opinion I have with others.

## **1.2 Self as *Cogito***

All these questions and queries take me close to the window opened up by the father of modern philosophy, who founded the base for '*I think, hence I exist*', Rene Descartes. The first difference a human creates in the world is between 'I' and 'others' or which is not 'I' i.e. something other than my 'self'.

If we follow the argument of Conttingham, one of the most important commentators of Descartes writings, for Descartes, a curious gap exists between what

reason tells us about our nature- that we are pure incorporeal minds- and what our every day experiences teach us- that we are embodied creatures. As Descartes says,

Nature teaches me by these sensations of pain, hunger; thirst etc., that I am not merely present in my body...but very closely joined and as it were intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit.<sup>1</sup>

Descartes' understanding of self is not merely personal or private; but he gives equal importance to the external environment, and the rational understanding of the world, which also involves the process of self-construction.<sup>2</sup>

What is the *indubitable* and certain foundation for our knowledge? Sensory organs do not always show us the 'as it is' existence of the thing and neither does external sense perceptions give us the ultimate understanding of our self. When we realize that another person cannot perceive our own thoughts, we may experience the feeling of being alone in our heads and our body may be just like a vessel for the inherent mental properties. The reason for the gap between understanding, doubting, affirming, denying, and willing on one hand, and imagining and having sensory experiences on the other, now begin to emerge.

According to Descartes only reason can help us to arrive at correct judgments, and provide us with a foundation, which is beyond all doubt. Reason, in this way, helps us to build up the power to discriminate between truth and error. In this way, Descartes' rational enquiry starts with the 'Method of doubt'. The first step in this scrutiny consists of questioning our knowledge derived from sense perception. As we discussed above,

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in, Conttingham, 1992, p.135.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.135.

sense perception doesn't give us the ultimate understanding either of ourselves or of the external world. Thus Descartes mentions:

Since I now wish to devote myself solely to the search for truth, I thought it is necessary to...reject as if absolutely false everything in which I could imagine the least doubt, in order to see if I was left to believe in anything that was indubitable. Thus because our senses sometimes deceive us, I decided to suppose that nothing was such as they lead us to imagine...I resolved to pretend that all the things that had ever entered my mind were no more true than the illusion of my dreams.<sup>3</sup>

Descartes never accepts anything as true, which he did not know clearly and distinctly. About the doubtful character of sense perception, Descartes observes: "From time to time I have found that the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once."<sup>4</sup>

Descartes tries to analyze doubt in order to examine the experience or sense perception and thus says,

The long chains of simple and easy reasoning to reach the conclusion of their most difficult demonstrations, had led me to imagine that all things, to the knowledge of which man is competent, are mutually connected in the same way...Provided only we abstain from accepting the false for the true, and always preserve in our thoughts the order necessary for the deduction of one truth from another.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in, *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in, *Ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>5</sup> Descartes, 1987, p.15.



Descartes doubts every thing, the sky, the air, the earth, the color, the shape, mathematical truth, God, his own body and tries to arrive at a certain judgment, 'thinking', which can be regard as the first indubitable principle of his philosophy. Thus Descartes writes:

I was willing to suppose that there existed nothing really such as they presented to us...But immediately upon this I observed that, whilst I thus wished to think that all was false, it was absolutely necessary that I, who thus thought, should be somewhat; and as I observed that this truth, I think, therefore I am, was so certain and of such evidence, that no ground of doubt, however extravagant, could be alleged by the species capable of shaking it, I concluded that I might, without scruple, accept it as the first principle of the philosophy of which I was in search.<sup>6</sup>

Descartes, famous statement '*I think hence I am*', is one of the most debated statements of his philosophy. According to Descartes, 'Thinking I' (*Cogito*) is the foundation for the existence of 'I'. Thus, in our understanding of 'I', a curious gap operates at two levels: firstly, what reasons tells us about our nature, and secondly, what our every day experiences teach us as to what we are.

Even if we wish to proceed beyond ourselves and try to discover the nature of reality, we must, according to Descartes, begin by directing our attention inwards, to the innate notion that we find within our mind. The reason for this step is that the sensual data that we receive from the outside world through the five senses, which have most of the time been misunderstood as the truth, have in fact, provided us with only *confused*, obscure, and imperfect representation of the world. It gives us the *nacre* picture of the reality. Descartes therefore relies on innate ideas or on intellect implanted by God

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

himself. Descartes admits that our ideas of the earth, the sky, color, shape, world, taste, etc., arise due to the external stimuli. He doesn't consider these objects as objects purely in the mind. The relation between particles in the external world and their understanding through sensual data in the context of truth is an arbitrary one.

Therefore, he tries to understand the existence of 'I' in something certain i.e. *Cogito*. Whatever we understand about ourselves from sensual perception is obscure and leads to confusion. Descartes systematically rejects the confusion raised by the sensual data. Thus by applying the 'Method of doubt', Descartes philosophy of innate ideas, invites us to reject the visible world, or the world perceived by the senses. Descartes does not deny the existence of the material world altogether. But the remarkable paradox of his philosophy is that, to understand the reality of this material world, we are urged first to turn away from it, as if we require a God's eye view to understand the reality of nature. If we want to know the truth, we need to understand first what truth is not. If we want to perceive the reality, we also need to understand what is unreal. He, therefore identifies reality and truth with something which is certain, incorrigible, and indubitable.

Since Descartes admits that none of the objects of sensual knowledge are real, therefore he differentiates the physical existence of 'I' (*Material Body*) and the existence of 'I' beyond the body (*Immaterial Mind*). Sense organs provide us with only the representative knowledge but not actual knowledge about the existence, just as; theatre represents reality, but is not the actual reality. Our senses always mislead us and are unable to produce the evidence of absolute existence of things. Descartes suggests that, sensory ideas are distinct from the innate ideas.

Descartes' noted example of wax in Sixth Meditation helps us to understand, how sensory grasping of knowledge is obscure and confused.

Let us consider this piece of wax. Taken from the hive, it has not yet quite lost all flavour of its honey; ...its color, shape and size are plain to see, it is hard, cold and can be easily handled, and if you strike it with your fingers, it makes a sound ... But now, as I speak, it is brought near the fire... flavor is removed, smell evaporates, color changes, shape disappears, it become liquid and hot, it can scarcely be handled, if you strike it, it makes no sound. Does the same wax remain after all this?<sup>7</sup>

The changing nature of wax has various reasons behind it, like, temperature, pressure, and so on; which help us to develop the ideas about the existence of unchanging things/objects with essential properties. It helps us to go ahead to understand the true nature of objects.

Descartes tries to understand the self on the foundational ground of *cogito* i.e. 'I exist therefore I am.' Cartesian Dualism suggests that body is not part of the essence of the self. Self is a thinking thing and body is an extended non-thinking thing. According to Descartes, the self is really distinct from the body and can exist without it. Thus, if we analyze deeply, Cartesian 'Self' seems thin, as he tries to know the self in certainty. Descartes was looking for something about that he could be certain. Word 'I', doesn't give the sense of history or future at all. Thus, it could not be only the tool to understand the 'self' as whole, as Descartes tries to locate the self in certainty,

But immediately I noticed that while I was trying thus to think everything false, it was necessary that I, who was thinking this, was

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<sup>7</sup> Example taken from, Williams, 1978, p.214.

something. And observing that this truth, “I am thinking, therefore I exist” was so firm and sure that the most extravagant suppositions of the skeptics were incapable of shaking it, I decided that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of philosophy I was seeking.<sup>8</sup>

Descartes needed a very thin concept in his Meditation of 1641, because he was looking for something about which he could be certain. The word ‘I’ for Descartes, must not imply past history. If he were to avoid the possibility of error, he must imply the existence at the moment of thinking, but not necessarily what existed prior to the thought.<sup>9</sup> Cartesian ‘Self’ is thus essentially a thinking thing; unextended, distinct, and essentially different from the body, which is extended in space.

## **1.2 Self as the transcendental unity: Kants’ view**

Kant’s strategy, as opposed to that of Descartes was to describe how we think, or what the parameters of thinking are- rather than how things are- and to urge that we need to think in terms of a unified self. Kant tries to throw light on the limitations of human experience as well as human reason. So, by recognizing the limitations of human reason, Kant is questioning Descartes’ belief in the unlimited power of human reason. We are bound to rely on our sense experience on something that is given in our hands. Kant thus opens another dimension to understand the Self. Kant gives little emphasis on the ‘knowledge of the self’, and relies on the appearance of ‘I’ before the ‘I’. In his words:

I am conscious of myself, neither as I appear to myself, nor as I am in myself but only that I am.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Conttingham, 1992, p.135.

<sup>9</sup> Sorabji, 2006, p.17.

<sup>10</sup> Kant, 2003, p.168.

Like Descartes, Kant agrees the representation of thought exist in order to understand the self. But he takes the proposition 'I think' is be problematic by calling it as belonging to empirical psychology. Descartes' 'I' exists beyond perception and only in 'thinking'. Kant argues that, this 'I think' has to be already attached to all perceptions. 'I think', according to him, is prefix of all perceptions and "is the one condition which accompanies all thought and is a representation which cannot itself be accompanied any further representation."<sup>11</sup> 'I' as a subject thus cannot be an object of knowledge. Self, as subject already has an identity of its own, inclusive of all representations and therefore self cannot represent itself as an *object*.

Kant proceeds, "This identity of the subject, of which I can be conscious in all my representations, does not concerned any intuition of the subject, whereby it is given as object."<sup>12</sup>

As, 'I' accompanies all our representations, self-consciousness is not aware of the subjects of one's representations as an object. Kant suggests that 'I' in every act of thought is already there and cannot be resolve into a plurality of subjects. Thus, unlike Descartes, Kant suggest that 'I exist thinking' is mistaken and argues that all thoughts consist in self-consciousness. As he writes:

I do not know as an object merely in that I think, but only in so far as I determine a given intuition with respect to the unity of consciousness in which all thoughts consists...self consciousness in thought are not by themselves concept of objects, but its mere function which do not give thought an object to be known, and accordingly do not give even myself as

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in, Cassam , 1997, p.1

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.2

object to be known and accordingly do not give even myself as object...That the 'I', the 'I' that thinks, can be regarded as always as subjects.<sup>13</sup> (B.407)

Kant, as we know, emphasizes that intuitions are necessary modes of determining thoughts.

I exist as an intelligence which is conscious solely of its power of combination, but in respect of the manifold which it has to combine I am subjected to a limiting condition (entitled inner sense), namely, that this combination can be made intuit able only according to relation of time... such an intelligence, therefore, can know itself only as it appears to itself in respect of an intuition which is not intellectual, and cannot be given by the understanding itself.<sup>14</sup>

One of the most important suggestion of Kant in understanding the self is its transcendental nature, by calling it as the rational doctrine of soul. He believes that 'I' as the vehicle of all concepts, and presupposition for any conceptual understanding, is itself transcendental.<sup>15</sup> He suggests that there are two kinds of 'I': 'I' as thinking being, an object of inner sense, and 'I' called 'soul'. 'I', as a thinking being signifies the object of that psychology to which he entitled the 'rational doctrine of the soul', and which belongs to the domain of rational psychology.<sup>16</sup>

However, for Kant, the proposition 'I think', is empirical and thus belongs to empirical psychology:

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<sup>13</sup> Kant, 2003, pp. 368-369.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.169.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.329.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 329-30.

If our knowledge of thinking beings in general, by means of pure reason, were based on more than *cogito*, if we likewise made use of our observations concerning the play of our thoughts and the natural laws of the thinking self to be derived from these thoughts, there would arise an empirical psychology.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, Kant proposes that 'I exist thinking' is an empirical proposition. That is why Kant does not think that existence of 'I' can be derived from its thinking alone; His famous objection to Descartes is thus:

But I cannot say 'Everything which thinks, exists'...My existence cannot, therefore, be regarded as an inference from the proposition 'I think', as Descartes sought to contend for it would than have to be preceded by the major premise 'everything which thinks, exists' but identical with it. The 'I think' expresses an indeterminate empirical intuition.<sup>18</sup>

Kant also emphasises on appearance. As he suggests soul, and even thought, is transferred into appearance. He writes:

"It would consequently seem that on our theory the soul, even thought, is completely transformed into appearance, and that in this way our consciousness itself, as being a mere illusion, must refer in fact to nothing."<sup>19</sup>

Nothing in the self is thereby given for thought, as Kant suggests, thinking is the logical function and it is not the subject of consciousness.

He writes further,

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.332.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.378.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.381.

“I thereby represent myself to myself neither as I am nor as I appear to myself. I think myself only as I do any object in general from whose mode of intuition I abstract.”<sup>20</sup>

Thus, ‘I exist thinking’ cannot occur without the inner sense, which Kant named as ‘intuitions’ and presents in the object merely as appearance. Mere thinking is not enough as suggested, but there is receptivity of the intuitions. This process distinguishes the object from the ‘I’ and determines its mode of existence.<sup>21</sup>

Understanding the self, is therefore process involving both the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’. Construction of self therefore involves not merely the spontaneity of thinking but it also involves the grasping of sensual perception of external world. Kant in his second Antimony on Antithesis (A 439-B44) says,

Self consciousness is of such nature that since the subject which thinks is at the same time its own object, it cannot divide itself, though it can divide the determination which herein it; for in regard itself every object is absolute unity. Nevertheless, when this subject is viewed outwardly, as an object of intuition, it must exist [some sort of] compositeness in its appearance; and it must always be viewed in this way if we wish to know whether or not there be in it a manifold [of elements] external to one another.<sup>22</sup>

We need the concept to understand the self but is there a Self as such? Concepts act as indicators to understand the true nature of self. Kant agrees that such are indeed required, concept, but as to what actually exists, he suspended his judgments.<sup>23</sup> Knowledge requires both intuitions and concepts, so knowledge of the self would also

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.381.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 381-382.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.409.

<sup>23</sup> Sorabji, 2006, p. 31.



require both intuition and concept. Much of our knowledge arises from the interaction, experience, and understanding the things in concept.

Human beings, as thinking beings, always think in terms of concepts. Logical and conceptual understanding cannot be detached from the awareness of the self, which in turn, gives the information about the sort of the thing it is.

Kant beautifully explains the importance of the concepts to understand the nature of the thing by using the example in his work.<sup>24</sup>

Understanding the 'self' is not at any extremity for example, in mere 'thinking' or in 'intuition', but self is an entity always open to renew itself. Self in this context can be understood out of the boundaries of any particularities.

### **1.3 Self: Universal versus Particular**

One cannot have a perfect imagination of the self in general, an imagination which is invariant. Each individual thus has a unique way of seeing, understanding and perceiving things. I may see a stone as 'stone' and another can see the same stone as God. Each individual's internal and external circumstances provide him or her with meaning that one attached to the self. The process of perception from external world rearranges the understanding of our self. Our senses have the ability to actively process where

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<sup>24</sup> The proposition  $7+5=12$ , is merely analytical and concept of the sum of 7 and 5. But if we look more closely we find that the concept of the sum of 7 and 5 contains nothing, save the union of the two numbers into one, and in this no thought is being taken as to what that single number may be which combine both. The concept of 12 is not merely thinking about the union of  $7 + 5$ , and I may analyze my concept of such a possible sum as I please, and still I shall never find the 12 in it. (Example taken from, Kant, 2003, P.53).

knowledge 'coming from'. It can integrate and analyze the impression made upon it by objects, and it is this ability that we can call thinking.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, the process of gaining knowledge also involves reception through sensation, their comparison and analysis, is a process of introspection. It is this introspective awareness, which is the starting point of knowing ourselves. Self-knowledge therefore is one of the results of sensuous reflection.

However, I develop my particular notion of the self, as I see the external things; I know what I see, but I try to see it through my own conceptual scheme. Thus, my knowledge of self involves both being and becoming. Knowledge of the self, by thinking of sensual data, makes us aware about the meaning of the self. Our understanding of the self, therefore, is built through various stages: understanding of the self in itself; and through an understanding of self in terms of the meaning we attached to it.

Thus each individual is involved in the process self-construction, which culminates in understanding the self as whole. In the history of philosophical thought, the process of gaining knowledge is an individual process.

Each individual in particular situation has his/her own way to understand his/herself. S/he constructs the meaning of the self according to his/her experience in particular Culture. As Buddhist view suggests, there is an attachment involved in seeing and forming the inner meanings, which we have already thought of. 'Attached view' means opinions, speculations, and beliefs, including all sorts of philosophical and religious opinions. It is significant to understand, that the self has a tremendous influence

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<sup>25</sup> Mikhailov, 1980, p.15.

on the external conditions. Buddhism suggests that attachment to one's own beliefs is unhealthy. It is not that one should not entertain beliefs, but one should not be attached to them.<sup>26</sup> Often we are attached to our own concepts. These attached beliefs result in particular self-consciousness and block our vision of the true nature of the Self. We can therefore say that it is our fixed notion or attachment that is strong or wrong. Many a times we try to see the universality in particular and vice versa. It is this fixed notion that results in permanent and unchanging self. Mere perception or thinking or conceptual understanding of self, cannot satisfy our understanding of Self as whole.

The theory of self-knowledge therefore depends upon the kind of selves we are and nature of particular conditional experience that we have. It includes the knowledge of our thought and knowledge of the contents of our thought.<sup>27</sup> Here, it is important to understand that, the knowledge inside us, and the knowledge we perceive by sensual data are not wholly separate, but both play an equal role in understanding the self. In a way the process of self-construction is simultaneous.

Also the self-knowledge may be understood in terms of *particular* self-knowledge as well as our knowledge of what we are. These two levels of self-knowledge are not detached from each other, but they influence each other. For example, the knowledge, which comes from the interaction with others, helps us to understand what we are. Much of our knowledge comes from the interaction with our outer conditions or with others, which provides insight into us. Since we perceive others and they perceive us by means

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<sup>26</sup> Sangharakshita, 1995, p.90.

<sup>27</sup> Cassam, 1994, p.3.

of 'outer sense', it would be quite legitimate to claim that the outer senses are at least as important as introspection in the question of self-knowledge.<sup>28</sup>

As we have seen, self try to understand itself with the interaction with others; 'self', as an open entity, always gives room to gain the knowledge. Thus the self is in continuous process to renew itself. Self thus not imprisoned of any particular situation. *Particularization* of 'self' in this sense may remain 'sunk' in specific and *fix* understanding of itself.

The Hegelian notion of 'self-feeling' suggests the particularisation of soul (Besonderung).<sup>29</sup> Hegelian passion seems to be within the context of the liberation struggle that the soul must go through to attain the self-possession of rational consciousness. It is altogether necessary, according to Hegel, that man actualises his capabilities in a determinate occupation or profession. It is necessary that a man's will as a 'person' become an objective for himself. As he suggests, only through the particular can he close together with himself as a concrete universality.<sup>30</sup> Both 'inner' and 'outer' facets are equally important to understand the self. We need to balance both the facets (to which the rationality of self), as they are not separate from each other. Through particular, one can be close to himself/herself as a concrete universality. But if s/he remains 'sunk' in the particular, if his/her satisfaction remains 'unmediated' in its particularity, then the closing together in particular would not mean a genuine concretization of the self in its inherent universality but only a form of self-sunderance.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>29</sup> Murray, 1972, p.121.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.123.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.123.

Particularity or particular self must lead self to the concrete universality by avoiding the danger of being 'sunk' in the particular-self. One particular self thus should not lead to another particular self. A person must translate the particularity in universal values. S/he must express the freedom of self in external realm, in order to prove self as not a *fixed* or *rigid* self, but a self to be transformed into a 'Human-Self' through realizing some universal values.

Sunderance of self is a process of transcendence of the self, which is a dynamic transformation from particular self to universal self. The attachment of self with particularity will block this transformation to understand itself (self as whole). It is one of the major obstacles for the self to become a free self.

Particularity is only 'objective to me', and immediate and one-sidedly subjective 'objectivity'. To raise myself to the level of rational thought, according to Hegel, I must sever myself from the content in its immediacy, set it opposite myself and in this way encounter it at a distance, as it were, or disinterestedly.<sup>32</sup>

In Self-feeling, Hegel saw the soul immersed or absorbed in its particular feelings. Our task is to see the difference of previous (past) stages to its present state, as it is presented to us in the evolving processes. Habits of the self in particularity will lead into reduction of its universal values. Hegel expresses these universal values in the term of higher activity: "I need no longer be preoccupied with the particular, thereby leaving myself 'open' for higher activity."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.135.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.135.

The phenomenon of breaking away from particularity into something universal is the project of transforming Identity. In what sense are we the same persons as we were ten years ago? To some extent, we may say, we are the same, by name or other indicators like body. But are we really the 'same' person as we were a few years back? No. Our thoughts, sense perceptions, and understanding in general changes. We must not ignore this 'change' and cannot try to understand the self in the absence these changes.

We can say that we experience our life at two levels: First, the life on this earth i.e., life in general (in society, in group, in culture etc.), and Second, life as an individual. Most of the time our outer experiences reduce our self into a mere material, which, in turn, keeps us in attachment, which blocks our understanding of self as a whole. As self-awareness matures, there is a fundamental split in the individual's experiences, as to who s/he is, and who is the 'other'. The experiences, which belong to us many a times, do not resemble ourselves. Self polarizes this experience into an experience of self and other. This split opens up a whole new range of possibilities. Self thus possibly makes the infinite ascent of the higher evolution.<sup>34</sup>

According to Descartes, all that really happens, from a purely physical point of view, is that the motion of matter in the external world impinges on the body and sets up further motion in it. As a result of this, certain ideas 'arise' in the soul. In this connection, Descartes employs a celebrated simile of a blind man probing the world with a pair of sticks. He is able to differentiate between trees, rocks, water, and similar things.<sup>35</sup> Sensory perceptions thus play an important role in our construction of self. But we cannot

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<sup>34</sup> Kennedy, 1995, p.27.

<sup>35</sup> Conttingham, 1992, p.136.

confine ourselves to mere sensory perception; there are different ways in different contexts by which we have self-awareness. It comes only after attention has been directed to a particular condition. What is important here is the intention of 'I' through which it approaches the condition.

Intention is very central to agency and agency very central to our idea of self. Without owner, there might still be illusory 'I' thoughts, and hence illusory intentions, just as there might be illusory ethical judgments, but not genuine ones.<sup>36</sup>

'I' intentionally responds to the *given* situation and constructs meaning for itself. We therefore, have to look at the *self in culture and culture in self*. Both the facets are equally important and are inseparable from each other. For example in the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, the idea of individual is one of the three ideas: the universal, the individual, and the particular. Plato held that the individual is an image or reflection of the universal and reminds us of it, while Aristotle maintains that, universal is present in the individual.<sup>37</sup> In a way we can say that, for both the philosophers the individual is a combination of the universal and the particular. The particular is the material principle that differentiates every individual from every other, and without this an individual cannot be distinguished from the other. In this way, each individual or Self is unique in its nature. In this sense the idea of particular is necessary; otherwise the universal would make all individuals the same. There is something in each and every individual to make it distinct from the others, even if all seems absolutely alike. This is the probable reason to inspire the self for its transcendental nature. Here, it is important to note that a

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<sup>36</sup> Sorabji, 2006, p. 273.

<sup>37</sup> Raju, 1982, p. 200.

particular cannot be the same as the individual, because it is what accounts for the individual being an individual and therefore is to be distinguished from it. Every individual may have distinct particularity, and therefore, particularity is one of the factors responsible for the uniqueness in the self.

It is also to be noted that, the concept of individual has a universal content; for the individual is understood as a member of one among many, having the same universal values. However, the activity of the principle of individuation involves self-transcendence. Particularity simply distinguishes the individual from one another. Transcendence transforms the inner content of self as a principle of individuation.

I, as a person, am what society thinks I am, the 'me', and therefore, what is determined by an attribute, a function or a universal. 'Person' is therefore, an individual, a member of a class. It does not disclose or express what distinguishes myself from other persons like me. We have, therefore, to go to the 'I' as that distinguishing factor. The 'I' is the ultimate in me, not determined by anything else, but determining and assimilating everything in me. I can use the term 'I' only with reference to myself and to none else. When I use the term 'me' as in 'you misunderstand me', I am referring to myself as I appear to you, but not as I am to myself.<sup>38</sup>

'I' is therefore, the only particular material of which conscious human beings are directly aware.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 209.



## 1.4 Self as Individual

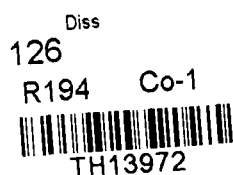
The individual cannot be true individual unless it acknowledges itself in the whole of the universality. In pluralistic universe, everything is limited by, and dependent upon, everything else, so nothing finite can be an individual.<sup>39</sup>

Individuation is the broader project in terms of universal values of the self. Thus in case it is fixed and finite self, it can never reach the principle of true individuality. This split between particular and universal inspires the self to transcend itself. Here, we can say that self is not imprisoned into particularities or specific culture, but has a capacity of transcendence as individual, with universal values as Human-self.

If I am born to such and such class or community, all characteristics of being in a particular class or community is unified by the 'I', and may be expressed by 'am'. However, if I become a Scientist, President, or Cricketer, the earlier 'I' is transcended and a new identity is formed. It is thus, the inherent nature of 'I' to transcend itself. This transcendence is the freeing of self from particularity, and the constructing a new individuality.

This transcendence leads the self beyond the egoistic 'I'. In this process of transcendence, Self is expanded from, the self in particular culture, and transform itself into an individual with a universal identity without limitation of 'am'. The questions that arise here are to what extent 'am-sense' carries with it the egoistic limitations? What is the point where self turns into the Enlightened-Human-Self? It is this capacity of self-transcendence of particular that can account for the freedom of the individual.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 211.



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If the 'I' as a particular is fixed point that determines with the specific circumference, then there will be no freedom in me and the 'I' within me can only be a fixed centre or circumference, determined by my physical, mental, social and cultural constituents. But I can react to the given circumference anytime and modify it. The self, therefore, has to be more than fixed point and capable of rising above itself. Particularity is therefore in a way, dynamic principle for individuation. Particular has to be self-transcendent and dynamic. Freedom is the capacity for inner self-transcendence.<sup>40</sup>

Particularity cannot be the same in each self. If we posit a universal for all particulars, we destroy the very purpose for which we posit the particulars.<sup>41</sup> It is important to note that individuals have something in common, but individuality may respond differently in different cultures. Because of the specific historicity of the 'I', this difference occurs in particularity. The past of the self and its experiences together make the self responsible for its transcendence.

In each one of us, there is something that is universal and unconditioned, which can be realised beyond the materialistic 'I', fixed in particular conditions or Culture.

As Mohanty suggests:

I characterize myself, by referring to my profession, my social status, which serve to identify me are all desired from the socio-cultural system to which I belong. There is in other words, a sense of identity in which my identity does not consist in my being a doctor or carpet dealer in Delhi, or son of so-and-so belonging to such-and-such village, but rather in the subjective perspective I have on the world, in the intentional act I perform, and the way my internationalities are unified within my mental life...my identity is not a function of culture, in the former sense it is. The latter sense concerns the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

formal structure of my identity as a person— no matter who I am, to which cultural-historical context I belong.<sup>42</sup>

Self, thus, is not fixed, rigid, limited, or ‘Cultured’, but something broader, universal, enlightened, unconditioned- Human-Self.

As I would like to conclude with quote from Friedrich Schiller:

Every individual human being, one man say, carries within him, potentiality and prescriptively, an ideal man, the archetype of ideal human being and it is his life task to be through all his changing manifestations in harmony with unchanging unity of this ideal.<sup>43</sup>

In Self thus, there lies the seeds of the transcendence to define itself in its own fashion. The self-realization, therefore, in terms of its full transcendence, leads the pure self-awareness. The Self thus, within a given context and in response to the given context, may create certain set of values, and express its inner social experience to which, we may give the name – ‘Culture’.

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<sup>42</sup> Mohanty, 2000, p.81.

<sup>43</sup> Schiller, 1967, p.17.

## ***Chapter II: Culture***

1. Introduction
2. The Meaning of Culture
3. Cultural Self
4. Culture as Experience
  - 4.1 Phenomenological Method
  - 4.2 Heidegger on Self and Culture
  - 4.3 Sartre on Existence, Freedom, and Culture

## **2.1 Introduction**

Historically the definition of Culture has been much debated in anthropology, sociology, and many other branches of social sciences. Our main aim in this chapter is to relate our discussion regarding culture with the notion of self. In this context, we would like to emphasize the dialogical relationship between self and culture. Specifically, the questions we would like to address are: How do we understand the meaning of culture? How do ideas of culture emanate from our ideas of the self, and how the ideas of self, in turn, depend upon the ideas of culture? How the self/other relationship to be understood in terms of the culture? And finally how the experiential or the phenomenological aspects of the self are related to our understanding of culture?

## **2.2 The meaning of Culture**

Culture as we commonly understand, is not something lying 'out there', though we generally say that it is constituted by a set of values and beliefs, but these values are native to the self. The quest for self-realization produces the values, which ultimately give birth to the concept of culture. The uniqueness of its expression thus gets highly contextualized in terms of various conditions. Culture thus begins with the self, and fulfills the individual and collective desires of the self. It emerges essentially as an

active entity that is embedded in the human being. Culture therefore is ‘not out there’, in contrast to nature, which is taken to be ‘out there’. For example, a monument is not merely a building but it also symbolizes the meaning attributed to it. We can connect it with nature in spite of it being a human creation. Culture therefore is not just creation but it also reflects the meaning associated with it. Culture therefore is more of a human construct (‘dependent’), as opposed to nature (‘independent’). For instance, stone is the natural thing whereas the sculpture made out of the stone belongs to the domain of culture. Stone remains stone, but what makes it different from its earlier embodiment is the meaning that is now accorded to it.

Culture thus is a conceptual construct and its character has to be perpetually derived from the language of values we associate with it. As mentioned by G.C. Pande, “culture is the tradition of values, of self-realisation”<sup>1</sup> it goes back to the activity that is deep-seated in the human being. The meaning, thus, derived from the culture, is the reflection of the self on various cultural symbols. For example, from the specific posture of the fingers, we derived the meaning of ‘lotus’. Culture thus more or less represents, the meaning of particular set of values, customs, symbols, and so on; and through these agents culture goes into the realm of meanings and values. In other words, we may say that culture therefore originates in the self. Culture in this sense is both medium as well as a derivative. Self thus becomes the “full fledged self” or “matured self” by understanding its ‘inner’ culture.

Our capacity or active response to our self makes discrimination, between the categories of ‘us’ and the ‘other’. To exist as a species, we must eat and meet other

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<sup>1</sup> Pandey, 1972, p.1.

basic needs, like that of other animals. However human beings have creative nature and individual has the tendency to either respond or resist the external conditions of existence. This creative exchange manifests the structure of certain sets of belief and behaviour, which re-pattern our so-called natural existence, and give clues to the structure of certain codes. Human ability thus forms the foundation of a unique structure. By perceiving the knowledge by senses, the mind builds up its perception of the other or the culture or the world. One cannot understand the dark without light, sweet without bitter, good without bad, life without death, and so on. Likewise human beings have a tendency 'to understand' her nature by making a distinction between self and others, self and world, self and culture, and so on. Thus my entry into an understanding culture is through that of the 'Self'.

As children grow up they begin to get familiarized slowly with relations, languages, beliefs, customs, etc., which they understand as culture in subsequent years. Culture thus is the product of the human self-realisation.

Human beings maintain a constant relationship with nature. They creatively re-pattern and re-fashion it according to their own desires. This process emerges in *particular* frame and shape with certain set of values, which we call 'culture'. It's a beautiful extension of nature by human's creative response to it. Culture thus the product of self-realization, which is a way of transcending the *given* values. Culture is therefore found everywhere, and not merely in the expression of high arts and in so called 'cultured civilization'. It is suggestive and expresses a way of life that patterns human nature, behavior, and action. Before embarking upon the construction of 'culture', nature provides the foundation for this construction. For example: if Jungle

is natural, Garden belongs to the domain of culture; if wood is a natural entity, the chair or the table is the cultural expression. Thus, human-self actively responds to nature and its creative interaction with it leads to the production of culture. Thus self's creative energy reshapes its environment in the form of culture. Culture, therefore, is not restricted to the study of mere social behavior of particular community, but it originates from the response of the self to nature.

The word culture, Raymond Williams explained, is derived from the Latin *Cultura* indicating 'cultivation'. 'Culture' was used to describe 'the tending of natural growth' over a period of time. The metaphor of tending was extended from plants and animals to the tending of human development particularly of the human mind. For the most part, even in early twentieth century, this sense of tending was quite specifically directed at individuals.<sup>2</sup> In the last quarter of the Eighteenth century, however, the German philosopher, J.G. Herder criticized the common assumption that all this tending and cultivating had led the European society to become the pinnacle of all human self-development.<sup>3</sup>

Understanding culture in the above way indicates that culture also has the evolving nature like the self, and is open to the influences of outside and inside, in unpredictable ways. Herder traces the individual worth of each culture to its values appropriate to humanity at the stage of its development.<sup>4</sup> In a way, individual or human-self is not the prisoner within its culture, but it actively connects to external

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<sup>2</sup> Mitchell, 2001, p.15.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>4</sup> Craig, 1998, Vol. IV, p.381.



conditions, and can affect and react against the *given* circumstances. It has a creative dimension to contribute to its development.

### 2.3 Cultural Self

Having initially reflected upon the relationship between self and culture giving rise to a specific meaning of culture, we can ask the further question: what are possibilities or grounds for the emergence of a Cultural Self?

The active dimension of self indicates that there cannot a 'Cultured Self' *per se*. Can we really differentiate a man, between the cultured man and the common man? The word 'cultured' creates the boundaries of social division, a state of confusion and incomprehension between the so-called 'cultured-man', and the common man.

We need no books to understand the essence and elements of culture, though it can also be preserved and conveyed through books. Culture is as dynamic as life and is made manifest by modes and institutions of the individuals. Every man is thus, the active and creative carrier of culture.<sup>5</sup> Human culture, thus, may be understood as the dynamic process of cultivation, and defines the self in a unique way. An individual from the beginning assesses values taught to him or her. One can appropriate them and experiment with them. S/he is free to accept and refuse the values *given* to him/her. Thus, self becomes the living interpreter of the culture. His/her interpretations, however intuitive, will always carry something peculiar and unique of his/her own. It is in this sense that each self is considered as independent

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<sup>5</sup> Bernardo, 1997, p.4.

'culture maker'. Hence, we should keep in mind that the uniqueness of contribution varies from individual to individual. Self has the active element to contribute to the culture radically and bring new elements into it.

The ancient Greek philosopher, Socrates' well quoted statement, "the unexamined life is not worth living", can be regarded as a call for deep reflection on individuals' need for transformation.<sup>6</sup> Anthropological reflection of culture is therefore different from the Philosophical reflection of culture. Anthropology suggests who we are, but not who am I? How do we associate with each other? But not, what should I do in general? What is done, but not what ought to be done?<sup>7</sup> The idea of culture is not what people are doing; rather, it is the way people make sense of what they have done. It is a medium through which individuals transform the mundane phenomena of material world into the world of significant symbols to which one gives meaning and attached values. Therefore each culture is unique in its own way, and no culture in the world is superior to the other. The idea of culture develops under specific conditions, so there is no such 'ontology' of culture in the realist sense.

In this respect we may mention Herder's view that each culture is distinct and has its own system of meanings and values, and, hence, cannot be ranked on any universal scale.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, there is no constant and permanent ground for culture but there is need for continuous grounding. Thus, it is difficult to define the culture in permanent

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<sup>6</sup> Carrithers, 1992, p.1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>8</sup> Craig, 1998, Vol. II, p.749.

and standard theoretical modes. People relate to each other and to objects in the world on the basis of shared meanings. Thus meaning arises out of the interaction with one another.

From these discussion it follows that the concept of self, other, and culture, are dependent as well as independent. To understand these concepts we need to look at the interconnections among them. For example, when a person comes in contact with a foreign language and a culture it helps him to discover, who he is. Culture, thus becomes the interpretative tool for understanding the self. Culture becomes the indicator to understand an individual and locate the self in relation to others. In short, we come to understand ourselves better by discovering the others. Furthermore, these others are already deeply there in one's cultural self and just need to be uncovered. But sometime they are lurking more in the margins as potential dimensions waiting to be incorporated into the self. It should be clear from these remarks that self is viewed not as a fixed entity but as something always in the process of change, whose identity derives not from an unchanging static core but from stability and coherence in transformation.<sup>9</sup>

Also to understand oneself as self implies knowledge that there is something outside the self, *the other*, in contrast to which the self can be defined and distinguished. For example, a poor man in a group of rich men, or a black man in a group of white men, or a man in group of women, results in the sense of self being differently constructed in different contexts. In fact, the very definition of 'self', implies that there is a second. Understanding the other is a necessary tool for

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<sup>9</sup> Chattopadhyaya, 1998, p.108.

understanding the self. The other provides a medium or dialogical partner through which the self can see and test its limits.<sup>10</sup>

Self is an experiential concept in cultural domain, and there may be continuous struggle between experience of self and one's role with the other. These changes can cause re-patterning of the relation of self with other. In other words, the self, not only determines itself against its opposition with the other, but it reshapes and enriches itself by assimilating the changes in itself.

Self is further seen as a performer, consciously interpreting ongoing action in the light of previous experience, and calculating responses to understand its relation with culture. Self in action, therefore, implies dynamic change as well as continuity. Self is seen as situational, and yet as something which transcends the ebb and flow of transitory encounters. It has the direct and indirect effect on both representation of self and experience of culture.

Culture, therefore, is the experiential condition for the self; it assigns values, directs ways of thinking and determines how to maintain and conduct relation with others. Culture is one of the major determinants of behavior of self. Culture influences the individual by both ways i.e., external and internal. Externally, it is represented by various institutions (e.g. familial, marriage, religious, and political) and internally; it is represented by values, beliefs, worldviews, and epistemologies. All these forces are in simultaneous interaction with the self. Thus, we may say that culture plays one of the most important roles in shaping the person and her environment. In the cultural realm, one can speculate that- self as 'subject' and self as

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.109.

'processes' are respectively differentiated portions of the organism-environmental unit, which are labeled as 'I', 'me', or 'mine'.

To understand the other, one must, in the first place, identify with the other and then project oneself into the others point of view. As T.S.Eliot describes: "you have to give yourself up, and then recover yourself; but the self recovered is never the same as the self before it was given."<sup>11</sup> This develops into the critical consciousness of the self; and culture becomes the analytical and interpretative methodology to understand self. Self's encounter with the culturally other not only enlarges the self with the experience and beliefs of others, but by providing a rich and articulate background of comparison and contrast, it enables us to form, define, and assert our own identity with greater richness and clarity.<sup>12</sup> That is why, understanding the culturally other becomes a tool to interpret the self and promote a better understanding of the self. With these comparative exercises of the self to understand other, it would be able to understand itself vividly, by understanding the other in ourselves. As we discussed earlier (in Chapter I) self is not a fixed and rigid entity; and external conditions have a tremendous influence on it. So, by ignoring the 'other' in ourselves, we may not understand the self as a whole. Many a times we may ignore the otherness of our self, and even if we recognized its otherness, we fail to recognize the culturally other dimension of ourselves. The important question that arises here is: will the self minus the cultural-self be defined as the complete self? Let us suppose that, being human; we have to perform many roles in our life. I am a teacher, and at

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in, Chhtopadhaya, 1998, p.111.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.111.

the same time I am a mother or father, wife or husband, son or daughter. I am a citizen of a particular nation; belong to a particular community, caste, religion, and so on. We have to acknowledge our *positioning* in order to understand the otherness of ourselves. We simply cannot ignore our comparative expression of self in given time and space. Hence the self minus (or apart from) the cultural-self can hardly make any sense.

By ignoring this aspect of our self, self would be suffer from cultural-self understanding. This would definitely be as a *lack* in one's self-understanding. It needs to realize its *other* roots, which may incorporate elements of the culturally other. Understanding cultural otherness of self means, not simply acknowledging the facts given to us, but realizing the self's *other* nature to promote the fullest understanding of self. Being black or white, upper or lower class (or caste), rich or poor, men or women, master or servant, I realize the culturally '*other*' in myself.

Let us take an example to understand the point that we have been trying to make in the above few paragraphs. The Indian society is divided into numerous level of hierarchy. The hierarchy is based on caste, religion, ethnicity, and so on. Being a Muslim, one recognizes how s/he is different from other; being a lower caste, one realizes how much dignity and respect s/he has in the society and how much one is marginalized. Being a north Indian, he recognizes that he is not south Indian; being an untouchable one realizes that he is an outcaste and so on. Such labeling of a person has undeniably marked one's cultural identity in many ways. This marking gives the *bracketed* meaning to the self and categorises it in its particular aspect. In a way, we can state that, to know myself means learning the culturally other. This can be a

difficult and painful exercise, but the philosophical quest for self-knowledge, has never been perceived as effortless and trouble free, even if it is often seen as pursuit aimed towards greater peace and tranquility.<sup>13</sup> Thus, culture *underlines* the self with various components, values, and identities.

It is important to understand that this self-other relationship re-constructs and broadens the understanding of self, but need not be viewed as a binary opposite. This process is helpful for the self-development and thus leads the self-transformation through amalgamation of the other. Absorption of cultural otherness in self, reveals a fresh aspect of the self. The 'other' therefore does not necessarily destroy the self. But in order to recognize faces of the 'other' which are constitutive or coercive, formative, enriching or oppressive; self has to exercise caution about the proper construal of the other relationship.<sup>14</sup> For every 'self' has its 'other' in different form, and every 'other' presupposes some or other 'self'. Self and other thus cannot be easily separated.

It should also be noted that neither the physical world, nor history, nor language, could set a permanent limit to what self can possibly know about herself. Whenever self knows something new, its existing knowledge undergoes change and in a way is renewed.<sup>15</sup>

If we accept the above thesis, the primary claim of Descartes, who tries to know the self in certainty, breaks down. Descartes presupposes that, an immediate

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.114.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.217.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.29.

sense of who and what we are, constitutes a kind of complete and certain knowledge. As opposed to this Cartesian approach, we can think of the Buddhist philosopher, Nagarjuna for whom self-knowledge is neither historical nor futuristic. It is momentary (*ksanabhangura*), a matter of dependently originating (*pratityasamutpada*), and having practical efficacy (*arthakriyakaritva*). It is both backward-looking and forward looking. Every past moment of one's self-consciousness collapses into the future one.<sup>16</sup> Self is thus renewed whenever it knows something new.

In this kind of self-understanding/knowledge culture plays a crucial role. In other words we can say, culture means both, what is around us and inside us. Culture is thus a matter of self-overcoming as much as self-realization. If it celebrates the self, it also disciplines it. Metaphorically we may say that, self is the clay in the hands of culture, and that is what we call 'a cultural self'. Although it is not the fullest conception of a self, it plays a major role in promoting the understanding of self in general, as one cannot ignore the cultural-self in order to understand the self as a whole.

Culture, has its diverse forms and evolves its own laws. Self too has similar characteristics to respond according to the environment in which it exists. All forms of cultured experiences depend on self-consciousness, for something to become an image of culture; it has to become expressive of self-awareness.<sup>17</sup> A figure carved on stone does not have meaningful existence in the stone itself, but it is an expression of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.30.

<sup>17</sup> Pandey, 1972, p.9.



awareness of self in a particular environment or culture. This form of understanding has a particularity of its own depending upon the uniqueness of the self who understands it.

The unity of culture is not the unity of an objective system but the unity of self-consciousness. Culture, therefore is not understood merely in terms of pattern, and system of beliefs and values, but in terms of characteristics of self-consciousness. Culture may also express itself in terms of self-realization. Self-realization is an unavoidable fact of everybody's life, and cultural expression of the self is the conscious effort to fulfill this thirst or quest. In this sense, self tries to experience/interpret the culture in its own fashion, and derives meaning for it. In this way, the meaning of culture varies from one self to another. So there cannot be one 'true' meaning of culture or any single standard scale to define it. Also there is not any definite pattern to relate the culture with an individual. Each culture and self has the 'autonomous cause' to express and define it.

Following Wittgenstein we can say that different cultures can be comprehended as different forms of life. If someone from one culture were to be persuaded to accept the 'truths' of another culture, then it would not be the case that this would be achieved by their accepting the certain 'truth', this will be an individual's 'cultural-view'. The perception of values occurs only in the feeling immediacy with the self, and belongs to different levels of experience. At each level the self is felt and imagined in terms of different characters and degrees of reality. Culture, in a way always, reveals a new notion for the self. As Wittgenstein suggests,

“culture is like a big organization in which each of its members can work in the spirit of the whole, and it is perfectly fair for his power to be measured.”<sup>18</sup>

In the light of above discussion we can say that, although self and culture exists independently, each of them plays a major role in defining the other. Self-understanding is contextualized in culture. It defines its meanings out of culture. These meanings have context specific aspects. Likewise culture is the active experience of individuals; it is through culture that the finite individual is able to transcend the continuity and existential boundedness of his life. Self is not only in observing the continuity and boundedness of life, that is the mundaneness that the individual becomes a cultural self. An individual in order to gain his completeness as a cultural self will also have to become a sufferer and doer.<sup>19</sup> Put together, as I have suggested above, the individual has to be an experiential self. Self does not merely an observer (*Drashta*) of things and events, but it also feels, suffers (*Bhogta*), and acts (*Karta*) in response to the situation s/he is in.

## 2.4 Culture as Experience

### 2.4.1 The Phenomenological Method

The experiential aspect of self, which we also characterised in terms of the idea of ‘cultural-self’, can be best explained through Phenomenology as a philosophic enterprise. Phenomenology would look out for a totality of experience, not by aggregating many experiences together but by transcending the everydayness of

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<sup>18</sup> Wittgestein, 1980, p.6e.

<sup>19</sup> The Concept of Self is well explained in Indian Philosophy- as an Observer (*Drashta*); as a Sufferer (*Bhogta*); and as a Doer (*Karta*).

experiences, and by intuitively experiencing the totality of the world as Husserl calls it '*Lebenswelt*'.<sup>20</sup> This transcendental experience is gathered through the act of consciousness, through transcendental meditation (Husserl). What are transcendently captured as certain meanings or values will form major constituents of culture. Culture therefore is not merely one instance of experience but certain meanings or values derived by a transcending of the experiences. Undoubtedly, Phenomenology as a philosophic method has helped in understanding the nature of culture and cultural formations. Philosophers belonging to this tradition, like Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and many others used this technique in order to relate thought and action. The method focuses on exploration of the conscious as it engages in the act of experience. The major concerns for the Phenomenologist dealing with cultural studies are based on concerns about practical and existential reality. Accordingly phenomenologists thirst goes on to enquire into question, such as, 'what is Culture?' 'How culture is experienced by the Self?' In order to reflect up on these questions, it requires the phenomenologists to overcome their preconceived ideas and traditional way of thinking, and try to develop the new methods for interrogation through conscious experience. According to them, one cannot think and experience about the things in the world independent of the subject of experience. Our pre-conceived thinking interferes in seeing the existence of the things 'as they are'. Many a times our present experiences are based on our past experiences, and we try to realize the truth under such influences of the past. To understand this mode of thinking, we have to consider

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<sup>20</sup> Bhadra, 1990, p.26.

our previous baggage of thoughts, which may compel and influence us to see the concepts in *fixed* sense.

It is also equally important to make a distinction between ‘meaning’ and ‘objects meant’. Sometimes, different expressions carry different meanings while referring to one and the same object. Another important distinction has also to be made between the multiple acts of meaning and one identical meaning to which they all refer and point.<sup>21</sup> The function of such science is to explore the foundation of logic and epistemology, on the basis of the phenomena given to consciousness. This process sharply creates a split between what is *given* and how the things *are*. Such study of consciousness is not an empirical study about the facts of the self. Phenomenology is interested in perception, judgments, and *feelings* as such, in their *a priori* nature, and in their very essence.<sup>22</sup> Phenomenological method systematically penetrates each layer of the description of the various aspects of Self, and ultimately would reach a position where essence would be revealed to its existence. For example, Mohanty, while defining self, goes with Husserl’s term called *Sachen Selbst*, (the matter in hand), while thinking about selfhood in certain a sense. He mentions:

I have decided to go directly to what Husserl called the *Sachen Selbst*, the matter at hand. In thinking about the idea of person, I am, in certain sense thinking about myself, and about creatures like my self.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.48.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.22.

<sup>23</sup> Mohanty, 2000, p.71.

Husserl's method promotes the practice of reduction in order to minimize vague experiences and make them focused. Mind cannot lead to satisfactory results unless it practices this reduction in which a suspension of the belief in the reality of world takes place.<sup>24</sup> This process of 'focusing' and disconnection of mind for the object is what Husserl calls '*bracketing*'. This is his best-known technique. This operation is like peeling an onion from the outside in order to focus our attention towards understanding the meaning.

When we come in contact with any given situation or let us say any other culture, it involves numerous elements like:

- (a) A sense of being a self so that we can be conscious of our perception;
- (b) Our own idea about what culture ought to be;
- (c) Our position or hierarchy in then given conditions;
- (d) Response of others to us.

Phenomenological methods account for each of these of perceptions in intricate detail.

The phenomenological relations between Self and Culture demand segregating the trivial and unwanted/less wanted elements of the Self's engagements with (authentic) culture. This segregation requires some form of bracketing.

As Mohanty mentions:

withdraw my focus on the world around, with which I was pre-reflectively engaged. I even suspend my naive belief in the world which surrounds me and of which I am a part. I focus my reflective glance on

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<sup>24</sup> Bhadra, 1990, p.26.

my inner mental life as a succession of mental events...since the world as totality to which I belong has just been left out of my reflective focus in the inner time of my stream of consciousness.<sup>25</sup>

The idea of 'bracketing' by Husserl can be used not merely as *suspending* the trivial ideas, but to segregate and delegitimise these ideas. This is an additional act required for understanding the nature of culture.

The relation of the self with culture thus undergoes a radical shift. The dialectic relation between the two is that 'culture' shapes the self, and self re-defines itself accordingly leading to re-enacting of culture. Mohanty observe that, the way the world, including oneself, is presented in our experience is determined by one's own culture.<sup>26</sup> The living space of a person, as Mohanty explains further, is not a field of object, but an actual and valuational field of situation, which constantly overtakes her, and about which she is called upon to make new decisions, and from within which she projects new possibilities for her being.<sup>27</sup>

Such classifying activities can help as to understand the conditions in different ways to modify our generalized category into focused category. Thus phenomenological encounter of self with the culture defines its relation on existential ground in a unique way. Self may share the common experience with others but may interpret the commonality in its own way. This Individuality of the Self opens a new possibility of erecting a separate space to understand the 'cultural' in its own fashion. I experience myself in an ordinary sense, as a human being living among the objects

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<sup>25</sup> Mohanty, 2000, p.76.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.82.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.82.

of the world. But the phenomenological investigations reject the general point of view and reflect upon the deep insights to investigate the experience that generally takes place. It clears the fog engulfing the relation between self and other, or self and culture. It promotes a clearer understanding of these terms. Phenomenological method requires the nature of the self, and its relation with culture to be free from any presupposition. These presuppositions include not only existent facts and the law of nature, but also metaphysical theories.

Husserl points out that, the world is by no means immediately accessible, as everyone is under the influence of the culture of the 'world' in which he is living. He believes that the western man is somehow 'seduced' by scientific interpretation of the world. A particular reduction that is a suspension of culture and science is therefore necessary for uncovering the life world and its essential structure. Once this reduction is performed, we are in a position to study the ontology of the life i.e. world, which is a kind of phenomenology...Thus we have to return from the world of culture to the original life-world by means of a first reduction.<sup>28</sup> Here, let us for a while; consider the 'life' as 'self' and 'world' as 'culture'. This phenomenological discovery of 'life-world' or 'self-culture' relationship makes possible for us to describe the original constitution of their structural features.

Therefore it is meaningless to claim that, culture is simply 'out there' or 'given' to the self. Culture is connected with a series of different experiences of the self. Cultural consciousness does not emerge simply by cultural experience. But the conscious connection of the self with a given culture is responsible for the series of

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<sup>28</sup> Bhadra, 1990, pp.25-27.

experiences. These experiences are responsible for forming the cultural consciousness. The 'self' through intentional connection and reflexivity forms the cultural consciousness. Self and culture have a number of categories of their existence. As Wittgenstein mentions, "you cannot assess yourself properly if you are not well versed in the categories."<sup>29</sup> Each individual is born in a social set up and he is made to believe and lead his own existence through some given categories. The task of such categorization is to let the self know itself within in particular situation or context and understand its relation with others. However each individual human being has the ability to go beyond these given categories. Hence, new categorizations are constructed by him. This requires transcending the given categories and awareness of the initial context.

#### **2.4.2 Heidegger on Self and Culture**

In the phenomenological method of Martin Heidegger, truth is neither a subjective representation nor the objectivity of world; truth is unveiling of the world as world.<sup>30</sup> The approach of the self consists in seeing the truth as truth and untruth as untruth. It opens a point of departure from culturally given values. According to Heidegger the tensions of modern cultures are themselves based on our failure to apprehend the problem of being,<sup>31</sup> which is about capturing the transcendental character of human existence. The emergence of relation between us and our experience of culture goes together. It is a simultaneous process. The self in culture and culture in self develops together, but this development may involve inner conflict which is hidden from us.

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<sup>29</sup> Wittgenstein, 1980, p.87e.

<sup>30</sup> Colbrook, 2005, p.55.

<sup>31</sup> Bhadra, 1990, p.288.



Phenomenological investigation attempts to capture the truth with transcendental enquiry. The idea of 'self' many a times hints towards some higher values. According to Heidegger, each human being is located in the world i.e., 'Being-thrown-into-the-world.' He cannot separate himself from the givenness of the world. Thus, he is the being-in-the-world, as a sense of thrownness. But he certainly can transcend this being-in-the-world. Heidegger opines: "unless we are guided by a developed knowledge of treeness...we can look over thousand and thousands of trees in vain- we shall not see the tree for the trees"; and for Heidegger phenomenological examination is not an examination of individual objects, but the examination of the phenomena of being as such.<sup>32</sup>

This is his famous idea of '*Dasien*', authentic existence. He never recognizes himself as just being-in-the-world, but being requires a proper explication of an entity with regard to its presence (Being). The existence of being is not in the world in the traditional sense, but it is Being-present-at-hand or its conscious presence, is in the world. No one is as close to us as what we are to ourselves. We know ourselves better than we know the world. On the other hand, the world too, cannot be bracketed out or doubted. So there is a possibility of the self's reaching beyond *given* culture to grasp the world. We must therefore understand in order to understand the cultural self. Thus, when Heidegger says that *Dasien* is being-in-the-world, it does not mean that there is mere juxtaposition of *Dasien* and the world.<sup>33</sup> There are necessary

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.298.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.302.

connections between self and culture derived from some fundamental practical understanding. Our every day observations point out the otherness in our self.

Heidegger clarifies the relationship of *Dasien* with the world, in its various dimensions. It signifies its meanings accordingly, in different context. For example, water gives different meaning in different context. It signifies its meaning accordingly, like, *in* the glass, or in sea, or in the garment, or in the space, etc. The relationship of self thus gets expanded in various situations. The facticity of the self forms part of an enquiry into the nature of self. This is what Heidegger calls 'present-at-hand', which is, not just 'presence', but which involves certain authenticity and reflection. According to him, *Dasien's* facticity is such that its Being-in-the-world has always dispersed itself or even split itself up into definite ways of Being-in. This produces connection of the self with something beyond itself. It opens many possible ways of relating the self with others. Being-in is, in a way knowing the 'in' that is, knowing the world, or the facts. The factual finding of the self makes it aware of its own existence, as it has concern for the world around it.

Let me put it in Heidegger's words,

This kind of Being towards the world is one which lets us encounter entities within-the-world purely in the *way they look*, just that; *on the basis* of this kind of Being, and *as* a mode of it, looking explicitly at what we encounter is possible. Looking *at* something in this way is sometimes a definite way of taking up a direction towards something- of setting our side towards what is present-at-hand.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Heidegger, 1983, p.88.

From the aforementioned quote we may say that the relation of self and other, as well as the relation of self with culture is an active and continuous process. Involvement of self in culture however, is not 'sinking' of self in culture. In fact the self gets involved in the given form of culture only to free itself from that given culture. It happens because of self's concern and engagements with others. Culture, for self, is both what is given as well as what is strived as other than given. It has the capacity of recognizing its otherness in moving beyond the given. Cultural-self therefore, means self within a culture or culture-in-self. Heidegger termed this aspect of the self as ready-to-hand through its transcendence from being within-the-world. Culture thus becomes a domain to interpret the self.

Man always has concern about himself, about his own existence. Heidegger's concept of *care* takes into account this fact of human existence, and regards philosophy as a search for an answer to the question, 'who am I?' It is also the search for self-identity. Self creates the space for itself to define itself. Only through this act can authenticity be gained. Out of *care*, self searches for meaning and values about the life it has; and the way self construes meanings and values is what is termed as 'culture'.

This 'inner' and 'outer' side of the self vis-à-vis culture highlights the significant characteristics of the self. For example, I am born in a particular family, state, religion, community, caste, and so on. There is a sense of givenness in all these identities but as mentioned earlier the self can break away from all these identities as well. *Facticity* for Heidegger is the set of all these 'givens' which I encounter in my

existence.<sup>35</sup> Self is thus determined by these 'givens'. But it has its choices open. I am 'thrown' in a particular culture, particular ways and values defining me, which I always confront and encounter. To these facticities the self is able to respond out of its intense care for itself. Self thus has the ability to recognize its 'not-self', when it comes in contact with the other. Culture therefore is an interpretative method that helps define the self as a whole. 'I' become conscious in 'others' culture, and recognizes what is 'not-I'. This interpretation of 'I' discovers its own standpoint and creates *anxiety*, which analyzes the self. It individualises the 'I' and exposes its independent nature. It takes 'I' face to face with freedom. Our aim here is to grasp the self as a whole, and not to ignore the cultural aspect of the self. According to

Heidegger, Kant proposes the distinction between 'in me' and the 'outside of me', and also *the connection* between these.<sup>36</sup> Understanding anything means uncovering it. In this sense, understanding culture means uncovering it, and understanding of self-culture relation means, uncovering this relation. Such investigating method is not merely an academic activity added to understand the self or culture, but the very way in which we understand the relation of self with the other.

### 2.4.3 Sartre on Existence, Freedom and Culture

Jean Paul Sartre, like Heidegger, uses phenomenology through the act of intention - such as man's experience, perception, emotion, etc. Unlike Heidegger, Sartre takes the human reality more into the domain of the mundane life by recognizing the nature of consciousness as it guides human praxis. As such, Sartre's philosophy is often

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<sup>35</sup> Bhadra, 1990, p.312

<sup>36</sup> Heidegger, 1983, p.248.

called 'descriptive phenomenology'. He tries to uncover the relation of an individual with the situation, with the ultimate purpose of realizing the nature of the man. Heidegger looks into explaining the purpose of Being-in-the-world, while Sartre highlights the praxiological importance of life.

Sartre's phenomenological method has been often seen as dynamic, as a process of individual's creating the world for himself. In his view, man has the ability to create the world by acting upon the *given* facts. Sartre goes ahead and opens the possibility that, though the individual has to accept the given fact, he can still make the world for himself within the *given* fact. Sartre in a way had not accepted *given* as given passively, but suggests that the individual can respond and reorganize the situation with his freedom. Self has an evolving nature, and thus Sartre introduces his well known concept of individual 'for-itself'. 'For-itself' wants unification with the world. How does it achieve this unity with the world? How does a man practice freedom? How is man condemned to be free? These are some basic questions of Sartre's phenomenological investigation that define the relation of an individual with the world. Man reaches the goal by acting upon the world as 'for-itself'. He does not merely accept the situation as fixed in the sense of being *givenness* but transform the situation from its givenness to a new situation through thought as well as praxis.

Thus, Sartre tries to understand the role of consciousness in life and in the world phenomenologically.<sup>37</sup> Sartre believes in the transformation of the situation through human realisation. The self for Sartre is an active aspect of the 'I'. He emphasizes that man first of all exists, is encounters himself, surges forward in the

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<sup>37</sup> Bhadra, 1990, p.346.

world and defines himself afterwards. He is not be anything until later, and then he is what he makes of himself.<sup>38</sup>

According to Sartre, Man is responsible for what he is. Therefore, man's existence precedes his essence. Man creates the image for himself, and thus is responsible for himself. His well known statement, '*man is condemned to be free*', means that man is thrown into the world and he is responsible for everything he does thereafter.<sup>39</sup> Sartre therefore gives the whole responsibility to man for his existence. Sartre states that there is no difference between being a man and being free. Man cannot be sometimes slave and sometimes free. S/he is bound to be free. Sartre criticizes Husserl and Descartes by trying to show that existence must precede its essence. What we can demand from the *cogito* is only what it discovers in us as factual necessity. It is also the *cogito* that we can appeal to in order to determine freedom as a pure factual necessity.<sup>40</sup>

By contextualizing freedom with Facticity, Sartre classified facticity into five categories:<sup>41</sup>

- a. My place
- b. My past
- c. My environment
- d. Other human being
- e. Death

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<sup>38</sup> Sartre, 1960, p.28.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.34.

<sup>40</sup> Sartre, 1957, p.439.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. pp.481-553. He explains all above facts in his work, in detail

In these five aspects of facticity, Sartre explains the locatedness of his place, and wants to submit that the particular facts of one's birth results in organizing one's world in a certain way. But there is always a possibility of going beyond what is merely located or given. Man keeps open the possibility of being free from the past. Past influences and decides the meaning of our action. But Sartre points out that understanding the meaning of the past is strictly dependent on the 'present'.

The above aspect of relating the 'past' with 'present' highlights the relationship between 'facticity' and 'freedom'. My past forms a part of my facticity, something that is given to me, without my having chosen the same. On the other hand, my present is in my hand, in the sense that I have control over the kind of action that I wish to perform. Culture forms, both the 'past' and the 'present' of the man. What is given to man (past) shapes what man proposes to become (future), through his action (present). So through human actions we aim towards realizing possibilities, and thus enter the domain of creating culture.

Cultural givenness provides room for the realization of the possibilities and links the self to understand of itself. The realm of possibilities need not be realized through a smooth path. The challenges could be harsh. It is not surprising that considerable cultural resistance is required to change the existing cultural structures. So, self can transcend what is given to it through new expectations and dreams. Changes and influences of the cultural space lead to the birth of new spheres of existence in the experiential self. The idea of Self is not thus a culturally static concept, but selfhood is something that is continuously defined in one's experience,

in our interaction with others, and in culture. Self through the cultural connection and interaction with others consistently attains a degree of reflective awareness.

Culture as an interpretative dimension of the self not only helps in understanding selfhood but also in changing the nature of something given. Cultural *givenness* therefore can always be transformed, which results in the formation of new Identity. But this formation of identity is also not a fixed process. It doesn't embrace a permanent character for itself but always keeps the possibilities open for its transcendence.



## ***Chapter III: Identity***

1. Introduction

2. Understanding Identity

3. Language and Identity

4. Ethics and Identity

5. Identity and Dominance

6. Re-Constructing Identity: Buddhist Testimony of Dr. Ambedkar

(A Case Study)

6.1 Where to Go?

6.2 Ambedkar's 'Human-Self' in the Modern Democratic World

### **3.1 Introduction**

Encyclopedia of philosophy explains the concept of Identity in cultural context as follows:

‘If cultural identity means that a person achieves the fullest humanity within an accepted context of traditional symbols, judgments, values, behaviour and relationships with specific others who self-consciously think of themselves as a community, then it must be seen as a great contemporary challenge to many western philosophical assertions about the person, society, meaning and truth.’<sup>1</sup>

Identity therefore, is something where an individual is submerged in his/her particularity, which defines the relationship between her/him with the surroundings around her/him. It identifies the ‘authentic’ location which should be grasped fully by one’s self. Identity is that which is psychologically grasped, geographically located, socio-culturally rooted, and politically given to an individual. It is the meaning of integration or unity in the sense acquainting one self within circumstances.

Another aspect of such uniqueness, different from others, is that things are identical if they are one and not two. This concept of identity is fundamental to logic.<sup>2</sup> As described by the Leibniz’s law, if,  $x = y$ , then whatever is true about the ‘x’, is also

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<sup>1</sup> Craig, Vol. II, 1998, p.744.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Vol. IV, p.675.

true of 'y'. A genuine consequence of Leibniz's law is the necessity of identity; which means that things are in fact identical could not have been distinct.<sup>3</sup> Thus, identity is also uniquely characterised in logic. However, in this context, we will be mostly concerned with Cultural identity. But what we can learn from the logical notion of identity is relational in character. The question of identity, then always comes in terms of 'relation with'. It is always related with the notion of 'sameness'.

### 3.2 Understanding Identity

The concept of cultural identity is also problematic in itself. Here the question arises, is identity the result of circumstances, place, and time? Is it always possible to identify an individual with certain *given* values and circumstances? Though it is a result of causes like: time, place, circumstances, etc., but these causes and events include the other events and circumstances too.

We can say the man is both a product of 'himself and his circumstances'; identity in this sense is contextual, and the logical conclusion that every man tries to derive for himself. The issue of identity always asks for and demands legitimacy through which an individual tries to shape himself/herself. Though this seems to be the correct way of understanding identity, the question is that, if the roots of identity are always specific or rooted in some specific situation or culture, is it possible to understand identity in terms of some universal values? If we accept the fact that identity is rooted only in specific culture, then the ancient western idealist sense of the human universal is either suspect or defunct.<sup>4</sup> This idealist sense of identity polarizes the concept of

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Vol.II, p.745.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, p.745.

identity from ‘particular’ to ‘universal’. Identity has many aspects involving the socio-political situation, cultural conditions, language, geographical location and many others, which may oppose to universal dimensions of identity. At the same time, we must admit that each culture has some universal elements, and has some universal threads to recognize some universal values. Thus, it is always possible to transform the *particular* sense of belongingness to the sense of *universal* belonging. Though there are unique ways to define the ‘material identity’, it is possible to transform them into ‘Human-identity’.

In broader terms, identity functions on both the levels, i.e., at a social level and at a personal level. Social identity simply comes from a particular group of people and personal identity is more or less a mental representation of the self. This self-representation is deeply incorporated in both social and cultural expressions of the person. When we share our experiences with other, our social-self is either partly or fully merged with the others experience. We try to derive an abstract by contextualizing self *vis-à-vis* others. Self-representation thus may or may not merge with the given situation. The Socio-cultural identity therefore can be said come as a background. While personal identity is highly contextualized.

### **3.3 Language and Identity**

Identity is defined in *context*, i.e., in terms of what situation, environment, linguistic framework the self is situated. Context plays an important role in defining the identity for the individual/self. This stays very close to where the self is *situated*.

The *position* of the self plays an important role to shape and understand how the self is understood and how it functions in a socio-cultural situation. The properties

of these situations become contextually relevant for the discourse of identity. The discourse of identity is also exhibited by its socio-cultural location, including the communicative practices. For example, it is not an objective fact that speakers are women or men, white or black, young or old, powerful or weak, upper or lower caste, etc.; these identities depend upon how they see and construct themselves in general, or in the current socio-cultural situation.<sup>5</sup> Self-representation, thus faces personal interference in culturally, socially, and linguistically shared representations and the attitude of belief, customs, habits of particular situation on the one hand, and identity which an individual seeks, on the other.

Though identity represents the dominant feature of socio-cultural and even political situation, it is more or less a mental model for an individual to represent her/himself. An individual accordingly evaluates the situation given to him/her. Identity, in other words, is not *what* it is, but represents *how* it is. Though it is a shared experience with others, we do have mental response and unique attitude to represent ourselves, which we may term as 'inner identity'. The relationship between context and identity consist in explaining *how* we are rather than *what* we are? *Who* we are rather than *what* we are?

Identity is thus an interpretative representation of the self in a given situation that one wants to be in. Identity as this interpretative mode may completely change our approach in response to a contextualized situation. This is an interrogation, and not the formal interaction with society or culture, while shaping the identity for oneself. It is notable here that in the process of understanding the relation between context and discourse relation does *not* mean that we *reduce* social context to cognition. It needs its own social analysis, but it refers to the relationship between

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<sup>5</sup> Van Dijk, 1998, p.212.

social context and action on one hand, and the subjective understanding of context and discourse, on the other.<sup>6</sup>

Self thus plays a central role in the process of shaping of its identity. It is conscious of what it does in everyday life while shaping the identity for itself. Furthermore Identity defines the intention of the self i.e. what an individual wanted to be. We therefore, also need to understand the meaning given by self to the things, in order to identify it. Thus, both interpretation and intention play roles in defining the identity of an individual. The experiences that we gather from the environment around us have two fold aspects; how the society looks at us, and how we would like to appear before others. As Edward Said put it,

Looking at an experience as a single unitary thing, it's always got at least two aspects: the aspect of the person who is looking at it and always seeing it, looking at it now and seeing it now; and then as you are looking at it now and what it would have been like to look; So you can bring the two experiences together. There is always a kind of doubleness to that experience.<sup>7</sup>

Identity is constituted with influence from *outside*, and approved by the self, from *inside*. As a whole it is self-constituted by considering many aspects with an interpretative sense by self. As Mohanty puts it:

The identity of a person is a higher order identity amongst various layers of identities; the identity of a subjectively lived body, the identity of a mental life, the identity of an ego pole and of a transcendental ego, the identity of historically developing self, a socially constructed selfhood

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.213.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in, Araeen, 2002, p.158.

perceived by others, self-gathering of a person to come to terms with one's past, with one's projects and tradition.<sup>8</sup>

Our experience of the given condition very often forms the basis of our identity. We can further say that our experience is very often linguistic. We define ourselves through our language. Linguistic meaning has multiple standpoints- historical, psychological, sociological, ethnological, and cultural, and so on, which locate the identity of an individual. A person's experience thus begins from the language and meanings defined in it. Language sets meaning to one's identity. We can thus identify a person and explain his/her personality based on *what* language he speaks. Here we may consider Roland Barthes' suggestion that a sentence can be described linguistically on several levels (phonetic, phonological, grammatical, contextual) and these levels are in a hierarchical relationship with one another, for, while all have their own units and correlations, no level on its own can produce meaning.<sup>9</sup> Language therefore helps us make the necessary shift of 'identity' depending upon *situations*.

The 'sentence' and 'situation' are thus deeply co-related with each other, and situation is coded in the sentence in the form of a definite meaning. In other words, language is an important indicator for identity.

Language is not a mechanical use of words or putting of sentences together. We express ourselves through language. Words already exist, but we very often change the *old* meanings to communicate a *new* meaning. We construct meaning according to self's experience and response to the situation. Language is therefore the

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<sup>8</sup> Mohanty, 2000, p.85.

<sup>9</sup> Sontag, 1982, p. 258.

point of contact between self and culture. Language offers us a special method to think about ourselves.

The process of interpretation and dialogue with oneself in language helps us in formulating meaning. Language is the articulation of meaning, which is intelligibly articulated and interpreted in one's mind. As mentioned by Heidegger: "the intelligibility of Being-in-the-world- an intelligibility which goes with a state-of-mind- expressed itself as discourse."<sup>10</sup> Language therefore, is an interpretation of the state of mind, and the way in which discourses get expressed. If we consider that identity is what is immediate to us (present-at-hand); then Heidegger is right in saying:

Language is a totality of words- a totality in which discourse has a 'worldly' Being of its own; and as an entity within-the-world, this totality thus becomes something which we may come across as ready-to-hand. Language can be broken up into words-Things which are present-at-hand.<sup>11</sup>

Heidegger's view of language claims that the true description of language is how it works, and it is from its *how* that its identity i.e., *what* is to be gathered.<sup>12</sup> According to Heidegger, words are not primarily referential. The referring capacity of naming expression is rooted in the consciousness of man's nature. It is both individuating and identifying.<sup>13</sup> All these capacities of naming words are sustained and nourished by man's consciousness. Man, thus, situates himself in language. Thus

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted in, Vollmer, 1986, p.234.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.234.

<sup>12</sup> Chattopadhyaya, 1988, p.232.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.232.



situated in language, man brings the world closer to him/herself. Man uses language to organize and re-create the world.

Let us take an example as to how different uses of language creates different notion of identity of a particular group of people. The popular debate between Gandhi and Ambedkar as to what word should be use to refer to the Untouchables in our country, is well known in Modern Indian History. Both of them were representatives and followers of the two different traditional streams of Indian Philosophy. Gandhi named Untouchable as *Harijan*, - meaning 'the Children of God.' Gandhi accepted the position and the location of these Children of God in *Varnashramadharm*. The occupation given to them, the location they have in the society, and the duties they have to perform, are all given by God and our task, as Children of God is to sincerely follow the duties assigned by God. Gandhi's concept of man is undoubtedly based on his religious ideas. He supported the traditional and orthodox Hindu idea of locating man in his assigned duties. He believed in the authority of the Hindu scriptures and in *Varna Ashram Dharma* (He even regarded *varna* as hereditary). The Law of *Verna*, according to Gandhi, follows the birth of man with limitation, which man cannot overcome. He regards it as an immutable law of nature (Gandhi, M.K., in *Sarvodaya*). It is given by birth and cannot be changed by choice.<sup>14</sup>

Ambedkar, on the other hand, used the word, Scheduled Castes, *Bahishkrit*, Depressed Classes, etc. to refer to the Untouchables, and thus interpreted the condition of these people in very different terms than that of Gandhi. He denied the entire structure of the '*Vernaashramas*' that locate the man by birth as Brahmin or Untouchable. He saw all the human beings as equal beings and measured them on the basis of their deeds and intentions. He was of the firm belief that all human being are

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<sup>14</sup> Mohanty, 1993, p.193.

equal by birth. Instead of seeing an untouchables as 'Children of God' Ambedkar saw untouchable *as* human. The meaning behind the two words *Harijan* and *Bahishkrit* thus created a new world by re-constructs the identity in question. Meaning thus precedes the language in mind. As one can say, following Chattopadhyaya, that language is a silent pointer; it functions through man, and man functions through it. Man's relation to language is a dialogue in self-representation and self-representation.<sup>15</sup> It is a living expression of man. We get back to our self and come out of our self through the language and meanings. The endless dialogue between the open and the closed spheres in human nature can be conducted through language.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.4 Ethics and Identity

Another domain in which our identity operates is the domain of ethics or our moral life. We evaluate ourselves in terms of the ethical values and then, decide our identity for ourselves. We try to discover ourselves through these evaluations in an attempt to free ourselves from any form of self-deception. In our judging a human being we really judge his/her actions in terms of ethical standards. We say that an action is 'good' or 'bad', 'right' or 'wrong', 'moral' or 'immoral', we 'ought to do', 'we should and we should not do' and so on. Various situations and different cultures define the meaning of 'good' or 'bad', according to what is favorable for it. The words 'right' and 'wrong' etc. as such have no reference and hence no substantive meaning, but they are meaningful in some way depending upon the circumstances.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Chattopadhyaya, 1988, p.234.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.236.

<sup>17</sup> Lillie, 1966, p.6.

In this process we define moral values according to its conformity to laws and rules. These rules are either imposed by dominant culture.

Let us take the example from India again. In the dominant Indian culture, since ancient time, moral values are decided by the upper caste Hindus for rest of the lower castes. The duties that are assigned by the *Smritis*, *Vedas*, and other Brahminical Texts considered to be morally correct and one is bound to follow (obey) the rules prescribed by these 'Sacred' sources.

For example, in verse, 1-28 of *Manusmriti* (M.), duties are assigned in accordance with the hierarchies in society. *Brahmins* are assigned learning, taking donations, performing *Yajnas*, etc. (M., 1-88); *Khatriyas* to give shelter and protect Brahmins and others (M., 1-89); *Vaishyas* to serve cows, give donations, do commerce (M., 1-90); and *Shudras* moral duty is to 'only serve' all the other three *Varnas* (M., 1-33).

Hence so-called 'Upper Culture' or 'Higher Culture' defines the ethics and moral values for the marginalized or *lower* castes or class of the society. Thus the idea of what is 'good' and 'bad' is highly contextualised, and the identity, is defined by the *given* cultural values.

As opposed to this way of understanding moral values, one may say that it is possible for more than one action to be right at the same time. Being a Shudra, one can *learn* as well as *earn* the wealth. Being a *Vaishya*, one can *learn* and *expand* his trade, and so on. In such open ended way of construing values; we cannot pass ad hoc judgments as to what should be somebody's duty in life.

Our moral values develop in association with those of other people, and are being constantly modified by taking into consideration the opinion of others. Therefore, it is difficult to term that a particular action is right or wrong without any

quantification. These judgments have a direct reference in culture. However there cannot be a conflict between good of the culture and good of the individuals concerned with it.<sup>18</sup> As Sartre put it “man cannot be sometime slave and sometime free, man is condemned to be free.”<sup>19</sup> Culture, therefore, must promise freedom for the individual, and this freedom exists in his capacity to choose between courses of action.<sup>20</sup> The abstract “common good” should have direct link to the concrete good of particular individual. If we are to make the common good our aim, we must remember its concrete manifestations; we should then be engaged in that course of action which will ultimately bring about the greatest good for ourselves and for others.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the duty of a human being is to recognize others with the sense of being, *equal* recognizing and respecting others with the Self-Identity that the other formulates of her/himself.

### 3.5 Identity and Dominance:

As elaborated previously, identity is a socio-cultural reality; it is produced within and by the experience and interaction with the others.<sup>22</sup> Identity transforms a biological individual into a social individual. It emerges from and is sustained by the cultural meanings of social relationship activated through interaction.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp.240-241.

<sup>19</sup> Sartre, 1960, p.34.

<sup>20</sup> Miri, 2003, p.65.

<sup>21</sup> Lillie, 1966, p. 248.

<sup>22</sup> Weigert, 1986, p.30.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.31.

Identity thus is a human construct. Hence we emphasize on Human-self, acknowledging the essence of identity being based on humanitarian grounds. A question arises here, why is there a need to identify a human being as human? Why a man, despite equal to other by both, indeed needs to be recognized as a Man? As we discussed earlier, there is need to understand the interaction between Culture and Identity on ethical grounds, to recognize a human being as human on equal grounds. The meaning of an individual changes in different cultures, thus resulting in construction of identity in graded inequality. As was mentioned earlier, the Indian socio-cultural system is deeply infected by the graded inequalities of the “caste system”. Humans are divided in graded inequality based on birth and caste. The identity of a person is therefore decided on the basis of caste, and occupations are divinely ordained without there being scope for *mobility* to escape from given identity. *Brahmins* are a priestly caste, *Kshatriyas* are a military caste, *Vaisyas* are merchant caste, and *Shudras* are the servants to everyone. Here *moral* duty of a person is to follow the duties of the caste he belongs to, prescribed by the *Shashtras*.

Take the example of *Rama* who, as the king, was bound to maintain *Chaturvarna*. It was therefore his moral duty, to kill the Saint *Shambhuka*, the *Shudra*, who had transgressed his class and wanted to be a *Brahmin*, thus giving no scope of change of identity. *Chaturvarna* is the reason, why *Rama* killed *Shambhuka*. *Shambhuka's* thirst for mobility was the cause for his death. And the moral responsibility of *Rama* was to kill *Shambhuka*. *Manu-Smriti* likewise prescribes heavy moral duties for upper caste Hindus, such as cutting off the tongue or pouring of boiled lead in the ears of *Shudra*, who recites or hears the *Vedas*. (M., 8-272). The meaning of ‘human’ and the meaning of ‘moral responsibility’ thus vary in accordance with his status in society.

So we find Ambedkar arguing against this system as follows,

I contend that it is the most vicious system. That the Brahmins should cultivate knowledge, that the Kshatriya should bear arm, that the Vaishya should trade and that the Shudra should serve as though it was a system of division of labour...inter-dependence of one class on another class is inevitable. But why make one person depend upon another in the matter of his vital needs? Education everyone must have. Means of defense everyone must have. These are the paramount requirements of every man for his self-preservation. How can the fact that his neighbor is educated and armed help a man who is uneducated and disarmed?<sup>24</sup>

Women or Men thus have some similar needs, and therefore his/her identity based on these human needs cannot be rejected by rejecting, his/her existence as 'Human-self'. 'Given identity' thus can be transcended from its *fixed* domain into a human domain, where man is free and his freedom consisting in his capacity to choose between courses of action.<sup>25</sup>

Each individual has her own way of deriving meanings and values for herself. They define their identity vis-à-vis the culture they belong to. Identity crisis emerges when a certain group of people or class or caste wants to define identity for others. Dominant groups determine *what* is good or desirable for others. This determination does not represent the experience of others, but interprets the experience of others in certain frame of rule and laws decided by the dominant groups. As Kymlicka points out, modern societies are increasingly confronted with minority groups demanding recognition of their identity and accommodation of their cultural differences.<sup>26</sup> People or communities who are degraded in their existence in the system of hierarchy always

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<sup>24</sup> Ambedkar, 1989, p.62.

<sup>25</sup> Miri, 2003, p.65.

<sup>26</sup> Kymlicka, 1995, p.10.

put up their efforts for recognition and wish to be integrated into the larger society, and to be accepted as full members of it. Kymlicka argues that they often seek greater recognition of their ethnic identity; their aim is not to become a separate and self governing nation along side, the larger society, but to modify the institutions and laws of the mainstream society to make them more accommodating of cultural differences.<sup>27</sup>

The idea of Counter-Culture perhaps emerges from such cultural marginalisation, and the way in which certain cultural hegemonies alter the meaning of moral values. Socio-religious influence greatly affects the culture, as cultures are profoundly rooted in religions.<sup>28</sup> Religious texts, beliefs, and moral values, decide the meaning for an individual or certain groups or communities, without objection. Their meanings and morals are, more or less given by such culturally granted rules and laws. Mrinal Miri, argues in this context:

They were ‘nothing’ to the culture. They might have had extremely useful functions in providing infrastructural services towards the physical well-being of people belonging to the cultures, but they themselves were cultural non-entities. They were indeed human beings, but their human existence was without meaning, except the meaning given to it by the culture and the meaning given was devoid of any cultural content. There is, therefore, no question of cultural assertion or revival even if the culture of the ‘outcastes’ is “romantic”. They have no ‘memory’ of self-sufficient, autonomous culture to which they can return and regain depth and dignity.<sup>29</sup>

In response, they (marginalized) may struggle by countering the *given* identity and ‘re-structure’ the identity for themselves. Counter-culture is therefore, the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>28</sup> Miri, 2003, p.111.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 114-115.

perception of alternative reality vis-à-vis the dominant groups in society. Countering the given identity is not simply opposition of the given idea of identity, but it represents a sustained challenge over the direction of societal self-production, and are themselves structured by this conflict.<sup>30</sup> They do not simply share the common historical and social context, but actively tries to regain depth and dignity.

Any *given* identity in culture needs a transformation, when it acts as a submissive and oppressive force. In this process of transformation, the whole discourse of identity, of the given cultural domain needs an alternative sight, to construct a different and more human-identity from *a prior* identity. Let us understand the above discourse of Identity, by contextualizing Dr. Ambedkar's model of Buddhist Conversion.

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<sup>30</sup> Laurence, 1995, p.2.



### 3.6 Reconstructing Identity: Buddhist testimony of Dr. Ambedkar

“They alone rise who strive. Some of you nurse the wrong notion that you will not rise in this world. But remember that the age of helplessness has ended. A new epoch has set in. All things are now possible ...”<sup>31</sup>

This pronouncement was an emancipatory appeal of Dr. Ambedkar to inspire the deprived sections of the Hindu Society. His deep insight locates human existence as being free in modern world. He aspired to transform the wretched identity of human-self from the location of dominance to the domain of equality, dignity, and self-respect. As identity is concerned with the self-esteem and self-respect of a community, the questions that arise are: who are We? What position do we have in society vis-à-vis other Communities? How are we related to others? The so-called lower castes or the Untouchables in modern times are striving and carrying on the struggle to find answers to these questions from their point of view. Notwithstanding differences in the nature of Dalit movements and the meaning of identity, there has been a common quest- the quest for equality, self-dignity and eradication of untouchability.<sup>32</sup>

Indian history is witness to the fact that the evil practices of untouchability and Caste system have resulted in painful degradation of human existence, which is still prevalent in the contemporary Indian society. The Lower caste identity is highly degraded within the parameters of the hierarchal caste system of Hinduism. They are ‘*named*’ and identified with different degraded meanings, by giving vague references to the Hindu ‘spiritual’ texts. Let us once again look at the language to understand

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<sup>31</sup> For details see B.R. Ambedkar’s speech at a Meeting of Untouchables, in February, 1933, Bombay.

<sup>32</sup> Shah, 2001, p.195.

this process of degradation. The word *Dalit* is common usage in the most of the Modern Indian languages (Marathi, Hindi, Gujrati, Tamil, etc.), represents the struggling poor people against caste oppression. On the other hand, the untouchable nomenclatures, like *Acchut* and *Harijan*, are meant to identify a group of individuals in the Hindu Upper castes way of understanding their social position as a result of past *Karmas*. Man is thus 'labeled', identified in orthodox caste system by his location in caste hierarchy. Let me highlight certain other categories of naming, as suggested by Gopal Guru<sup>33</sup>: the Gandhian category named them as *Harijans*; legally constituted terms used for them is like, the SCs (Scheduled Castes), STs (Scheduled Tribes) or Depressed Classes; some other names like *Asprishya*, *Paddalit*; politically constructed category of Bahujan, etc.

It is notable that, Ambedkar used a number of categories depending upon the context. For example, dealing with the imperial state, he would use the category of Depressed Classes, whereas while addressing high-caste Hindu adversaries, he used he term '*Bahishkrit*', meaning one who is an outcaste. In the arena of competitive politics, he would use the term 'Scheduled Caste'. This was evident when he established the Scheduled Caste Federation in 1942 while addressing his own constituency, he preferred to use the term 'Pad-Dalit', meaning those who are crushed under the feet of Hindu system ... thus, there was simultaneous existence of two sets of categories within '*Harijan*' and *Asprushya* always serving as the counterpoint for the categories, used by Ambedkar (G. Guru, 2001).<sup>34</sup>

Gandhi's understanding about the untouchables led him to categorize them as 'Harijan' and tried to give the metaphysical connotation, meaning 'Children of God'. This meaning approves the authority and authenticity of God (Children of Hindu god

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.99.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp.101-102.

Hari, i.e. Krishna) to identify Dalits as 'Harijan'- the untouchables, and thus an attempt was made to subordinate them into the Hindu fold.

The meaning of the word Dalit derives its epistemological and political strength from social experience of its subjects. Hence, Dalit category becomes human – centered rather than God-centred, unlike a Gandhian category of Harijan. The Dalit category, in fact, promotes both the cognitive and emotional response of the collective subjects to the immediate world and its reconstruction.<sup>35</sup>

The difference here is a fundamental one, for a while Gandhi criticized untouchability and not caste, Ambedkar argued that the heart of problem of untouchability lay very much deep in the caste system itself. Ambedkar was of the firm opinion that as long as there is caste, the identity of *Shudras* and *Ati-Shudras* will remain, and untouchability will prevail as it is. Ambedkar therefore rejects Gandhi's views on caste-identity and untouchability.

In expressing his view he said,

'There will be outcastes as long as there are castes; nothing can emancipate the outcastes except the destruction of the caste system. There have been many *mahatmas* in India whose sole object was to overcome Untouchability and to elevate and absorb the Depressed classes, but every one of them had failed in his mission. Mahatmas come and mahatmas have gone. But the untouchables have remained as untouchables'.<sup>36</sup>

Ambedkar, therefore, strongly rejected the idea of 'Harijan' used as name for the untouchables.

Ambedkar's dream was to create a 'Casteless Society'. Transforming the untouchable identity into a modern identity, into what may be called 'Human-Identity', was the most important task which Ambedkar wished to fulfill. He

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.102.

<sup>36</sup> Ambedkar, 1932, Quoted in, Narake, 2003, Vol.XVII, Part-1, pp.148-150.

recognized that the identity of an Untouchable is not the 'real' one, but one that was 'labeled' serving the benefits of one particular section of the society. Such social positioning of a section of society underestimates the basic values of democratic and corporate living and therefore destroying such an inhuman social identity became the lifetime goal of Ambedkar.

As Mrinal Miri highlights the predicament of the Dalits is extraordinarily cruel; and pointed out that, do they remain in the emptiness of the marginal space; or do they try and merge themselves in some other self-sufficient cultural entity. Marginality, therefore, is a powerfully appropriate metaphor in understanding the Dalit predicament.<sup>37</sup>

Ambedkar in 1936 published the resolution in *Janta*, declares: "It is this conference's opinion that we should now make our society independent of the so-called touchable classes. The untouchable classes ought to try to win, single mindedly, a place of equality and respect for our community in another society in Hindustan", (*Janata*, Bombay 1936).<sup>38</sup> He was of firm opinion that 'religion is for man; man is not for religion', (Dr. Ambedkar, 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1936).

Thus, he publicly proclaimed:

"... We shall repair our mistake now. I had the misfortune of being born with the stigma of an untouchable. However, it is not my fault, but I will not die a Hindu, for this is in my power".<sup>39</sup>

This proclamation calls for his passion to renounce the Hindu-Untouchable identity, and his capacity to redefine himself as a human being with fullest dignity and self-respect. This is the kind of reconstruction of identity that we were trying to argue

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<sup>37</sup> Miri, 2003, p.115.

<sup>38</sup> Zelliott, 2005, p.9.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

for in our previous sections. It is also important to understand that this was not an individual stance; he was trying to discover the path for others too. His effort was to initiate the process of radical and rational transformation of the individual as well as collective identity on egalitarian grounds.

Ambedkar saw the problem of identity for the untouchable is not merely socially, or culturally, or politically, or religiously, or textually constructed but it has deep roots in the 'mind' of the untouchables as well as non-untouchables. As, Alex Kennedy, (Dh. Subhuti)<sup>40</sup> suggests: 'the problem of *caste* is not 'out there', like any other material thing, but *caste lies in mind*, it's a mental attitude to relate and treat one man with another'. If one sees a man with caste-identity, he knows how to relate with him on the basis of his caste.'

### 3.6.1 Where to go?

Ambedkar's never ending quest for a new identity as a human, thus, came to an end just before two months before his death. On October 14, 1956 at Dixabhoomi, Nagpur, he proclaimed and embraced Buddhism along with lacks of his followers. He infused new confidence and inspired his people to recognize themselves as human and not as untouchables. He left behind the old-caste-identity and declared his new Buddhist identity as 'new-birth'. While delivering his speech at the ceremony he declared: *I am reborn today*. It was the result of personal conviction as well as a conscious effort to lay down a path his people could follow<sup>41</sup> and live their lives with new human identity or recognize themselves as 'Human-Self'. It is also notable that, in this project of transforming and contextualising identity, Ambedkar had found a

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<sup>40</sup> Kenney, Alex, (Dh. Subhuti), Lecture, (in Talk series), released by, 'Dhammakranti Social Institute', (www.dhammakranti.com), (TBMSG), Nagpur, 2006.

<sup>41</sup> Zelliott, 1992, p.136.

religion of Indian origin, which could legitimize the claims of the untouchables. Ambedkar firmly admitted that Buddha as an 'Enlightened Man' not as a 'God' per se. The psychological impact of Buddhism, and the matter of changed 'identity', cannot be judged by any visible signs.<sup>42</sup> Ambedkar thus restored untouchables to greatest heights of confidence to come up even from their degraded identity rooted in their minds. Ambedkar thought that this move was an essentially psychological and moral weapon necessary for this group of people to identify them as human and not as Untouchables. It opened up a *new* way of investigating their selves (self) and self-identity.

Each human thus carries some common ground to identify him/herself as Human-self. Ambedkar emphasizes that a human being has body as well as mind. But mere physical freedom is of no use. For human being, freedom of mind is of prime importance.

Social dignity, self-respect, and dignified identity are important needs for the marginalised as well as for all people, any where in the world. Ambedkar in search of new identity thus made a successful attempt to emancipate the untouchables from Identity-crisis, and boost them with new moral confidence along with the construction of a *new* identity.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.218.

### 3.6.2 Ambedkar's 'Human-Self' in the Modern Democratic World

Ambedkar's act of conversion to Buddhism is not merely significant for positively altering the degraded identity of the untouchables in India, but in his attempt there lies a deep philosophical approach to reconstruct the whole human relationship.

Every individual needs equal stature in public sphere. The 'Untouchable-self' was blemished undignified presence in the public sphere. Hence the 'Untouchable-self' lacked the essential stimulant of moral capital and self respect which are the prerequisites to mobilize people for their social, political and economic demands, and to make any change in public sphere. To exercise the political rights, certain prior conditions are required to be fulfilled. It is not enough to give rights unless they begin to appreciate themselves by believing in their capabilities to enjoy those rights. Ambedkar detected the reason of such inability in the Hindu caste system.

He reasoned:

How can Untouchables stay in Hinduism? Untouchability is the lowest depth to which the degradation of a human being can be carried. To be poor is bad but not so bad as to be an untouchable. The poor can be proud. The Untouchable cannot be.<sup>43</sup>

Thus the conversion to Buddhism was an attempt to revive the 'Untouchable-self' with a new moral feeling and identity of pride which is comparable with citizenship in the modern state. He wanted each citizen of the nation to recognize himself with a modern Human-identity. In his view, all members of the modern nation-state are equal vis-à-vis the public law; once an individual identifies himself as a 'citizen' s/he must not be dominated by any other specific rules or obligations of

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<sup>43</sup> Quoted in, Rodrigues, 2002, p. 229.

any class or caste-community. Citizen's identity argues for a common heritage of public assets without any discrimination. The Indian society which aspires to become a democratic nation, morally should acknowledge that, the maximum participation of the people in all the spheres of public life is compulsory requirement. But in reality we have seen that, in the public sphere the citizens are grouped or nominated into separate formulations. We noticed the presence of degraded-inferior identities against the superiors or upper caste identities, which do not allow any individual to locate him/herself as citizen. But Ambedkar also recognized that mere political reforms are not any solution for the social conservatism prevalent in society.

Ambedkar had a broad insight about the nature and functioning of the Indian democracy. He understood that the people with Upper caste nomenclatures when they enter into large democratic circles, they assert their social identity and try to dominate the others who have degraded and inferior identity. Those who don't have prestigious history and glorified past, and always remained controlling power, feel sense of 'inferiority complex' because of their degraded identity, as they don't share the equal and prestigious privileges like the other fellow citizens. Democracy thus falls in a subtle competition, in the real sense of inferiority or superiority in which the degraded-self, fails to achieve the dignified position in a correct sense because of its past experiences.

In this context, Dr. Ambedkar proposed the secular role for religion in creating moral values favorable to a modern society. The propagation of Buddha's *Dhamma* could be seen as an effective means used to revolutionize and transform the society towards a more humane society. He elaborated:



“Buddhism teaches social freedom, economic freedom, intellectual freedom and political freedom...equality not between man and man but between men and women”.<sup>44</sup>

Ambedkar is of the opinion that Democracy is another name for Equality.<sup>45</sup> In his view, the existence of the caste system is a standing denial of the existence of those ideals of society and therefore of democracy.<sup>46</sup> He wanted true nature of democracy to prevail: for the people, of the people, by the people; not merely *in form*, but *in facts*.

The dignity of the Self, for Ambedkar, means a true representation of Human-Identity. As Meera Nanda elaborates:

“Ambedkar’s ‘Buddha’ is not meant for Dalit alone, his true significance is much broader. Ambedkar poses a challenge to the cultural common sense of the entire Indian society. In turning to the Buddha, Ambedkar is attempting to ‘extend the reach of reason’ into the moral sentiments of Indian society at large.”<sup>47</sup>

Undoubtedly, his turn to Buddhism has given the so-called Untouchables, a *new* social and cultural identity. Buddhism reformulates the past of the Dalits as golden, glorified, and most human epoch of all times. This relationship of the Dalits to such an historic religion bestowed in them a feeling of ‘Human-Self’ different from the ‘Untouchable-Self’. He tried to transform the identity by using Buddhism as a transformative tool for modern democratic society, which Meera Nanda calls, ‘epistemological revolution’ in Hinduism, at the centre of the Cultural Revolution needed for India to become truly democratic and secular.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ambedkar, 1991, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in, Moon, Vol. IX, p.442.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in, Narake, Vol. XVII, p.520.

<sup>47</sup> Nanda, 2006, p.20.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25.

Ambedkar, thus, erects a *new arc* of self, culture and identity based on Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, which are true human values for him. He never denies the need of morality and sacredness in everyday activities, and tried to define the true sense of Human-Identity through these ethical values. Buddhism is for him a set of *new* equal social order for modern Indian society; which is also helpful and supplementary to form the democracy in India.

## **Conclusion**

1. Self for All
2. Ourselves: Themselves

## 1. Self for all

The ideas of 'Self', 'Culture', 'Identity', 'Freedom', and 'Morality', the concepts that the dissertation deals with, can be studied independently in various branches of philosophy. But, understanding the Self, or creation of a Culture, or searching for an Identity, is not a mere academic exercise. Though it is necessary to engage in an academic exercise to understand all these categories, a connected account of these categories may be arrived at through a reflection on the human condition. Let me try to interlink them. As we have seen, culture is not the category that lies 'out there', but culture is something acquired, something which guides, improves, and fulfils the individual as well as collective desires of the people, and at the same time constitutes the inner meaning of socio-cultural experience. According to G.C. Pande, culture, "is the tradition of values, of self-realizations."<sup>1</sup> The values, set of beliefs, and customs, at a certain level, are incorporated in human mind through his experiences; manifestation of culture thus primarily begins from the self. Human being is nothing but how s/he lives, the way s/he thinks, the way s/he responds, the way s/he collects experiences, and so on. Though 'we' may live together under similar circumstances, each one of us has individuality. Each one of us responds to the circumstances in his/her unique fashion. We try to know ourselves through our own experiences. Interaction with others on a daily basis opens new windows

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<sup>1</sup> Pande , 1972 , p.1.

to look at ourselves. The differences or the contrast that we recognize, always help us to renew our knowledge about the 'Self'.

Another aspect of 'self' is that, its knowledge is also based upon the knowledge of the other- how others understand us, and how in turn we, understand others. Our continuous interaction with the other opens new possibilities to know ourselves better. The idea that one knows oneself through knowing the other is considerably studied in Greek Philosophy. 'Self' thus has the two dimensions 'inner' and 'outer'. We have tried to show that the 'inner', in a very important sense, depends upon the 'outer', and is constituted by it. That is why, it may be important to understand the self through its inter-subjective experience, rather than through its 'purely' subjective or 'purely' objective experience. In fact one may go further and ask whether there is anything like a 'pure' subjective or 'pure' objective experience.

Yet another aspect of knowing our self is that it is a process. Self is always open to renew and reform itself. In this sense, the 'self' is not a fixed entity. Therefore self in this sense is not anything given to the human being prior to its existence, and, thus is not something which cannot be transcended.

It will therefore be a mistake to think of self in any 'attached' way. We are often attached to our own ways of thinking, and fail to go beyond that fixed mode of thinking. This may result in understanding ourselves in a particular manner. However we have tried to show that freedom to think and transcend the *given* is inherent to the self.

Along with this urge of transcendence we are also responsible to ourselves. This responsibility arises from the freedom to change ourselves through choosing between

various alternatives. As this is applicable to each one of us, therefore, it is also true that as individuals we are equally responsible for the other.

As Sartre mentions:

“When we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but he is responsible for all men.”<sup>2</sup>

According to Sartre, Descartes claims of existence of the self in *Cogito*, is not for himself alone, but equally exists for others too. It is not only one’s own self that one discovers in Descartes’ *Cogito*, but those of others too. We are realizing ourselves in the presence of others, and we are just certain of the others as well as we are of ourselves. Thus, the man who discovers himself directly in the *cogito* also discovers all the others, and discovers then as the condition of his own existence.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, what is true about my self may be equally true about the other. The condition for understanding the other may vary, according to the limitation of the various situations. We try to differentiate the things according to our experience. When self-awareness matures, there is a fundamental split in the individual experience as to who s/he is and who other is.<sup>4</sup> Many a times our experience about what we are, may not resemble that of the others. This opens up into conflict of interests, and self polarizes into ‘self’ and ‘other’.

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<sup>2</sup> Sartre, 1960, p.29.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.45.

<sup>4</sup> Kennedy, 1995, p.27.

## **2. Ourselves: Themselves**

The sense of belongingness of the self comes from its being culture. Culture is nothing but the production of self-realization. I mean here, culture is something acquired from within. Something which guides, improves, and constitutes the meaning of social experience. Human nature constructs a certain set of values and morals, which are immediate objects of self-consciousness and experience of the individual. Thus cultural understanding involves the process self-realization in given time and condition- with certain sets of values and meanings. Such understandings are always unique in character. This uniqueness of understanding has its own meaning, but not necessarily fixed or attached to a particular culture.

Cultures, in a way evolve their own shape. Our views, therefore about 'ourselves' and about 'themselves' have a major impact on our construction of culture.

The ideas of Self and Culture thus emerge from each other. In effect the concepts, self and culture are not fixed categories but fluid categories, like water. Culture gets modified with the modification of self-realisation. Similarly self also shapes according to response to culture. Thus, for both the ideas (self and culture), there is no fixed ground. Continuous interaction and transformation thus takes place on an ungrounded frame. In a way, we can say, it is a process of evolution. Hence, one cannot think or claim that 'our culture' is superior to 'their culture', or 'ourselves' is superior to 'themselves'.

Any emancipatory enterprise, be it religious, social, or political, in a way tries to overcome the givenness of the self and culture. These enterprises deny the self as being fixed or imprisoned in conditions. Every individual, culture, nation, community, and caste, has their own way to derive the meaning and value for themselves. The problem of

claiming 'ourselves' to be better than 'themselves' arises, because certain groups or classes or castes, want to define the meaning for others in their own pattern. In response to that domination, this dominated section struggles by countering the *given* values and 're-structure' values for themselves. The idea of *countering*, therefore, is a struggle for an alternative reality vis-a-vis the givenness of the values.

Our dissertation, so far, has brought out the 'contested' nature of the concepts of self, culture, identity, etc. Our point of departure has been bridge the gap between the 'contested concepts' and our felt experiences.

Our concern has been: whether philosophy would be able to bridge this 'gap'? What are the philosophical tools that we can use to bridge this gap? To what extent shall we be successful in achieving the unity between experience and that of 'contested concepts'?

We have considered the views of many philosophers who have interpreted these concepts. But the point is, whether and to what extent, these interpretations relate to our praxis. There is a need to think beyond the problems, in terms of tools, which are able to fill this gap between reading of the concepts and realization of the concepts. Thus, we may study the concepts formally, but the task of philosophy is also to understand practicality of these concepts in the backdrop of certain socio-cultural reality.



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