

Self: A Dialogical Exploration

Swati Sengupta

swatisenguptaju@gmail.com

Author, Editor at The Bengal Story

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ABSTRACT

The concept of the self is a highly contested topic. Social scientists are re-exploring the conception of the self, and, also its relation to the 'others' in the social and cultural contexts. It is evident that the philosophers of different schools of thoughts have been concerned with distinct aspects of the selfhood. The paper, by critically examining the two distinguished positions namely, the autonomous self and the relational self, discusses an alternative approach to understanding of the self. On analyzes, it is conspicuous that both the positions (autonomous and relational) are pre-occupied with the task of prioritizing one aspect over the other. For instance, in case of the autonomous self position, autonomy is prioritized over relation; and in case of the relational self position, relation is prioritized over autonomy. In this sense, they both appear to be tied down to an essentialist and binary analysis. Therefore, it turns into a debate between pro-autonomy and pro-relationship. As both of these positions valorize one dimension as more fundamental over another, so, they remain exclusionary, in their respective frameworks, albeit differently. Thus, these positions turn to be an ideal-centric in nature because their conception of the self essentially perpetuates 'ideal types' about the self based on their respective theoretical positions. And the individuals who do not assent to these characterizations may find that the selfhood models in question does not give chance to their individuality or point of views because their views / person has already been determined to lie outside of the autonomous / relational selfhood domains. As an alternative to such positions, the paper explores the conception of the self from the dialogic framework which recognizes the correlation of agency and the interpersonal relatedness. It contends that both the autonomous and the relational aspects of the self must be taken as the two basic human qualities. And every individual should be given equal opportunities as well as encouragements to adopt or to develop both of these qualities. By not focusing on one aspect of the self over the other, the emphasis of this selfhood construction would be on evolving the conceptual tools for working towards the non binary and non exclusionary framework concerning the self.