

LESSON 16

WHAT IS SELF?

SUMMARY

Self is focus of our everyday behaviour and all of us do have a set of perceptions and beliefs about ourselves. This kind of self-concept plays important role in motivating us and organizing our behaviours. It starts evolving early in life.

All of us engage in experiences which enhance our sense of self. As Rogers said we want positive regard from others. In other words, we have a strong need of being loved and valued by other people.

Concept of self

The self-concept is a collection of diverse information. It constitutes a central aspect of psychological functioning.

Self is subject as well as object.

Self as a Subject

- Person's experience as thinker, feeler and actor

Self as an Object

- Person's view of the self or "me"

The structure and contents of self are shaped by the society and culture in which people live. Based on the cultural context people divide the world into the categories of "self" and "non self". In the **individualistic cultures** people prefer independent self-construal. It considers self in terms of a

bounded, separate and individual entity which is central to all the while people in **collectivist cultures** prefer an interdependent mode of self-construal. It emphasizes on connectivity, interdependence and sharing.

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

Levels of self

Self is experienced at different levels. William James talked about material self, social self and spiritual self. More recently Neisser has talked about ecological self.

Ecological self

- refers to the self in the embodied form that can be physically identified in time and space.

Interpersonal self

- involves the self which exists in the social relations when we interact with others.

conceptual self

- the idea of self that a person holds.

Extended self

- the self which is in our memory.

The conceptualization of self is nurtured in each culture in a given way. Consider the concept of **Panch Koshas** as developed in the Indian thought. Kosha means layers or sheath like the sheath of an onion. The Jiva consists of five such Koshas and self should be considered in terms of a multi layered structure of hierarchically organized sheaths and these are as follows:



Annamaya Kosh: This involves the gross physical body. This is the outermost layer of existence. It is called annamaya because it is grounded in the food that we eat and consume.

Pranamaya Kosha: This layer deals with life (Prana) and represents the functions of breathing and metabolic processes. The five effectors are also included in it.

Manomaya Kosha: It consists of sense organs. It is the seat of ego and leads to personal involvements which bind people with the desires and activities.

Vigyanamaya Kosha: It consists of five sense organs and intellect. It regulates the worldly life. The feeling of “I-ness” present in it

relates Jiva to past actions. Also, the feelings of pride take place.

Anandmaya Kosha: It is the joyous sheath. The experience of bliss has spiritual basis also, the pleasure that one gets from obtaining the desired objects is part of it.

Aspects of self

The ideas held by the people about self, shape our personal lives and allow participation in group life.

Self-esteem - It is the evaluative component of self-concept. It deals with internalized social judgments and ideas about how worthwhile a personal quality is. People who feel good about themselves or have high self-esteem are found to be more active, motivated, persistent, and happy than the people with low self-esteem. It has been noted that unhappiness, and despair are related to low self-esteem.

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

(a) **Cognitive:** refers to the effect on thought patterns. Self-efficacy influences evaluation of capability

and preparation to make an attempt.

b) **Motivational:** It influences how long we will keep trying.

(c) **Affective:** It deals with stress, anxiety, and feeling of control.

(d) **Selection:** It includes choosing challenging activities.

Self-presentation—The term self-presentation technically means the strategies people use to shape what others think of them. It deals with the behavioural expression of self. The process of self-presentation can take many forms. It can be conscious or unconscious, accurate or misleading, and intended for real audience or for ourselves. The two motives for self-presentation are –

Strategic self-presentation

- The strategic self-presentation is our effort to shape other's impression to gain power, influence or sympathy. Ingratiation and self promotion often make us liked and respected by others.

Self-verification

- The goal of self – verification help people to affirm their existing self concept.

Self-Monitoring - the extent to which external situation and the reactions of others help one to regulate behaviour. The people who are low self-monitors regulate their behaviours on the basis of internal factors such as beliefs, attitudes and interests. It has been found that high self-monitors pay attention to others and low self-monitors pay attention to them.

Self-consciousness - we are not always self-focused. However,

certain events do compel us to turn to our own selves. When we become self-aware, we start comparing our behaviour with internal standards. Such a comparison reveals negative discrepancy. Under these conditions our self-esteem decreases. In order to deal with this situation, we may attempt to reduce self-discrepancy or withdraw from the state of self-awareness. There are two types of self-consciousness:

1. Private self-consciousness – such an individual introspects the inner thoughts and feelings.
2. Public self-consciousness – these individuals have tendency to be aware of outer public image.

Awareness of self: how accurate are we in self-appraisal?

Three possibilities of self-awareness are as follows –

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

In order to live a healthy life proper appreciation of one's attributes is necessary. Also, it must be a realistic appraisal. It is on the

basis of an impartial knowledge and understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of oneself that proper course of action can be planned.

People often show self-serving bias. This implies that they try to defend themselves and view things in a way that positive attributes of self are enhanced. Also, everybody likes positive appreciation from others, whether it is correct or incorrect. This may lead to building false self-images.

Relationship of self with other processes

We attend and perceive objects and people in a manner which is compatible with one's self.

Self and cognition - It has been found that people with independent self-construal emphasize on their internal attributes as important features. In contrast, the people with interdependent-self think more about relationships and contexts.

Self and Emotion - Some emotions emphasize inner attributes such as pride, frustration (as desires are blocked). In these situations the emotional experience tends to separate or disengage the self from one's social relationships. In positive emotions such as respect, happiness, promote an interpersonal bond. In case of negative emotions, such as feelings of indebtedness or guilt, they occur because of failure in maintaining relationship with

others. This set of emotions reflects **socially engaged emotions**.

Self and Motivation - It has generally been thought that the issue of motivation deals with internal processes pertaining to a person. This view is very close to the independent self-construal. All of them refer to the motivation related to the person or "me".

In case of interdependent self, it is noted that behaviours are directed or guided by the expectations of significant others (e.g., parents, teachers, other family members), obligations and duties toward others.

Evaluate yourself

1. Discuss the level of self as given by William James.
2. How is self-related to motivation and emotion?
3. Discuss the Panch kosha model.