

Rethinking of women's Self: A Critical Analysis

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1. Introduction

The Self, in its technical sense, is a challenging notion in modern intellectual discussions and the theory of knowledge as well. This, along with the issue of Individuals' ever-unending search for it and its construction and reconstruction in relevance to dynamic social ties and its surroundings, is a central point of discussion, both in the contemporary anthropological sense of views and gender-related analytical contexts. Individual constructs his/herself incessantly based on his/her environments, situations and surroundings, again split its edge and re-notify this, when necessary. It's through the concept of the self, that individuals establish their identities. They create it in light of gender, class, age, socioeconomic position and environmental situations. Hence, it's different from individual to individual, men to women and even women to woman. Self-related comprehensibility defers from person to person based on their observations and realities, and so is in the mechanism of self-related formation and its reformation. It is not only the identity of an individual's existence or presence but also a kind of ever-flowing essence of life. Therefore, it may be considered a blended phenomenon of a person's psychology, society and tradition. Self-centred awareness, consciously and sometimes even subconsciously, inspires people to construct and reconstruct their self. Again, the process of social and traditional formation inspires them to generate awareness.

This article aims to draw mainly on the importance of studying the self with the representation of complex analysis of different theoretical frameworks and the post-modern streams, especially with the post-modern feministic point of view. Apart from its introduction and conclusion, this article includes discussions on four distinct phases. How the self is defined has been discussed in the first phase. The philosophical base of studying it has been brought to light in the second phase. The next phase includes the discussion, in brief, on the way the self is being conceptualized with psychological, social and anthropological spirits. And finally, the importance of herself and its analysis in the study of a woman through the presentation of the conceptualization of the self and its limitation with the post-modern feministic views in light of empirical knowledge has been carried out in the fourth phase.

2. Conceptualization Having Affinity with Self

Rene Descartes (1644), in his book 'Principles of Philosophy, used the phenomenon of *self* for the first time while describing an individual's self-centric presence. As he said – it's when an individual thinks of something does he/she realizes their existence, their self. And this realization of existence depends on the individual's viewpoint. Later on, its relevancy took place in the discussions of other philosophers, psychologists, social scientists and anthropologists. But this topic had been studied alone in the intellectual

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society for a long period. Afterwards, with the development of *Individualism* in the west, the phenomenon of *self*-revived. Again, it's thought to have had reshaped with the flourishing idea of personality classification. Besides, it's being studied as a major phenomenon in context with social relationships, mutual actions and circumstantially relevant realities. Sigmund Freud (1900) is another profound intellect in the study of the self. He explained the self with the key peripheral contents of an individual. Michael Carrithers (1985) came forward and identified the self as a metamorphosis of the modern western psychological notion of the soul, where the importance is imposed upon an individual's self-analysis by emphasizing his/her personal freedom and independence. According to Marcel Mauss (1979), this issue is not only connected to the sense of self, but also to history, through which the way how an individual has been developed from time to time might be traced. Maybe the key to why self-centric studies have become so much important at present is laid in Mauss's discussion. There are complexities in the conceptualization of the self, and thus this may be defined as a complex and diverse phenomenon which is studied in different peripheries in different times under various contexts (Purkey William, 1988). But Carl Rogers emphasized the autonomy of the self. According to him, an individual's self is the main component of constructing his/her personality. Alongside, it's such a social component with which individuals create interrelationships with each other. In line with this, Prescott Rogers (1947) says – it constructs not only the personality of an individual or the interrelationship between an individual with his /her personality, rather it creates the insight of it which gains repletion through the succession of its own. At the same time, it determines an individual's behaviour and inspires him/her to construct and re-construct his/her self within their psychological edges.

Analysis related to the self in anthropology became remarkably striking in the eightieth decade. Anthropological perspectives define the self as living life. The summation of how an individual lives his/her life, how he/she constructs himself/herself and how he/she realizes himself/herself is conceptualized as the self. In this context, it's thought out that an individual is the creator and leader of his/herself. But Heidegger (1962) says – an individual's self is constructed through 'givenness'; in other words, individuals create their selves through a set of a specific social system, tradition and culture, and obligations. They try to draw themselves through factual situations and become inspired to attain their goals. And thus, individuals' selves get continually reshaped, parallel to the continuous change in circumstances. An individual approaches different forms of reality at different times and creates his/her self, splits it and tries to grasp its new shape under the existent surroundings and circumstantial considerations, he/she belongs.

3. Individuals' Consciousness & Self Construction - Conceptualization of the Self with Philosophical Spirits

It's mainly through the discussion of Descartes, that the concept of self-entered into philosophical discussions for the first time in history. According to him, it's when an individual casts doubts about something, does he/she think. And with this thinking, he/she realizes and becomes aware of his/her existence. Descartes defines the existence of an individual as the self. His philosophical thought is widely accepted as a milestone in giving the primary notion of the self. But his thoughts are related only to the existential presence or absence of an individual which seems to exclude the sense of comprehending the self with completeness. On the other hand, Immanuel Kant, in his book 'Foundations

of the *Metaphysics of Moral*' (1948), said – the self is that kind of category of an individual's thoughts and mind, through which he/she comprehends himself/herself. But he drew a line between 'self-perception' and 'individual'. He attested an individual's thinking streams as 'sensitivity'. As he kept going, individuals' sense of awareness is different with the differentiation of the idea of 'person' under cultural diversities; and the self may be taken as one of the main categories of analysis of this diversity.

Kant's approach suggests it to be more of a category and a tool for the analysis rather than emphasizing the self within its isolated edge. He, furthermore, stated that – 'I' cannot be a phenomenon. But it bears an individual's consciousness; which is why the existence of the self can't be sensed until an individual's awareness is added to that. I do partially agree with Kant, since it's certainly true that the concept of the self is not only attached to an individual's existence, presence and/or absence, it's essentially relevant to attach it to his/her psychological consciousness. But if the self is examined only with consciousness, this might seem to be a subjective matter under different contexts. Again, the way Kant identifies the self as a category is difficult. However, Hegel attests to the self quite opposite to that Kant. Where Kant proposes that 'I' cannot, in any way, be considered as a phenomenon or a concept, Hegel takes it as the main phenomenon of attesting everything. In that context, Charles Taylor (1975) quoted Hegel's,

"The best representation of the concept in the furniture of the world is the 'I'..... 'I' is a pure concept itself, which as a concept has come into existence"

That is, Hegel stands not only quite the opposite of Kant at conceptualizing the self, rather he uses 'I' as the pure phenomenon or concept of every attestation. He delivered the notion of the self through *Geist* and *Spirit*. According to him, 'I' attests to the consciousness rooted in the reality of an individual. Hegel imposed reality on his thinking course in such a way that the point of psychological consciousness attached to it is turned down, which might be considered an important issue in comprehending the self. Renouvier (1903) and Hamelin (1907) came onward against Kant and Hegel and explained the self in light of *personalism*. They defined the self by combining the sense of individuality with non-self and awareness with the person.

Besides, they challenged Kant's and Hegel's ideas of consciousness into two different peripheries. Firstly, if Kant's explanation of consciousness is evaluated, it may turn out to be that – an individual essentially bears it within. Secondly, Hegel's talking about it shows an inclination to define the self as a 'concrete being' that continually moves through an active process. Here it's notable that, Renouvier undermined Kant's position about the self. Hegel explained consciousness as an autonomous subject. Renouvier followed Hegel in that, he considered consciousness as a synonym for the *person* and used it to define the self. In his discussion, it's said to analyze the self by connecting a person only to his/her consciousness. But the self is not only an essential bearer of consciousness, the relation of a person with his/her unconscious mind is also important to that. A person doesn't do everything consciously. There are, in fact, so many things, a person possesses in his/her unconscious mind which influence the construction of his/her self. Therefore, I think it's inappropriate to define the self as consciousness or a conscious state of an individual.

4. The Self with Psychological, Social & Anthropological Spirits

Sigmund Freud is especially remarkable at conceptualizing the self in its second phase. Where philosophy emphasizes consciousness to attest to the self, Freud imposes psychological peripheries to explore it. He divides psychology into two frames – The conscious part of the mind & Unconscious part of the mind, to comprehend an individual's individuality. Most of Freud's works centred on and developed from unconsciousness (Peter Barry, 1995). He suggests understanding an individual's consciousness by emphasizing the existent thoughts within his/her unconscious psychology; with which, his/her self is being constructed and developed. Here the self is defined by attributing importance to the following three steps. First: Id – where an individual is cropped up with his/her inborn desires and comprehends him/her or their self through their behavioural urges and satisfactions. Second: Ego – it, mainly, brings the psychological explanations of the self to a strong and sustainable ground. In this stage, he/she generates integrity by assimilating the social system, basing which the sense of integrity is formed within individuals. And third: Super-Ego drives the idea of egoism to a superior state. It develops through the individuals' morality, consciences and various social judgments, based on which they form the set of principles that they possess in them.

The schools of psychology define the self mainly with the ideas of Freudian Id, Ego and Super-Ego. Afterwards, the self is identified with the descriptions of the explanation of various actions that happen in day-to-day life. Freud calls it "The psychopathology of everyday life". Subsequently, Anna (1946) said, it's an individual's internal description that can wholly represent his/her self. Though Freudian psychological explanation is so much relevant and logical in analyzing the self, however, it seems to devote supreme importance to the psychological edges. Even though social objectivity is added to it, nevertheless, it's observed to tend to draw it in light of an individual's psychological spirit.

Contrary to Freudian ideas, on the other hand, Emile Durkheim (1912) said, the self is one kind of social output. According to him, society and social factuality construct it. In that case, he tried to define the self in light of 'social fact'. As he thought, the notion of the self is a stream to the change of modern social conditions. It's a cognition formed, controlled and directed by society under the reflection of the modern social system and social factuality. In other words, Durkheim stresses the mind relative to society and the cognition of an individual formed by social factuality in defining the self. Marcel Mauss (1968) puts his ideas one step ahead. Mauss thinks the concept of the self is mainly a phenomenon carried out by the western social system. The idea of 'person' emerged there in the course of the individualistic social system. And this 'person' is the self. In that context, Carrithers (1985) quoted Mauss, "The Person = The Self, The Self = Consciousness. Mauss states that the concept of individuals, moreover, the self is certainly the reflection of their consciousness. It's, indeed, a spirit inspired by the individualism that developed in western society. Mauss's thought is observed in the work of Mac Farlane (1978), where the self is represented to be a phenomenon exercised only in the west. In that perspective, the self seems to be an exclusive phenomenal product and a property of western individualism, and this challenging spirit is existent only to them. That's because, an individual's comprehension of his/her self-integrity can, in no way, be identified as a product of any specific social system. The concept of the self may be

among societies but it's active in every society. Anthropologists make this issue much more obvious throughout their works. Radcliffe Brown (1940) said, "Every human being living in society is two things... he is an individual and he is also a person". According to him, an individual can be analyzed through mutual social relationships when his/her individuality is considered in sense of a person. He suggests that the coordination of individualism and person can be referred to as the self.

5. A Woman & Her Self – Conceptualization of the Self with the Postmodern Spirits

Postmodernism differs a bit from mutual thinking streams. It casts doubt on the traditional implications of 'truth' and 'reality', and thereby, rejects traditional thoughts. Along this stripe, there are uncertainties thrown at the settled concepts like the role of the male and female sex, written in 'Grand Narratives' Narratives. These are said to be logocentric thoughts in which thoughts are considered an unalterable essence. Hence, postmodern feminists reject traditional views. It's, however, proposed to study the self with the attribution of emphasis on the diversities of feministic thoughts and their multidimensional realities. Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva are remarkable scholars in this context. Like Jacques Derrida, most postmodern feminists claim to reconstruct the self and female nature through the deconstruction of the prevailing concepts concerning it. They stressed the analysis of the female's self over the re-explanations of Freudian psychological theories and their applications. Some postmodern feminists, on the other hand, call attention to the point of analyzing females' modified selves parallel to the flexible social schemes, rather than deconstruction. The source of their thoughts is found in Simone de Beauvoir's works, where she raised the question, "Why are women the second sex?". This idea creates a new horizon of discussions on the self for postmodern feminists. Where Beauvoir questions 'the second sex', postmodern feminists tag it 'the other' (Tong, 1989). And while analyzing this otherness, it's said in postmodern feminism that, the conversion of women into 'the other' prompted only the patriarchic rules, regulations, practices and values. As a result, women are repressed and seen as inferiors in terms of their identity. And therefore, the inclination to explain women with some particular phenomena became obvious. It follows that a woman's presence and her thoughts are not uplifted here. So, they think it was not possible to know a woman's total reality. That's why, postmodern feminism suggests that a women's self be studied by stressing her openness, through which, her diversity, uniqueness, objectivity and multi-dimension of self would, probably, be identified.

The deconstructionist approach is one of the fundamental topics in postmodern feminism, where not only the universally dominant and authoritative grand narratives are doubted, various contrasts are challenged too, i.e. logical vs. emotional, beauty vs. ugliness, good vs. bad, male vs. female, individual vs. others etc. All these contrasts are brought into question through antithetical opposition, which claims that a concept is made authoritative and dominant in virtue of another concept, which results in the formation of contrasts like in feminism vs. patriarchy. Postmodern feminists suggest studying the self, stripping off those contrasts. In other words, their suggestion is to analyze a woman over her inner construction of self, not to consider her feministic views as a mere counterpart of patriarchy, in view to promote her individuality rather than 'the other'.

i) The Rational Maximizer Theory of the Self and Its Limitations

Contemporary American society seems to emphasize the self as a phenomenon to comprehend women's reality. There, the self is considered a unified rational thinking subject after John Locke and Tomas Jefferson. This perspective regards an individual as a perpetually rational human. It's assumed that an individual always acts rationally and tries to fulfil his/her interests, which serves the point that why the desire to make true the dreams and wishes awaken in women with a reason and which is why the inspiration and desire to meet the dreams and wishes awaken followed by rationality and rational attitude in the self of women. These are the indicators of the identification of women's self. The theory of evaluating women's self-based on rationality is called 'The Rational Maximizer Theory of the Self'. The feminists, who believe in this theory, claim that women are always rational, but their rationality is not socially appreciated, and on the contrary, all their rational acts are ironically termed as 'Women's work'. Moreover, they claim that there are simply no fundamental differences in personal characteristics between men and women. So, both men and women can attain their goals through rational behaviours by their potentialities and wishes.

The way it's claimed in this theory that persons are always rational is, indeed, kind of awkward. Besides, it seems this theory resembles, much more, the economists' concept of the rational self to me. On the other hand, the theory claims of the absolute similarity in the personal characteristics of both men and women are, in fact, unconvincing.

The above situation, if analyzed, would clearly show the fact that Shima's perceptions of experiencing her life before marriage, after marriage and after divorce are all different. And this differentiation is connected to her different identities under different circumstances. Consequently, it brings changes to the background of her self-constructions which necessitates it to be re-attested. Before marriage, she attempted to construct herself as a homemaker. After marriage, she tried to adapt herself to the reality she faced. And it's she when divorced her husband, that she inspired herself to re-construct her pre-constructed individuality and went in search of the objective of her life. From this incident, we can infer that the identity of an individual is subject to the change in circumstances, he/she travels through. The identity does not only influence and motivate the perspective of self-perceptions, dreams and self-constructions, but also creates considerable pressure on the re-attestation of the self. Therefore, it's important to evaluate the way a woman creates and re-creates herself under different circumstantial situations. Because the identity, from the viewpoint of individuality to that of socially and traditionally formed identities, of men and women, can never be the same. Besides, the identity of men and women defers under different circumstances. Moreover, the same woman holds different identities at different steps of her life, which affects her perpetual rationality in her. To speak it the other way round, the identity of a woman defers when she's unmarried, married, a wife and a mother.

On the other hand, the identity of a man's fatherhood and a woman's motherhood is, again, not the same. For a woman, the representation of her identity in the formation of herself usually derives from her family, but it doesn't appear the same for men. For instance, a man uses his name to introduce himself to his surroundings irrespective of what and where he belongs, but a woman, after marriage, is named after her husband.

And when she begets children, she receives the identity of a mother. This is, however, not always imposed on her; sometimes she holds this in her subconscious nature. Though a woman's name bears her identity in her job sector, she's identified after her children at home to the neighbours and everywhere. But a man can always assume his own identity. Therefore, in my opinion, it's very important to study the *self* of a woman under different circumstances and identities.

ii) Difference Theory of the Self and Its Limitations

Another important theory in the study of women's self is Difference Theory, which holds that an individual's personality is formed under the differentiation of their sex. This theory talks about studying the self of women in two phases, based on the determination of differences between them. The first phase points out the differences between men and women, and their selves according to their sexual identifications. Psychological feminist conceptualization proposes, in the second phase, that the differentiation in the identities of men and women is the root of differentiations among their selves. Socially customized labour distribution for genders, rather than sexual differences, is identified as the main reason behind the difference in the construction of self in men and women here. Nancy Chodorow (1994), Dorothy Dinnerstein (1978), Carol Gilligan (1993) and Sara Ruddick are noteworthy scholars in this context. According to this theory, though the psychological spirit and sexual differentiations have been especially emphasized, nevertheless, it appears to have been considered only that differentiation in discerning the self of women, which seems to be awkward to me. The following incident may come in handy to illustrate this situation. We can infer from the above discussion that an individual's sexual and psychological differentiations are not the only factors that bear the identity of their self. The differentiation between men and women are essentially important; however, the psychological motives of women, the social relations among men and women etc. are also important in understanding the self of women.

iii) Aspect Theory of Self and its study in light of Women's Reality

Ann Ferguson (1991) put forward, probably, the most logical and important theory in contemporary feminist discussions. Her theory on the self of women is known as the aspect theory of self. She argued that both the rational maximizer theory of the self and difference theory evaluated the self of women from a rigid platform. According to her, if the self is analyzed this way, there might be a tendency to define the self of women through a given unity. And if the self of women is evaluated this way, then women are confined within some special qualities which are quite unable to represent their true realities. Therefore, she rejects the earlier theories and suggests analyzing the self of women from different perspectives. She explains it with flexible and mixed consciousness. Ferguson offers to understand and study women's self through the existential process, based on the situations they belong to, which would, as a consequence, leave no scope to stand any universal explanation for themselves. She put the universal concepts of women's self into question the same way postmodern feminism challenges and calls for re-attestation to this. Additionally, she denied all those prevailing concepts centred on the notion of women's self and evaluated it through its multidimensionality and objectivity. She just proposed to realize the self by connecting it to women's personhood. As she thinks, if we want to understand women's self, we'll

have, then, to come out from prevailing various divisions and multiplications related to it. It's not through a woman's femininity or a counterpart of masculinity, rather it's through the different perspectives of the prevailing realities and social practices, she has to be understood. Ferguson's theory did certainly add a new dimension to the analysis of women's self. This concept holds a much stronger theoretical platform compared to that of the earlier mutual thinking streams in terms of studying the self. Besides, it seems to me that this piece of discussion is influenced by postmodern thoughts in the contemporary intellectual community. Ferguson's consideration of women's self under the popular reality is essentially logical. But how much of it is possible through the way it's said to be understood the multidimensionality and multiplicity of their self in this theory is, in fact, subject to various thinking perspectives. If every individual self has to be understood as subjects to their boundaries according to her concept, then it would not only turn out to be hard to figure out the self, it would be impossible too. The way I think is, if women's self is analyzed through their prevailing realities, then it might be possible to represent their mobility and continuous changeability of their self-much more clearly. At the same time, if women's selves are studied without confining them into the imposed realities, without setting them opposite to men, then their wholesome reality may appear before us. There may be an opportunity to understand women's self in its sense through the analysis of various dangles of their self-construction.

6. Conclusion

An individual's self is not something isolated. It's connected to mutual facts and cognition of changeable essence. It's crucial to evaluate his/herself through proper coordination rather than relying only on their psychological frames and social systems to consider this. The self is a phenomenon that develops from an organizing system, where, at the same time, philosophy's consciousness, Freud's ego and Durkheim's social facts are all dominantly influential at work. This cannot be analyzed only with any single determinator. Besides, the self of an individual is not any particular character trait or essence; rather it's his/her mutual social relationship with the surroundings and a changeable spirit, which is influenced by the set of prevailing circumstances. It's, however, true that a person's life along with his/her intellectuality changes with the change in time and situations. Given that, apart from the consideration of it as a postmodern feministic spirit, the fact of studying women's self can be defined as a demand of time. Therefore, I think the self can simply be discussed through an intersectional lens.

Short Notes

1. In Bengali, the terms 'Self' and 'Being' literally stand for "*attma*" and '*shattma*' respectively. But according to many scholars in the intellectual community, it's not possible to stand any meaning for the phenomenon 'Self' apart from 'Being' (Wikipedia, free encyclopedia). Here, in this context, I don't think '*attma*' is genuinely synonymous with 'Self'. Therefore, it seemed logical to me to use 'Self' for "*shattma*".
2. The Term 'Individual/person is identified as synonymous with the Self in this article. Besides, the coordination of an individual's self-consciousness and awareness has been defined as the Self here. Read on this more in Michael Carrithers (1985), 'An Alternative History of The Self'.

3. The construction of the identification of women in contrast to men is defined by "The other" in this article. Seldom is it observed that women are illustrated as "the self" in any women-related research works, which is seen as a problematic notion in the eyes of postmodern feminism.
4. "Deconstructionist approach", usually in the postmodern spirit, suggests following a different stream of research methods associated with the variation in the prevailing research works, where a researcher imposes importance upon the prevailing phenomena against the dominant essays on them by his/her total authority.
5. "Antithetical opposition" is one of the important phenomena in the postmodern spirit, where it's thought out that, to authorize a concept in the earlier grand narratives another concept is set opposite relevantly to it. For instance, in an attempt to authorize the concept of "patriarchy", women's "feminism" is set against men to emphasize the discussion on feminism.

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