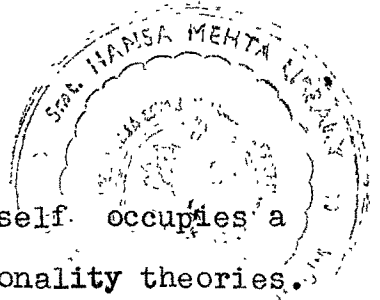


CHAPTER IV

SELF-CONCEPT - AN INTERPRETATION

- 4.1. Introduction
- 4.2. Self-Concept in Philosophy
- 4.3. Psychological Conceptions of the Self
- 4.4. Self in Indian Philosophy
- 4.5. Self-Concept in Modern Research
- 4.6. The Phenomenal Self and Self-Concept
- 4.7. The Origin and Development of the Self
- 4.8. The Self-Concept and Role
- 4.9. Measurement of Self
- 4.10. Summary



At present, the concept of self occupies a very important position in many personality theories. It is used as an important concept in understanding the behaviour of an individual. Every individual attempts, in various situations, to protect and enhance his own self. This constitutes the powerful motive behind all actions. The self viewing process is considered to be the key to the understanding of many problems of the individuals. The self-concept is thus used as an important concept around which many aspects of personality are organized. Recently, psychologists are showing a considerable interest in the problem of self-concept and the correlates of different types of self-evaluation. Many different theories have been developed since the time of Freud. The history of the theories of self is full of contradictions among well known personality theorists. In order to understand the ramifications of the concept of self and the implications of each theoretical position, it is quite useful to consider the history of the development of the self-concept. The purpose of this chapter is to present the various views about the self-concept.

4.2 Self-Concept in Philosophy

The origin of the modern self-concept can

be traced back to Descartes in the seventeenth century. Descartes¹ maintained that the self is a thinking substance. Locke² made a clear distinction between cognitive self and self as an object. According to Hume:

The self is nothing more than a bundle or collection of different perceptions which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity and in a perpetual flux and movement.³

This atomistic approach of Hume made it impossible to consider self as an acceptable concept.

The term self is used, in modern psychology with two different meanings. In one sense, it is used as an object. In this sense, the self is nothing more than what a person thinks himself to be. In the second sense, self is considered as a doer. It consists of the active groups of processes like thinking, perceiving, remembering, etc. Both the

1 Frondizi, R., The Nature of the Self, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), p. 3.

2 Allport, G.W., Becoming: Basic Considerations for a Psychology of Personality, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), p. 8.

3 Frondizi, R., Op. Cit., p. 90.

meanings of the self have developed important theories. Hume completely ignored the cognitive self. This atomistic approach of Hume is responsible for the development of associationism, behaviourism and stimulus-response psychology.

William James is often regarded by many authors as the originator of the modern self theory. James¹ distinguished two types of self namely, empirical self and a cognitive self. The empirical self has been further subdivided as a material self, a social self and a spiritual self. There was no progress for about fortyfive years after James. At this time, George H. Mead² should not be forgotten as his book 'Mind, Self and Society' led to the re-emergence of self as an acceptable concept. The modern role theory is based on the conception of social self developed by him.

4.3 Psychological Conceptions of the Self

Psychological theory of the self has been

1 James, W., The Principles of Psychology, (New York: Henry, Holt & Co., 1890), p. 371.

2 Mead, G.H., Mind, Self and Society, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934)

rooted in the philosophical determinations of the concept of self. The terms ego and self have been used interchangeably by many theorists. Some of the ego theories, therefore, should also be considered. The term self, as mentioned above, is used by different personality theorists with slightly different shades of meaning. In order, therefore, to have a comparative view of different conceptions of the self, various theories must be classified or grouped together. A three-fold classification has been used for this purpose as follows:

- (1) Theories in which the self is defined as a process or subject.
- (2) Theories in which the self is defined as an object, and
- (3) Theories in which the self is defined as both subject and object.

(1) Self as a Process or Subject: All the theories which belong to this class make use of the term cognition and in this sense they are similar to the Descartes' conception of the self as a thinking substance. Implicit in these theories is the

assumption about purposive behaviour on the part of the organism. The ego in the Freudian system is the director of behaviour. The term ego is viewed as a process. The cognitive self in Sarbin's¹ system consists of ideas about aspects of one's own existence. He also talked about somatic self, receptor-effector self, and the social self.

(2) Self as an Object:- Many personality theorists have defined self as an object and in that sense their theories resemble that of Hume who maintained that self is the collection of perceptions. Symonds², for example, follows the lead of psychoanalytic theory and regards ego as a group of processes which are carried out to satisfy the inner drives. According to him, the self is the way in which the individual reacts to himself. Sheriff and Cantril³ regard the ego as having the same properties as the self as an object.

(3) Self as an Object and Process:- In most

1 Sarbin, T.R., "A Preface to a Psychological Analysis of the Self", Psychol. Rev., 1952, 59, 11-22.

2 Symonds, P.M., The Ego and the Self, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crafts, 1951).

3 Sheriff, M. and Cantril, H., The Psychology of Ego Involvements, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1947), p.93.

of the current personality theories, the use of the term self as a process and as an object is very common. The emergence of these theories can be considered as due to the compromises effected by the philosophers. The Gestalt movement, for example, is an outgrowth of a reaction against atomistic approach to the understanding of personality. Since Gestalt approach is restricted to only conscious experience, it has very little to contribute to the understanding of the personality as a whole. However, Gestalt principles have been extended by many theorists to include the whole organism. This approach is known as organismic approach to the study of personality. G. W. Allport,¹ is perhaps the best known for this approach in his personality theory. According to him, the self is both a process and an object. Goldstein² sees self actualization as a creative trend which allows for change in the self. Side by side conscious motivation has been assigned the role of putting the self in the position of knower and director of behaviour necessary for self actualization. According to Lecky³,

1 Allport, G.W., Op. Cit., pp. 19, 42, 55,

2 Goldstein, K., The Organism, (New York: American Book Company, 1939),

Most constant factor in the individual's experience is self and the interpretation of his own meaning in the world, appear to represent the center of nucleus of the personality.¹

He stresses that a gradual change in self-concept is essential to normal development. Closely similar to Lecky's position is that of Snygg and Combs² who study individual behaviour from the point of view of behaviour. The phenomenal field is defined by them as the entire universe including the self at the time of action. According to Murphy³, the self is the individual known to the individual. The self involves all of the person's perceptions and conceptions of his whole being. Besides this, ego is a part of this formulation.

Roger's⁴ theory of personality is a synthesis of phenomenology, holistic and organismic approaches.

1 Lecky, P., Self-Consistency: A Theory of Personality, (New York: Island Press, 1945), pp. 86, 82.

2 Snygg, D. and Combs, A.W., Individual Behaviour, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), pp. 78, 58.

3 Murphy, G., Personality: A Bio-Social Approach to Origins and Structure, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), p. 996.

4 Rogers, C., The Significance of the Self, regarding Attitudes and Perceptions in Reymert, M.L. "Feelings and Emotions", (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1950), p. 379.

The cognitive self is represented by the emphasis on consciousness in his theory and self as an object is observable as a pattern of perceptions and values. Ludholm¹ has formulated a "subjective self" and "objective self", both of which consist of symbols of awareness of self, the former by the person and the latter by other people.

Raimy's² work has initiated much experimental effort. He has mentioned the three major tenets of the self-concept as follows:

- "(1) Self-concept is a complex system.
- (2) Self-concept not only influences behaviour but is itself altered and re-structured by behaviour.
- (3) A person's awareness of himself may have little relation to reality."

This system is thus, quite rich in experimental possibilities for the study of self-concept. During

1 Ludholm, Helge, "Reflections upon the Nature of the Psychological Self", Psychol. Rev., 1940, 47, 110-127.

2 Raimy, V.C., The Self-Concept as a Factor in Counselling and Personality Organization, (Ohio State University, Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, 1943).

recent years a large body of literature has grown up around Raimy's self-concept.

To summarise, we have considered the origin of self in philosophy and the two different meanings of self. The theory of the development of the self in psychology also developed side by side. The atomistic approach completely ignored the cognitive self which remained alive in Freud's conception of ego. Allport contributed to its resurrection as an acceptable concept in the understanding of human behaviour. While one would agree that the problems of understanding human personality and measurement of the variables are not resolved, considerable progress has been made by current personality theorists who have raised the self-concept to a much higher position in the understanding of personality dynamics.

4.4 Self in Indian Philosophy

Indian philosophers have also contemplated about the nature and perception of self. In the preceding discussion, it was reported that the self was used both as a process and as an object by various personality theorists. This subject-object controversy is found even in the views of Indian philosophers. The

question of whether the perception of the self is possible or not is answered differently by different schools of Indian philosophy. Most of the schools have tended to postulate the real self and the empirical self, the former being apprehended only through higher intuition or by 'yogic' practice. Secondly, self has been defined by many Indian philosophers as both subject and object. Almost all the schools have assigned to the self the role of a perceiver or a doer.

It is quite possible to think of two types of self namely, the higher self and the lower self. The higher self, according to Indian philosophers, is the self to be aspired in order to merge with the Absolute. The lower self is that of which we are aware at present. In a sense, the higher self can be regarded as the ideal self and the lower self as the present self. It does not seem probable that the two views of the self namely, subject and object, are distinct and separable from each other but it appears that the self-concept consists of both the aspects, mingled with each other.

4.5 Self-Concept in Modern Research

It is the empirical self which is the subject of much experimental work during the last few years. According to Rogers¹, the self is observable as it is a "perceptual gestalt". In another sense it is the phenomenal experience of identity. According to the dictionary meaning the term self is generally used to describe or refer to, a particular individual. This usage of the term makes the task of describing a particular individual more difficult as the same can be perceived from number of points of view. Secondly, it is not possible to know what specific qualities are included in a "real self", as it has to be perceived by someone. And the perceptions thus obtained may not represent the "real self"; they may be close approximations to the real self. The "real self" according to Indian philosophers, can only be apprehended through intuition or yogic practice. The existence or non-existence of the real-self is a problem in the domain of philosophy. This, however, is not a great obstacle in our way to use this concept in understanding and predicting human behaviour. What is needed for our

¹ Rogers, C.R., Client-Centred Therapy, (Boston: Houghton Miffling Co., 1951),

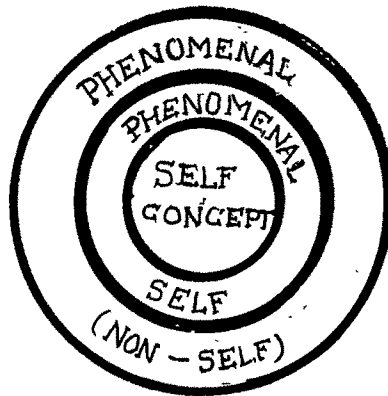
purpose are the ways in which the self is perceived.

There are number of ways in which the self can be perceived. Some of these ways of perceiving are shared by others while some others are peculiar to a particular individual. A person's perceptions of his own self may be completely different from how he is perceived by others. The discrepancy between the person's own perceptions of his self and his perceptions of how he is regarded by others may influence his adjustment with other people. An individual, during the course of his life, develops number of perceptions about himself. These various perceptions are known as self-concepts. These perceptions are communicated to others by referring to 'I' or 'me'. The various perceptions the person holds for him are by no means of equal significance to him. Some of these are sharply differentiated and they form an integral part of his whole being. Others are loose and very unclear in the sense that they can easily be changed.

4.6 The Phenomenal Self and Self-Concept

The phenomenal self represents an organization

or a pattern of the various ways of perceiving on the part of an individual. The self-concept is a generalized aspect of the phenomenal self. The relationship between these two terms can be illustrated by means of the following diagram.



The outermost circle represents all the perceptions of an individual in a specific situation. This also includes the perceptions of those things which do not belong to the self. The middle circle represents all of the individual's perceptions which are relevant to the self. Some of these perceptions might be of vital importance to the individual and others might be so trivial that they can easily be changed. The innermost circle represents the perceptions which are of much importance to the individual. This portion may be regarded as the domain of the

self-concept.

The phenomenal self once formed displays considerable constancy which is inevitable as every discrete perception bears some relation with every other perception in an organization. The phenomenal self after it has become stabilized resists change in it. This kind of stability is the result of the felt need for something stable so that the complex environment can effectively be dealt with. The phenomenal self with its more specific aspect namely, self-concept serves as a framework to evaluate every subsequent experience. Thus, it becomes sometimes more difficult to change the self-concept of an individual. The world around us is constantly changing and if a person is to stay harmoniously with this changing world, he has to integrate new elements in his concept of self. In a sense, building an adequate conception of oneself is essentially a matter of learning. In a complex environment an individual is exposed to number of new experiences which may be gradually incorporated into the existing pattern of the self-concept. This process of differentiation continues throughout life. The change in the self-concept, is

for this reason inevitable. Sometimes a person requires help in order to build up an adequate concept of his self. The inclusion of new elements into the concept of self will depend upon how effectively the new experiences satisfy the individual's more potent needs.

4.7 The Origin and Development of the Self

Self-concept², as noted above, is the organization of various perceptions of an individual about various aspects of his environment. Some kind of perceptual field exists even before birth, but the real development of the self takes place from the moment the child begins to perceive the environment. In the beginning, the child fails to make any specific reaction to a particular aspect of the environment as no differentiation has yet taken place. With the passage of time, the child becomes able to differentiate and to make specific reactions. The process of differentiation and exploration is much more rapid during childhood. One of the earliest differentiations is that of one's own self which is experienced in the form of tactual and kinesthetic sensations

arising out of one's dealing with various objects in the environment. Thus, the child may learn that hands and other parts of the body are his own while things there do not form a part of his body. The differentiation is much more accelerated after the child learns the language skill. This kind of awareness of the self is a product of the interaction between an individual and other persons in his environment. The child spends the first few years of his life in the family which influences the development of the self in number of ways. In the first place, the family provides opportunities for developing the feelings of security and the sense of worth. Closely related to the sense of worth is the individual's ability for his self-acceptance which is very essential for effective living. Thirdly, the family provides models for identification. To identify oneself with others or to consider other objects and persons as forming a part of the self is much more desirable in our present day society. Fourthly, the child's behaviour is moulded in the family situation. He learns what is expected of various persons in relation to other persons. These expectations generally determine the level of aspiration, enabling

the individual to set goals. The setting of the goals is generally in accordance with one's^{own} self-concept. Besides this, there are many other factors outside the family, which influence profoundly the development of the self-concept.

4.8 The Self-Concept and Role

The self-concept, as mentioned earlier, is a frame work to evaluate new experiences. This means that the perception of any situation depends largely upon the concept of self of an individual. This, in turn, will determine the kind of role the individual will play in various situations. The roles to be played by an individual will depend upon whether they are perceived as consistent or inconsistent with the self-concept. Role playing means formulating a particular goal and applying certain techniques to achieve this goal. In this sense, it represents the various activities carried out by an individual. If a situation does not allow an individual to play certain roles for the satisfaction of some of his needs, he seeks another situation. Every individual is strongly motivated to seek situations for the preservation, maintenance and enhancement of the self-concept.

4.9 Measurement of the Self

When the person is asked to describe himself freely he may do this by giving many evaluative statements concerning his self-concept. From this sample of statements, it would be possible to extract certain properties of the self-concept. Many different techniques are now available for the measurement of the self-concept. Some of the widely used techniques are Rating methods, Questionnaire method, 'Q' technique and check-list procedure.

'Q' Technique

This technique developed by Stephenson can be very easily adapted to the investigation of the self-concept. When a number of statements are sorted into piles under given instructions, it forms a distribution of statements, and this is known as 'Q' sort. As applied to the measurement of self-concept, this technique requires a person to sort a number of self-evaluative statements into a series of piles on a continuum ranging from "most like me" to "least like me". The number of items to be sorted in each pile is decided in such a manner that the resulting

-

distribution will approximate that of a normal distribution. Thus, when a number of statements are sorted several times under given instructions, each statement will have as many scores as the number of sortings. These scores can be correlated and factor analyzed.

Rating Method

In this method a number of personality statements or traits are rated on a five or seven point scale. Numerical weights are assigned to each item and the sum of all the weights is the total score of the individual for all the items. This technique has certain limitations. In the first place the very act of summation changes its nature. Secondly, the errors like logical error, central tendency error, and error due to the tendency to put oneself in the favourable light, all enter into the process of ratings and make them unreliable.

Questionnaire Method

In this method particularly the open-end questions are asked. The answers obtained are then classified in pre-determined categories. The main

criticism is that the responses cannot be classified objectively because the placement of a particular response in a particular category depends upon the judgment of scorer. Moreover, some of the response are such that they cannot be classified in the categories selected. The validity is difficult to establish.

Check-Lists

Check-lists are also widely used for measuring self-concept. In this procedure the individual is required to select those items which describe himself or other person. Only those items are considered for analysis which have been marked by the individual. All the items are considered as having the same degree of involvement for the individual.

From all these methods, 'Q' technique has been very widely studied and applied to the problem of vocational choice in relation to self-concept. Some of the limitations which restrict its use can be easily overcome by using appropriate design and statistical procedure. It can profitably be used to study all types of problems of subjective nature.

4.10 Summary

In this chapter, the concept of self is introduced by considering the views of various philosophers and psychologists. It is pointed out that the two different meanings of self namely, self as an object and as process are like the two sides of the same coin. Secondly, it is stressed that it is the empirical self which is the focus of modern experimental researches. The origin, development and changes in self-concept are also explained. Finally, the methods of measuring self-concept are briefly mentioned.