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Indira Gandhi
National Open University
School of Education

**BESL-124
Understanding the
Self and Yoga**

Block

1

THE WORLD WITHIN ONESELF

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BESL-124 UNDERSTANDING THE SELF AND YOGA

Course Introduction

"Understanding the Self and Yoga" is a course designed for B. Ed. students to help them understand themselves – the development of the self as a person and as a teacher, through conscious ongoing reflection. It is very important for a teacher to understand his/her students. A teacher must accept that students differ in their interests, capabilities and level of achievement. But the understanding of self is a prerequisite for understanding others and for effective communication and engagement with others, including students. This course will help you in developing a deeper understanding of your own self and identity.

This course is divided into two blocks. **Block 1**: The World within Oneself; and **Block 2**: Self and Yoga. First Block on 'The World within Oneself' focuses on understanding sense of self in the personal as well as social spheres. It particularly focuses on helping you to discover your own lived realities and develop an understanding of yourselves within the cultural context in which you live. Second Block on 'Self and Yoga' will help you in enhancing your abilities of body and mind, and in promoting your sensibilities to live in peace and harmony with your surroundings. Yoga plays an important role in the well-being of the person. You will be encouraged to learn the practice of yoga and to use it in different contexts.

Through this course, you will recognise the need to situate self within a social sphere and focus on your professional and social identity, along with your personal identity. You will also learn to recognise the significant life experiences that have shaped your identity. At the end of this course, you will be more connected to your inner self and thus, better able to connect to the world around you.

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Block 1: The World within Oneself

This block on "The World within Oneself" focuses on development of inner self and professional identity of a teacher. This block aims to develop sensibilities, dispositions and skills of student teachers so as to help in the personal growth of their own students when they teach. This Block is divided into three units: the first unit – *Development of the Self and Self Expression* – discusses how self needs to be understood in relation to others. It dwells on how this journey of self discovery and engagement with others can help us in rediscovering our own selves. The unit also suggests learning to strike a balance between self in relation to others and self in the absence of these relationships.

The second unit – *Social Self* – will provide a glimpse as to how self evolves continuously as a result of interpersonal interactions and socially approved evaluation and perception of others. The unit also discusses that an individual ultimately gains his social identity only by viewing himself through the spectacles of other's perceptions.

The third unit – *Revisiting the Self* – examines the meaning of childhood and encourages you to revisit your childhood days. It also develops an increased awareness about oneself and understanding and compassion towards self & others. This unit also highlights that concepts like children and childhood are imbued with stereotypes which we adhere to believe in spite of our own journeys through these ages.

The three units of this Block will enable B. Ed. students to develop a holistic and integrated understanding of the human self and personality; to build resilience within to deal with conflicts at different levels and learn to create teams to draw upon collective strengths.

UNIT 1 DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF AND SELF EXPRESSION

Structure

1.1   INTRODUCTION

As a practicing teacher you would acknowledge that it is important for a teacher to understand his/her students. A teacher must understand the importance of knowing the patterns of learning and development in students, the need to recognise and embrace diversity among students and accept individual differences in them. But the understanding of self is fundamental to understanding others and for effective communication and engagement with others around us, including students.

In this unit, we will focus on developing a *sense of self* in relation to others around us. This will help you to discover your own capabilities and potentials, as also new ways of engaging with your inner self.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you should be able to:

* interrelate and differentiate between concepts of self and identity;

* recognise your inner potential and develop better interconnectedness with your sense of self and the outside world;

* identify the significant life experiences that have influenced your identity and recognise the nature of their influence;

* trace your movement towards growth and develop a plan of action;

* recognise yourself in relation to others and develop better interpersonal communication; and

* find creative ways of expressing yourself.

1.3 SELF AND IDENTITY

Let's begin by understanding the nature of self and identity. Erikson emphasised that our sense of identity develops through eight psychosocial stages that begin from infancy and continue to old age (discussed in Unit 6 of Course BES-121). At each stage, we face a conflicting situation that requires us to resolve a crisis that can have a positive or a negative outcome. Each successive stage is influenced by our negotiation of conflict at the earlier stage. The eight stages have been presented in the table below:

Erikson's Stage Theory in its Final Version

Age	Conflict	Resolution or "Virtue"	Culmination in Old Age
Infancy (0-1 year)	Basic trust vs. Mistrust	Hope	Appreciation of interdependence and relatedness
Early Childhood (1-3 years)	Autonomy vs. Shame	Will	Acceptance of cycle of life, from integration to disintegration
Play age (3-6 years)	Initiative vs. Guilt	Purpose	Humour; empathy; resilience
School age (6-12 years)	Industry vs. Inferiority	Competence	Humility; acceptance of the course of one' life and unfulfilled hopes
Adolescence (12-19 years)	Identity vs. Confusion	Fidelity	Sense of complexity of life; merging of sensory, logical and aesthetic perception
Early Adulthood (20-25 years)	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Love	Sense of the complexity of relationships; value of tenderness and loving freely
Adulthood (26-64 years)	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Care	Caritas; caring for others, and agape, empathy and concern
Old age (65-Death)	Integrity vs. Despair	Wisdom	Existential identity; a sense of integrity strong enough to withstand physical disintegration

Fig. 1.1: Erikson's Stage Theory in its Final Version (Source: https://handeyes.wordpress.com/tag/erikson-8-stages-of-development/ downloaded on May 16, 2016)

You would notice that the fifth stage in Erikson's theory is particularly significant. It is during adolescence that we face a sense of moratorium and attempt to develop our sense of identity. Erikson elaborated on this stage as follows:

"The growing and developing youths, faced with this physiological revolution within them, are now primarily concerned with attempts at consolidating their social roles. They are sometimes morbidly, often curiously, preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are and with the question of how to connect the earlier cultivated roles and skills with the prototypes of the day..." (Erikson, 1963, cited in Hjelle and Ziegler, 1992, pp. 197-198)

Erikson said that these stages are typically marked by a quest for finding answers to questions such as Who am I? What am I? Where am I? Where am I going to go? He termed the failure of young individuals to develop a personal identity, as an *identity crisis*. Marcia built upon Erikson's work to present four identity statuses which he said, represent the ways through which people typically find a solution to their identity crisis. These are:

Identity Statuses	Description
Identity Foreclosure	Committing to a personal and professional pathway of life based on childhood socialisation without exploration of alternatives.
Identity Diffusion	Not making a commitment to particular life choices, nor exploring alternatives.
Psychosocial Moratorium	Exploring alternatives in personal and professional life before making a commitment to a particular identity.
Identity Achievement	Committing to a sense of personal and professional identity, after having engaged in exploration and undergoing a state of moratorium.

Fig. 1.2: Four Identity Statuses

Marcia emphasised that *Identity Achievement* is the healthiest alternative of the four, since it represents making a conscious choice after exploring various alternatives and engaging in moratorium for a while. In India, however, early socialisation practices and a commitment to family values, often prevent children from engaging in moratorium or in active exploration. In many households parents compel children to undertake the same professions as their family tradition. Even in educated middle class Indian families, children are often expected to pursue conventional careers with financial stability, rather than following their dreams and fulfilling personal ambitions. This can lead to a sense of discontentment that often remains unexpressed. It is important to understand that at times, this form of suppression can lead to psychological distress and feelings of alienation from oneself.

Contemporary researches on identity show that the quest for identity development extends into young adulthood and even middle adulthood. Thus,

it is not surprising to see people in their late twenties and early thirties still exploring alternatives, before making commitments (Arnett, 2000, Brown and Larson, 2002). Take a minute here to pause and reflect on the questions in the exercise given below.

Check Your Progress 1

Who am I?

Look back on your life and think about your childhood and family life:

* Did you always want to be a teacher?

* When did you decide to choose teaching as a profession?

* Who or what experiences helped you to choose this profession?

* Was it a conscious choice?

* Are you happy with your decision or would you like to be in some other profession? What factors helped you to choose your profession?

Besides professional commitment, what other areas of life have you made commitments in/to? Erikson defined identity as:

"The integration now taking place in the form of ego identity is more than the sum of the childhood identifications. It is the inner capital accrued from all those experiences of each successive stage, when successful identifications led to a successful alignment of the individual's basic drives with his endowment and his opportunities. The sense of ego identity then is the accrued confidence that one's ability to maintain inner sameness and continuity (one's ego in the psychological sense) is matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others." (Erikson, 1963, cited in Hjelle and Ziegler, 1992, pp. 197-198)

Identity extends to the personal, social, professional and religious domains as well. Perhaps the best example of a foreclosed identity is that of our religious identity. Do we choose our religion or are we born in it? By virtue of being born in a family that follows a particular religion, we also acquire the same religion. A major part of our lives, including the rituals we follow, the places we visit, how we worship, and sometimes even our names, are based on a religion that we have not chosen for ourselves nor through an active exploration of other religions. Similarly, caste, class and gender identities are also not chosen by us. You would study more about these in the second unit of this block. For now, let us explore Grotevant's (1992) notion of assigned and chosen identities. He described assigned components as those aspects of identity that are ascribed to us by birth or by external social factors. For instance, a person is born into a particular religion. He emphasised that assigned domains of identity can "pose problems for the self in the sense that one must construct meaning around that which cannot be changed" (p. 77). In contrast, chosen aspects of identity are conscious, well thought out decisions about the roles that we want to play in the world. These may include professional choices, courses we pursue or the lifestyle we lead. The process of identity development may at times be negatively influenced by the undervaluing of its assigned components, such as caste, gender and social class. They may also restrict the available options for exploration of one's identity.

Check Your Progress 2

Have you ever questioned the direction that your life has taken? Is there anything that you would like to change? Try to fill the empty columns given below:

	Personal (Choice of clothes/ food habits/ lifestyle and other preferences)	Professional (Teaching/ Educational courses undertaken)	Social (Caste/ Culture/ Religion/ Family/ Class)
Which aspects of your identity do you think have been assigned to you?			
Which aspects did you choose?			

The paragraphs above highlighted that our sense of identity does not develop in a vacuum. In fact, it is the environment in which we live and grow that has a significant influence on our sense of identity. Jenkins (2008) put forth the important notion that our identity is not just about how we see ourselves, but also about how others see us. You will study the notion of social identity in greater detail in the next unit. Let's now try to understand the concept of self and how it differs from identity.

1.4 DEVELOPMENT OF SELF

Self and identity are often seen as overlapping terms and are frequently used interchangeably. There is no clear consensus among theorists about how the two terms are related and yet different from each other. The way we define ourselves is based on our perception of ourselves as well as how we think others perceive us. This forms our *self concept*. A related concept is that of self esteem. Self esteem refers to the evaluation of one's worth by oneself. If one views self as worthy and capable, the person would have a positive self esteem. A negative self esteem would develop through constant undervaluing of one's potential and capabilities. Here, again, how others perceive us has an important role to play in building positive self esteem. Roger's work on the development of self highlights the importance of primary caregivers in providing unconditional positive self regard. The term refers to providing feelings of acceptance and respect without the dependence on fulfillment of defined conditions. Family, teachers, and society at large often put conditions on children. Common examples of these include appreciating and rewarding socially appropriate or expected behaviours. A child who defies social norms would often be told to change his/her ways to fit into stereotypical categories and meet conventional norms. Thus, experimentation with hairstyles, clothes and lifestyles will be frowned upon. On the other hand, a child who meets the conditions of academic excellence will be considered good and will be well accepted. Children thus learn that only certain kinds of behaviours are acceptable to parents and teachers. In other words, 'conditions of worth' are ascribed to children. Prolonged exposure to

such conditions of worth, often lead children to judge themselves along the same standards. This leads to creation of conditions of positive self regard. However it is important to recognise that children value themselves, only when these conditions of worth are met.

Check Your Progress 3

1. List the qualities that you think are desirable in you as an ideal person / List the qualities that you think make you a good person in your personal, professional and social life.

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2. List the qualities that you think are undesirable in you as an ideal person / List the qualities that you think make you a bad person in your personal, professional and social life.

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3. In the list drawn above, think of the reasons why you value certain qualities in yourself. What are the sources of these values? Does your family place emphasis on the same values?

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We often tend to value the same things that our family values. We draw upon experiences at home and school to appreciate certain qualities and imbibe them. Similarly, we tend to devalue certain qualities that we have been 'taught' are not good or appropriate. Thus, as children and even later in life, we try to develop those qualities that are appreciated by others around us. These include being academically sound, being a good student, wearing certain clothes, or behaving in certain ways. Many a times, this may be in contrast to what we truly want to be. Characters in popular Bollywood movies such as that of Farhan Qureshi in *Three Idiots* (2009), Aslam Khan in *Rang De Basanti* (2006), Ved Vardhan Sahni in *Tamasha* (2015) and young brothers Ishan and Yohaan Awasthi in *Taare Zameen Par* (2007), highlight how family and society, place importance on certain kinds of behaviours and life choices. This often prevents us from discovering who we truly are.

Check Your Progress 4

You may want to pause here and reflect on the influences others have had on your identity. One way of doing this is to write a story in which the central character is inspired from your life. Incorporate how the character's choices were influenced by others around him/her in the story. See how the story ends.

Is the character in your story breaking away from family or other ties? Can you see where the character is making choices that may not be appreciated or accepted by others around him/her? Are these choices reflective of what you want to do?

The exercise above would have helped you to develop insights about yourself and chart out the direction of growth you would like to take. Development of self requires readiness for taking on fresh dimensions. In the section that follows, we will discuss how to develop the predisposition for personal growth.

1.5 MOVING TOWARDS PERSONAL GROWTH

In the section above, we have discussed how we tend to be influenced by others around us. We tend to maintain an outward stance to please others. We are socialised into behaving in certain ways and fulfilling societal norms and expectations. In keeping others happy, we tend to forget what truly makes us happy. In other words, it is important to recognise our inner self. It is through the realisation of our inner self that we can work towards growth in our personal, professional and social domains.

Brian Tracy (2001) in his book 'Eat That Frog' stresses the need to understand that you can be more successful by learning to work differently. "Coming from an unsuccessful background, I had developed deep feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. I had fallen into the mental trap of assuming that people who were doing better than me were actually better than me. What I learned was that this was not necessarily true. They were just doing things differently and what they had learned to do, within reason, I could learn as well" (p. 6). This realisation emphasises that everyone has the potential to work towards personal growth. Look back at your own experiences and think of the ways in which you would like to improve as a teacher. Are you satisfied with your relationships with students, colleagues, and the school principal? Are you happy with the way your classes proceed? Do you feel dissatisfied with your students' learning on some days? What can you do to improve it? With these questions in mind, identify the key domain that you would immediately like to work upon. Once you have identified the target area, list up to three things that you would like to change in that domain. Now, list a set of steps you can take on each day in the coming week to move towards your aim. Review what you have achieved on everyday basis.

It is important to understand that personal growth is an ongoing process. It does not end with achieving a set goal. In simple terms, we set goals for ourselves that we need to achieve in order to overcome our weaknesses in specific areas. However, as we achieve these goals, we set new goals for ourselves. Personal growth is thus a process and not an end product.

The journey of personal growth requires developing characteristics that would facilitate experiences that help you to discover your potential and realise it to the fullest. In Rogerian terms, this would refer to working towards becoming a 'fully functioning person'. Rogers (1961) described a fully functioning person as one who is using his/her capacities to the fullest extent possible. They would work towards developing a complete knowledge of themselves. This requires openness to experiences of different kinds. A fully functioning person would intuitively listen to himself and be aware of his own thoughts and feelings. Such persons would lead a fulfilling and rich life and live as a unique experience. Thus, they would be flexible and spontaneous. This inherently involves being free and responsible for one's own choices. Finally, a fully functioning person would live creatively in terms of ideas and actions.

1.6 CONNECTING WITH OTHERS AROUND US

The discussion so far has focused on understanding one's thoughts and feelings. The first part of the unit emphasised that self develops in a social context. To reiterate, one's identity is significantly influenced by others around us. Roger's framework of fully functioning person discussed above also emphasises the need for harmonious interpersonal connectedness. In this section we will see how healthy interpersonal relations can be established.

In our everyday life, we communicate at various levels in our personal, professional and social lives. Each of these communications requires engagement in different ways. For instance, communication at home can be more casual. In professional situations, we would tend to use formal language and would often refrain from sharing each of our deepest thoughts. This would also influence our body language and thus our non-verbal communication.

Think about the times when you have felt disconnected with others around you. Sometimes unpleasant communication can set the mood for the day and make us feel unsettled. This can in turn influence our performance at work. Effective communication would be especially important for you as a teacher in the class as well as with others in the school. Look back on your own years in school and college. Which are the teachers that you liked the most? Who are the popular teachers in schools? You would notice that all teachers who are liked by students are not always the ones who teach the best, but the ones who are able to connect well with them. The same teachers are often equally popular with their colleagues. Think of what they are doing differently and you would be able to draw up a list of things that can easily be done. Some suggestions have been discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

1.6.1 Listen to Others

One of the key aspects of communication is to listen to others. You would notice that even in this section, listening has been put before expressing oneself. What this emphasises is that listening is equally, if not more, important than speaking and expressing oneself. Often in communications, we tend to pay more attention to only the aspects that are relevant and important to us. When listening to others, express concern about their difficulties and listen carefully to even things which are not so important for you. This would help you to develop healthy relationships that are rooted in

mutual concern and regard. Listening to others is often also a good learning experience in all aspects of life. In a classroom, listening to students can help you to develop insights about how children think and build strong interpersonal bonds with them.

1.6.2   Express Clearly

It is equally important that we learn to express ourselves clearly. Ambiguous sentences or inept articulation in heightened emotional states is often the cause of misunderstandings. It can lead to strained relationships, and difficulties at the work place. Thus it is important that our communication is clear and to the point. When in doubt, instead of saying something that you would regret later, or leaving with ambiguous responses, it is best to express the need for time to think. This allows the time to reflect on responses before expressing them. This means that there are no impulsive responses made in the heat of the moment. Further, articulating well also prevents from creating misunderstandings and tensions.

1.6.3   Communicate Pleasantly

Earlier we had discussed that the most popular teachers are often the ones who are able to build strong interpersonal bonds. It is thus important to communicate in a pleasant manner. Greeting with a smile on your face, casual smile in the corridor, engaging in personal communication can help to build strong interpersonal bonds. Non-verbal communication forms the basis of communication that can help prevent miscommunication that was discussed above. At the same time, it is important that the verbal and non-verbal is in consonance. In other words, one should trust that you actually mean what is being communicated.

1.6.4   Be Attentive

While engaging in conversation with others, it is important that you express interest and therefore pay attention. The other person should feel that you are genuinely concerned and are listening authentically to him/her. Being attentive will also make you more aware of the subtle changes in tone and body language of the other person, thus allowing you to make better assessment of the communication being made. Being attentive also involves making careful observations. For instance, what are the key points that the other person is stressing? When does the tone change? Are the facial expressions showing the same tone as the verbal expression? Do you think you can trust the person? Is there some area in which the person is asking for help or seeking advice? Maintaining eye contact will help you in observing carefully as also in expressing confidence in interactions.

1.6.5   Refrain from Judgement

One of the key areas in maintaining interpersonal ties is by ensuring that you refrain from judgement. You may want to go back to *Rogers' theory of personality* to understand how judgement can lead to placing conditions of positive regard. This leads to a lower sense of self esteem. We have already discussed how important unconditional regard is for the development of self. We have also empahsised the role that others play in the development of self and identity. By refraining from judgement, you express acceptance of others

in the way they are. This helps others in being more open and honest with you and also allows you to learn from their experiences. You must thus try to locate people within the social context in which they have grown and now live. This will help you to accept their decisions as authentic even when they are in sharp contradiction with your own values and opinions.

Check Your Progress 5

Consider the following:

Rahul studies in class 6. Last week, he went to see his favourite actor's movie and decided to style his hair in the same way as his role model. He came to school with spikes in his hair. All his friends expressed admiration for his style and his courage to come to school in the new get up. However, this did not last long. He was reprimanded by every teacher who came to his class and by all those whom he met in the corridor. One teacher even threatened to cut his hair if he carried on with his new hairstyle. He had not completed his Science homework and was scolded by his teacher for being careless, and only interested in frivolous things, with no inclination towards academics. The Science teacher told other students not to interact with him, as they would also learn similar ways. By the end of the day, most students were not talking to him.

He wasn't surprised since this wasn't the first time his teachers had reprimanded him for defying social norms. Last year he had been scolded because he used to wear baggy trousers to school, rather than straight fit ones like all others did. He was getting used to the social isolation.

Reflect on the following questions:

1. What do you feel is the nature of Rahul's relationships with his peers?

2. How do you think this would influence his studies?

3. How would it impact the process of his identity development?

You would notice that the same student can perform well if he/she is accepted for who he/she is. This applies not just to school students, but also to adults, including you!

1.7 CONFLICT AND STRESS MANAGEMENT

Despite healthy interpersonal communication, conflicts at home and work place are not uncommon. Further, even in the most harmonious of settings, stress and work pressure are now a part and parcel of everyday life. While it is important to avoid conflict and negative stress as far as possible, sometimes these are inevitable and we must develop mechanisms to help us deal with them. It is important to remember that all stress is not bad. A little bit of stress, called 'u-stress' is important for healthy functioning. Think of a day before the examination. A student who is completely relaxed about the exam would probably not study for it. In other words, u-stress enhances

performance. Similarly, a little bit of conflict is necessary. Diverse opinions allow one to see various perspectives and thus grow as a person. Conflict can therefore be taken constructively.

Nevertheless, it is important to develop strategies that would help you to deal with stress.

1.7.1 Holistic Living

It is important to maintain an active lifestyle. In managing work and home, we tend to forget those aspects of our life and personality that are not only important for healthy living, but also bring to us great peace and joy. Regular yoga and other forms of physical exercise can help rejuvenate our body. Meditative practices can also help us to destress and rejuvenate our minds. Just like it is helpful to take time off from family and work to go out with friends, it is also helpful to take some time off for yourself. Spending five minutes only with yourself to listen to your own thoughts can help develop deeper connections with self. It may be helpful to have an early morning tea alone so that you can schedule the day ahead.

It is important to maintain this work life balance so that we live a holistic life, fulfilling our emotional, social, professional and personal needs.

1.7.2 Building Resilience

Despite all attempts, it is important to build resilience in the face of conflict. Where people live and work together, there are bound to be differences of opinions. By building resilience to conflict, you can let differences of opinions remain and prevent them from becoming personal issues that are emotionally disturbing. It is also equally important to keep your personal and professional lives separate, as far as possible. This would help you to not let emotional charges overflow from one domain to another. In other words, even if you are disturbed in one area of life, it need not mean disturbance in other areas as well. In fact, keeping the two areas separate can also serve a destressing function. You would be able to channelise your energies positively in the other domain and prevent excessive pensive thinking on any issue.

Finally, if you wish to lead a fulfilling life, it is of paramount importance to learn to let go. Holding on to grudges will only lead to undue stress.

1.7.3 Accepting the Nature of One's Job

One major aspect of the teaching profession is that it is believed to be a half days' job. In reality it is a full time profession in which work, more often than not, carries over to after school hours. Further, the profession is very demanding and mentally exhausting. Being responsible for children and their education on an everyday basis is challenging. This can be particularly frustrating when you are in the initial years of teaching. The amount of work and the nature of job are difficult for anyone outside of the profession to comprehend. One of the first steps is therefore to accept the nature of the job. It may help to befriend people in a similar profession within your school or in other schools. This would help you to share the difficulties and challenges that you face and provide a cathartic outlet.

1.8 PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Professional identity refers to the way you engage with your work and the people around you in your professional space. In more certain terms, it refers to the way you define yourself as a teacher. For instance it is based on reflective questions, such as, do you define yourself with how well you teach? How well your students score in exams? Is a significant part of your professional role governed by administrative responsibilities? Would you like to be the School Principal? Or would you like to teach in higher education institutes? Do you define yourself in terms of your engagement with students or parents? By answering these questions and maybe framing some of your own questions, you would be able to define your professional identity.

Remember that identity is not an end product that you have achieved. Instead, you are constantly growing as a person and as a teacher.

Check Your Progress 6

Take a moment here to think about the ways in which you can grow as a teacher. Answering the following questions may help you:

- Which are the areas in education that interest you?

- Would you like to pursue higher studies?

- Given your life situation, which resources can you tap: internet, libraries, books, media, or any other?

- Are there areas, other than education, that interest you? For instance, pottery, music, social work, or writing?

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The subsequent section will talk about engaging in interests other than in education. As a successful and motivated teacher, you would also be able to identify areas within the domain of education and teaching that you would like to explore further. In addition, teaching can become very dull and monotonous if everyday tasks, such as planning for class activities, identifying resources for students and engaging with students in the class, are not enriching experiences. Several strategies can be adopted for enriching the teaching experiences.

1.8.1 Building Teacher Networks

By interacting with teachers in your own school or with other teachers in the neighbourhood, you can learn new ways of dealing with challenges in the

classroom, find a platform for sharing difficulties, exchanging notes on students' experiences and engagements, and learn new pedagogic strategies. This can be done informally by meeting occasionally outside of school. On the other hand, a group of teachers can together organise weekly, fortnightly or monthly discussion sessions in the school.

1.8.2 Writing and Sharing Reflective Journals

Another very important tool is to maintain reflective journals. These are more elaborate than diary entries and provide you a forum for expressing your thoughts. The journals serve a significant purpose in allowing you to monitor your growth as a teacher. They can also build clarity of thought by allowing space for revisiting some of the day's events. If you choose to share these with peers or seniors, you may also benefit from getting an alternative perspective to your opinions and perspectives.

1.8.3 Engaging in Research and Writing

Several journals and magazines now encourage teachers to share their experiences, engage in research in school and contribute to the larger body of knowledge. This is also a way of helping other teachers to learn from your experiences. By engaging in research and publishing it in appropriate forums, you may be taking a step towards higher academic achievements. You will also see that it would help you to enrich your teaching through reading other researches and carrying out your own.

1.9 SELF EXPRESSION

In the earlier section, we discussed the need to recognise areas of growth that go beyond your professional life. To reiterate, your profession is only one part of your identity and you may wish to engage in many different domains. You may engage in exploration of your own areas of interest from time to time. In this sense, your moratorium may not ever end. In other words, you may find your niche in one area, such as painting, creating innovative products, writing, reading, music or craft. Or you may shift across different areas at different points of time. In any of the ways, it would help you to relax, rejuvenate and find a sense of purpose and meaning in life. The important thing is to find that medium of expression that suits your needs the most and allows you the space for self expression. It would help you to remember that this expression may not be for appreciation or even acceptance from others. You may choose not to share your work with others. This should be one domain that allows you to be yourself, irrespective of others around you!

Thus, we may say that it is important to understand self in isolation from others as well.

1.10 LET US SUM UP

We began the chapter by addressing how self needs to be understood in relation to others. In this journey of self discovery, we learn to engage with others around us and constantly rediscover our own selves in the process. In the process of engagement with self, exploring one's professional identity

and avenues for growth are also important. In the end, we must balance between self in relation to others and self in the absence of these relationships. In simple words, socialisation should not overpower or create obstacles to our discovery of self.

1.11   UNIT-END ACTIVITIES

At the end of the Unit, reflect on the following questions:

1. Read Erikson's theory and write down the significant events in your life at the various stages that have influenced your identity development.

2. Go back to Check Your Progress 1 and try to answer the questions again. Are the answers in variation from the ones you had given previously? What has led to the variations?

3. Write a short paragraph describing your sense of self.

4. What are your future plans and what strategies do you wish to adopt to fulfil these plans?

5. After studying this unit, list the changes that you have made or are making in your life that are helping you in connecting with yourself.

6. Identify and list the areas in your life that you think you need to grow in.

1.12   ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

The answers to questions in this section will be based on the life of the individual. The focus will be on identifying persons, instances, and situations that have led one to become a teacher. It will also involve identifying key thoughts that lead to satisfaction or dissatisfaction from professional and personal life as a teacher.

Check Your Progress 2

In this table, readers will identify those aspects of life which they feel are externally controlled. Those aspects which are beyond one's control will comprise assigned aspects of identity. In contrast, where individuals are able to exercise control and choice, they will identify chosen aspects of identity. This can vary across individuals. For instance, the clothes one wears may be exercised as a choice by some but decided by cultural and religious practices, and thus be assigned for others.

Check Your Progress 3

This is a reflective exercise. Desirable qualities can range from tangible aspects of financial stability and physical appearance, or intangible ones such as confidence, hard work etc. Undesirable qualities can include lack of determination, situational factors etc. The third question requires one to identify socialisation processes. This may include family, society, school, and peers. The purpose is to become aware of oneself and to recognise the sources that influence the values we develop.

Check Your Progress 4

The story written by the students will be analysed in light of the questions given at the end. The purpose of the exercise is to reflect on one's life and explore the trajectory of identity development.

Check Your Progress 5

1. Peers would be impressed by Rahul but would be unable to express it for fear of being scolded by teachers for talking to him. His relationships with peers would be marked by tension and limited communication.

2. His experimentation with hairstyles and clothes should not influence his studies. However, experiences of social isolation and teachers' attitudes can lead to a disinterest in school and studies, in turn leading to underperforming.

3. Rahul would experience a constant tussle between his inner desires and having to listen to others. In other words he would experience diffusion and may be forced to adopt an identity that he doesn't agree to. Alternatively, he may choose to disagree with authority and adopt a rebellious identity.

Check Your Progress 6

The questions serve as guidelines to explore pathways of continuous professional development. The answers will depend on the specific life situation of the reader. Further avenues will accordingly be explored.

1.13   SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 2 SOCIAL SELF

Structure

2.1   INTRODUCTION

Man is a social animal. He derives the meaning of his existence from the social context in which he is placed. We grow up in families, belong to different religions, ethnic groups, communities, come from different socio-economic strata and even speak different languages. These contexts shape our development and our sense of self. In the present unit we will try to understand the meaning of the concept *social self*, and the different socio cultural and historical factors which shape our identities and contribute to the creation of our social self.

2.2   OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you should be able to

- explain the concept of social self;

- distinguish between the concepts of self, identity and social identity;

- explain related concepts like self concept, social categorisation, stereotypes and prejudice;

- identify the contribution of culture in shaping our identity; and

- delineate the significant factors that affect the development of identity.

2.3   THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL IDENTITY

Task 1: List ten adjectives which you feel define you. From these ten adjectives, select two or three adjectives which you feel describe you perfectly. Try to recall a personal experience that led you to that adjective (e.g. how/when did you realise that you were intelligent)

Task 2: A longitudinal dialogue between a parent and a child

Parent: what do you want to be when you grow up?

Child (3 years): Chocolate because it is so tasty

Child (8 years): Daddy/ Mummy

Child (13 years): A Doctor to serve society and they earn well too

Young Adult (19 years): A Musician so that I can bring peace in the world

Adult (25 years): I want a decent job

As you can see from the responses cited above, the question is the same but the answers given by the respondent change with the age. Is age the only factor responsible for change? No age is a symbolic representation of our understanding of the world around us, what we can or cannot do, our strengths and weaknesses, which in turn help us to develop a sense of identity, of who am I ?

This world around us is inundated with various forces of change which impact us directly and sometimes indirectly but are equally capable of shaping our identity.

An *identity* is the concept we have of our role in the world around us. We don't simply wake up one day and decide what we want to become. Our identity is socio-culturally constructed, gradually, through our interpersonal interactions and experiences. Our gender, religion, race, age socio-economic status and cultural inputs, to name a few contribute to the creation of our social identity and this subtle yet complicated process continues throughout our lives. The way we see ourselves is our *self concept*. An individual's self concept may be defined as the sum total of all beliefs, attitudes, notions and perceptions that he has regarding himself. Self-concept is a phenomenon which defines who we are. Our self concept will guide our behavior, influence our thoughts, our worldview, what we think is right or wrong, and beliefs and values. These are some of the important factors that will influence what all we can accomplish and where we will fit in.

As we grow up we learn to choose between different alternatives available to us and decide, but does this mean we are free of influences? For example, if Rani tries out for the school choir why does she do this? Does she like singing and is talented? Did the teacher force her to join because she is good at the singing, even though she didn't really want to join the choir? Is she interested only for scoring co-curricular points? Or does she want to sing because her mother couldn't, and it is expected of her and she is giving in to family pressure?

Pondering over these issues helps us understand the complexity involved in the process of decision making and the innumerable factors that influence a seemingly routine decision. To some extent, for Rani certain factors which are outside of her control will impact her decision to join the school choir. Along with Rani, the attitudes of others, their beliefs, values and past experiences all play an important role in her choosing to be a singer.

Rani's social identity*, or the way others see her, is also influenced by their (other peoples) own attitudes, values, perceptions, and beliefs*. The music teacher may feel that Rani would be a good singer like her mother. Perhaps her peers reject her because she attracts too much attention maybe, or they

don't want to associate with her because of her caste or religion. Social identity and our concept of self do not always agree, a mismatch between how others see us (our social identity) and how we perceive ourselves (self concept) causes conflict and disharmony in a person's life. Wouldn't she feel distraught if she identified herself as a talented singer and then was cut from the team? For each of us, our social identity is extremely important in defining who we are, what we do and how we evaluate ourselves.

A *social identity* is that portion of an individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership in a relevant social group i.e. *Social identity* is a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s). Tajfel (1979) proposed that an individual's social class, caste, gender, education served as foundational influences on his sense of self esteem and pride. It produced a sense of belonging to the social world. Our social identity cannot exist randomly or in isolation. It dwells upon the experiential nuances that we have by virtue of belonging to a particular sex, race, religion, political affiliation, age, occupation etc.

Task 3: You come from a strictly vegetarian family where talking about mutton or chicken is also prohibited. Once under peer pressure you ate chicken. And you really liked it. Now you eat chicken regularly but outside the house and also hide this fact from your parents. Do you think this is a mismatch between your personal identity (non vegetarian) and social (family) identity (vegetarian)? Would it bother you? How?
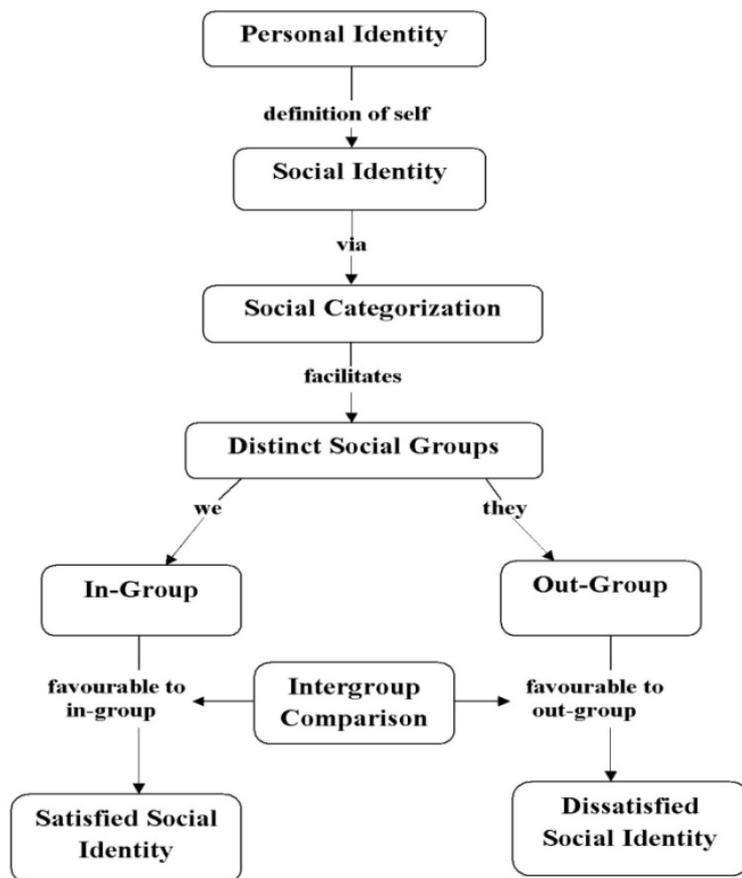

Fig. 2.1: Flow Chart showing Theorised Social Self-Categorisation, Social Identification and Social Comparison (source: www.age-of-the-sage.org 466×540 Search by image)

2.4 SOCIAL GROUPING, PREJUDICE AND STEREOTYPES

Ever since mankind existed social groupings and categorisation, comparisons and for that matter prejudice have always been a part of the human society. We acquire our identity or self concept primarily through our social interactions and the value each one of us place on our own behavior, characteristics and abilities and is responsible for determining our *self esteem (which is defined as an overall judgement of our self worth*.) It is a presumptive tendency of all human beings to think of themselves as better than others while indulging in the process of social comparison. But how exactly is it done? We often augment the status of the in-group or the group to which we belong (the in-group) so as to add to our self image that is to say that I am better because I belong to the better group enhancing the collective goodness of the group. For example, My country *India is perceived by me as the best country in the world*. Another way of enhancing my *self-image* is by putting down and discriminating- against the group that I do not belong to or the out-group. For example: saying other countries have so many flaws. Therefore, using the process of social categorisation *we create hierarchies by putting people into social groups* and we divide the world into *two groups - in-group and out-group.*

Social Identity Theory (SIT) by Tajfel refers to our collective identity or group identity resulting by virtue of belonging to a group or its membership. When we identify with a particular group i.e. the in-group, we develop a sense of oneness and camaraderie leading to *the development of favorable attitudes towards the* in-group members that belonging to certain groups occurs through categorisation and affective components that are associated with group memberships. This is known *as in-group (us) and out-group (them)*. Social identity theory states that in order to enhance their image, the in-group will discriminate against the out-group. The hypothesis at the core of social identity theory is that members use social comparison to enhance their self-image and attribute negative aspects to the out-group.

Living in contemporary society which is pluralistic in its social affiliations and is multicultural, multilingual, social identification may lead to the development of an especially negative attitude called *Prejudice*. Prejudice is defined as *an attitude* (usually negative) *towards the members of some group based solely on their membership to that group. It is an unjust predisposition to act in a certain way towards an individual based on his membership of a particular group. It is very often experientially incorrect and segregator in nature*. Prejudice may also involve beliefs and expectations about members of that group - specifically stereotypes suggesting that all members of this group demonstrate certain characteristics and behave in certain ways.

Prejudiced views between cultures may result in extremely negative reactions like racism; and in its extreme forms, racism may result in genocide, such as occurred in Germany with the Jews, in Rwanda between the Hutus and Tutsis. Too often history has paid the price of mankind's prejudicial overtures.

Henri Tajfel proposed that stereotyping is based on the principle of cognitive heuristic, a tendency to differentiate by categorising individuals based on some common characteristics:

1. Intergroup differences: the differences between groups;

2. Intra-group similarities: the similarities of things in the same group.

We generally utilise this cognitive heuristic to categorise all people in the same way. Imagine a cricket match between India and West Indies and another match between India and Pakistan, What do you notice? Are the audience reactions and comments similar or different? Why do you think this happens? We often tend to heighten intergroup differences and increase intra-group similarities. The process of social categorisation is one explanation for prejudiced attitudes (i.e. "them" and "us") which leads to in-groups and out-groups bias.

Prejudice and stereotyping are cognitive schemes that work to encourage social disparity and create an unfair society. Prejudice refers to the special attitudes and feelings—whether positive or negative and whether conscious or non-conscious—that people have about members of other groups. On the contrary, stereotypes have traditionally been described as specific predefined beliefs about a group, such as images of what members of a particular group look like, how they behave, or their abilities. As such, stereotypes are cognitive schemas of how members of a group are similar to one another and different from members belonging to other groups significantly. People are aware of cultural stereotypes and have cognitive representations of those beliefs *without personally endorsing such stereotypes*, without feelings of prejudice, and without acknowledging that such stereotypes could affect one's judgement and behavior. Creating a categorical identity out of the shared features offers solace. Collective identities buffer the individual from innumerable threats to self worth. De individuation leads to depersonalisation, hence providing a fertile ground for prejudices to flourish.

Check Your Progress 1

1. List any THREE prejudices which you have witnessed in your own cultural group.

    1. ....

    2. ....

    3. ....

Are these prejudices correct? Do you agree with these prejudices? What do you feel about such attitudes which not only fuel discrimination but also enmity between groups hampering the equal and secular nature of the country?

Task 4: Our prejudices exist towards different castes, religion and even communities. On a piece of paper, write down if you have had similar feelings towards a person, any religion or a community. Pour out your emotions. Do not show it to others or discuss it. Then tear this paper because now you understand that prejudice is incorrect and unfair.

Prejudice and stereotyping are often seen as providing cognitive rearrangements to assimilate and accommodate real world complexities. In

order to operationalise, and make sense of this complex world these cognitively adaptive shortcuts may lead to mistreatment, segregation and even abuse of some groups in particular creating differential power relations in the society. Negative attitudes and explicitly discriminatory actions have always been core issues underlying psychological constructs like prejudice and stereotypes. Collectivistic individuals are more often expected to form and supposedly be highly involved in social affiliations than individualistic persons. In the socially diverse world that we live in, plural social affiliations co exist and categorisation emphasises social differences and group distinction leading to dissonance and intergroup conflict. Social identities *operate as the corner stone of establishing effective social networks*, which in turn serve as valuable social assets. Our behaviors, cognitions, beliefs and appraisals are deeply influenced by the in-group and out-group presumption theory resulting in the creation and sustenance of conflict and disharmony. This is the core hypothesis of the social identity theory.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Look up a matrimonial advertisement for '**Brides Wanted**'. What are some of the qualities mentioned: fair, homely girl, convent educated needed. Now see the meaning of the word homely in the dictionary it means plain looking or very ordinary as per the Oxford dictionary but it is the most sought after characteristic when looking for Indian brides. Can language also be culturally and socially influenced? Discuss.

2. Both girls and boys want to be fair and good looking and thus go through rigorous measures to do so. Why do you think we are not satisfied or accepting of ourselves as we are?

2.5 SOCIAL IDENTITY: MULTIFACETED AND SUBJECTIVE

Here is Manvi. Let us know more about her in her own words.

Hello! My name is Manvi. I am 16 years old. I am a student of class 12th. I have an elder brother and I want to be a pilot because I like flying. I am a devoted Hindu who visits the temple every day. I like to listen to music and chat with my friends. I hate exams.

The above given character sketch entails many identities and sub identities of Manvi. She is a teenager. She is Hindu by religion, ambitious, a daughter, and a sister who likes to fly and listens to music. All of us portray many identities at a given point of time. Our Social Identity is *intricate and subjective, multiple and complex*. It can be overtly assessed and covertly too. It is a socially created construct which is defined and influenced by context and the culture we experience. Identity as we know has ceased to be a static construct and has moved away from being homogenous making it dynamic, constantly evolving and thus adding to its complexity. It is influenced by a host of societal and relational factors. The eternal question of 'who am I? And 'what am I? These questions are answered by a person by close perusal of one's subjective and distinctive, overt and covert experiences in life. As

Eriksonian writings indicate the environmental influences on identity development include socio-cultural, political and historical contexts which differ for different social groups.

The societal factors include race, religion, gender, age and the socio economic and educational status. The relational facet is determined by the intimate relationships we observe and experience, that of family and friends. Let us discuss these factors in detail:

1. **Race**: Race may be defined as a socially defined concept used to designate a portion of the population with common characteristics, ancestry or language. People belonging to a race have a shared historical past, shared values and beliefs which heighten their affinity with each other. There are many races in the world which have been discriminated since the age of slavery. Since identity development depends upon our social interactions and their interpretations, being a part of a minority group creates a strong sense of in-group and out-group division with the mainstream society encouraging stereotypes, racial prejudice and intergroup conflict.

2. **Gender:** Gender may be defined as *the socially ascribed specific roles and behaviors attributed to a particular biological sex*, in other words *societal expectations of how girls and boys behave*. Through their interactions with family peers, toys, and the world in general children as early as 3 years begin to form gender schemas or organised networks of knowledge about what it means to be a male or female which further guide our identity development.

3. **Socio-Economic Status**: The socio-economic status that we belong to profoundly influence our identity development and advocate the social-integrationist approach. Our identity is socially created construct majorly carved out of the social interactions and experiences. Hence, the higher one's socio-economic status, it is likely that the more privileges and opportunities one will get and vice versa, responsible for shaping our sense of who we are.

4. **Age**: Age is yet another important determinant of identity, while the child starts categorising and making sense of the world around him as early as 2-3 years but the actual impact of abstract experiences are deeply understood only at the formal operational stage of cognition wherein children develop perspective taking ability. As children mature they become capable of logical reasoning which allows them to understand different points of views. This fosters cooperation, pro social behavior and a sense of cohesion in the society**.**

5. **Intimate Relationships**: Family is the most important and prime agent of socialisation. It is also the most powerful influence in terms of acculturation i.e. teaching and learning of traditions, beliefs, values, rituals, roles, and nutrition, morality (right and wrong). Psychologically it's the first group that we belong to which influence and shape an individual's identity and perception of self. How children are brought up has a solid impact on their sense of self. The parenting style adopted by parents influences their social interactions and their primary experiences of warmth, empathy, interpersonal connectedness and positive social behavior.

Am I smart? Am I a good swimmer? Do I dress fashionably? Can I cook? These questions are answered when we compare ourselves to others or in other words we see ourselves in relation to others. I feel I am smart if I achieve more than others. I am a good swimmer if I can beat others. How did I come to conclude this? We conclude this by our own observations and interactions with others. Identities are not de contextualised entities that stand out of relational contexts. It is later in the process of reflection and abstraction that identities are refined and objectified as internal phenomenon that we experience and label as individualised and private.

Our selves are not created in isolation; we are not born with perceptions of ourselves as shy, or aggressive, miserly or charitable to others. Our primary experiences, how we are brought up, our values, beliefs and perceptions, how others perceive us, our interpersonal learning experiences, parental reminiscing shape our identity. Hence it is not wrong to say that our subjective interpretation to the social situation and phenomenological reaction defines our self-concept and our self-esteem.

According *to Ecological systems Theory* propounded by Urie Bronfenbrenner's (which will be discussed in unit 3 of this course also), social context can be understood as an ecosystem because it is in constant interaction with Microsystems, Mesosystem and Exosystem. This interdependent and symbiotic relationship helps to define who we are. A change in our self concept comes with maturity and age, by adapting to different people and situations. As we age different milestones such as jobs, life events like parenting, marriage or death, a change of environment all affect the way we see ourselves. Actually the overall self concept is an organised cluster of selves even though in reality we refer to it in the singular. Each of us think about our possible selves in a unique and idiosyncratic manner while assimilating feelings, beliefs and values associated with them.
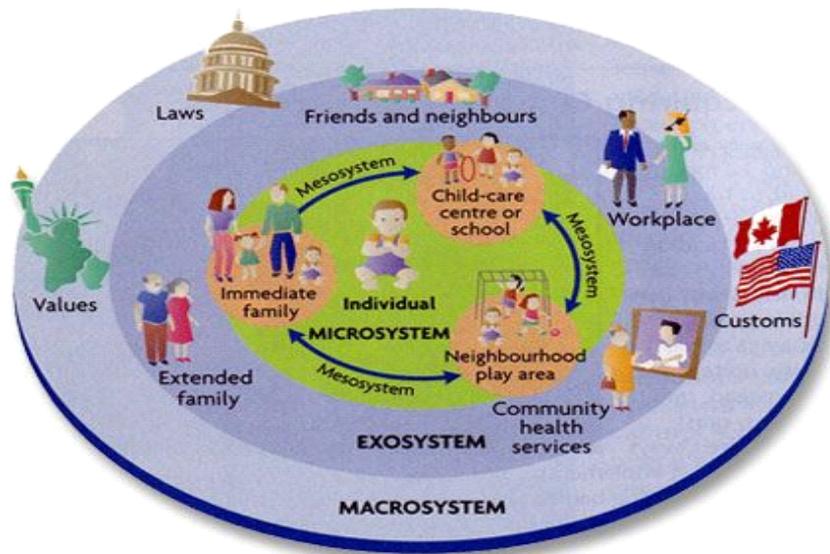

Fig. 2.2: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory
(Source: https://www.pinterest.com/pin/395331673523163076/)

At any given point of time we belong to a particular race, nationality, religion, and are a part of some social group, have familial responsibilities, endorse some hobby or sport, face individual conflicts and dilemmas, each of which contributes and exerts a powerful influence on our social identity. Seeing the tricolor flag outside a government office may remind us of our national

identity, whereas seeing the cricket stadium may remind us of our identification with our favorite cricket team.

Our sense of identity is also heightened after facing a conflict. Soon after the communal riots an individual may develop a sense of deep belonging with a particular community and at the same time extreme hatred towards the other party (in-group and out-group feeling).

According to Mead, the basic fact that others perceive people differently than they perceive themselves creates a dialogue between the actor and the subjective self known as 'I as agent' or the objective self known as 'me by others'. Drawing a reference from Mead's early ideas, the social integrationist view of the self has emerged which believes that the social self is a product of interpersonal interactions involving two or more persons. For example, the self as a mother is a social self because a mother cannot be without a child. He described self as taking the role of other, the premise for which the self is actualised. It is only through an *interaction with the others that we begin to develop an identity about who we are.*

2.5.1   The Looking Glass Self

Much like the social self, *The Looking Glass Self* is a term used by sociologists. It was given originally in 1902 by Charles Horton Cooley who was a famous American sociologist. He was of the opinion that an individual's sense of self develops as a product of interpersonal interactions and the socially approved assumptions of others. Individuals ultimately gain their social identity by viewing themselves through other's perceptions. He further extended his body of work to include what he called the metacognitive capacity of the self that is, the capacity of the self to reflect upon itself. According to Cooley, "the mind is mental because the human mind is social ". The dynamic interaction between how we perceive our self and how others perceive us creates a self image mirrored in the looking glass self.

2.5.2   The Complexity of Social Identity

Our social identity is actually a collection of multiple identities which are interwoven and interrelated. Social identity complexity is a theoretical construct which can be defined as the subjective representation of an individual person's interrelationships among his or her multiple group identities.

Social identity complexity reflects the degree of overlap which occurs between the multiple groups of which an individual holds concurrent memberships (Roccas and Brewer, 2002). The concept of social identity complexity is a recent focus of social psychology. The innumerable in-group identities that we embody are bound to intersect with each other. The individual maintains a relatively simplified identity structure whereby different memberships in different groups simultaneously come together to form a single in-group identity suggesting a greater degree of overlap. However the individual develops a more complex social identity structure when the multiple memberships are not fully convergent and overlapping. Research has also suggested that individuals with dual identity who perceive to belong to a minority group as well as the larger mainstream society see both these identities as complimentary to each other hence reporting a greater sense of well being and adjustment.

2.6 IMPACT OF CULTURE ON IDENTITY

"Different Cultures create different Selves"

The old English adage, *'different strokes for different folks'* holds irrevocably true in today's multicultural and diversity centric world. Culture is considered to be a major regulator and motivator of behavior. It is logical to assume that different cultural orientations will lead to different social identity development and structure. Because our culture is such a powerful and all encompassing social phenomenon, it naturally has a significant influence on our sense of self-concept, and it influences how we perceive, judge or relate to others. All other socially designed constructs like gender, religion, caste and community, *even the ideational notion of beauty, virtues and rightfulness is regulated by the culture which in turn is fed by the ideological, geographical and socio-political forces*. How we conceptualise our identity will vary across different cultures due to the difference in diversity of context and experiences. For instance, Asian and African students, who come from a collectivistic culture, are more likely to describe themselves in terms of group identities and to make references to other people than are European and American students, who come from an individualistic culture. And Europeans and Americans make more positive statements about themselves *whereas* Asians being a part of *Collective Cultures* are more likely to think about others in more positive terms.

In Table 2.1 we can see self is guided by different cultures across the World.

Africa: The Community and the collective self	
No concept of individual self	
Self is always collective and contextual	
Hinduism: God and the innermost self	
Indivisibility of the 'true' self with the one-ness of God	
Innermost self reached through mediation and self-discipline	
Japan and Asia: Social awareness, the relational self	
Parents 'suffer' their children's actions (shared grief, social shame)	
Need to belong and maintain social balance (self can be hidden)	
Western world: Multiculture, cultural change and new identities	
Meeting and merging of different cultures/ identities	

Table 2.1: Concept of Social Self as guided by different Cultures across the World

Self as the outcome of social interaction
George Herbert Mead
The everyday drama of the self
Goffman
Cultural differences in the production of self
Markus and Kitayama
The impact of culture and late modernity
Gergen; Giddens
The self in an intercultural world
Hermans; Howarth

Table 2.2: Different Theoretical Orientations to Social Self

2.7 IDENTITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Task 5: You get ready for a wedding, wearing new clothes, jewellery, and a new hairstyle. You look at yourself in the mirror and decide to take a selfie and post it on a social networking site. You get many likes and appreciative comments. You are quite pleased with yourself. Take a minute to examine: is it the real you? Which comments make you happiest and why? Who are the people you are trying to impress?

As we move further into the twenty-first century the Internet and the Social networking sites posit people at the command of their social lives enabling them to create personalised networks of contacts which can be accommodated and explored at their beck and call. These public self expressions are then constantly monitored and regulated in order to socially construct attractive selves which are evaluated positively. This digitised and carefully manufactured representation of the self for the consumption of the audience is the new norm which in the near future may lead to a complete overhaul of social practices as we know and the process of identity development.

2.8 LET US SUM UP

Every time we hear "be yourself", what do you think it truly mean? It means embrace all the different aspects of your identity in an authentic and realistic manner. Realise that the self is always in the process of creation constantly reacting to the perceptions and attitudes and expectations of others around us. It is dynamic and evolves with our social interactions, and cultural exchanges.

A person's self concept is not uniform, it develops as a result of interpersonal interactions and socially approved evaluation and perception of others. An individual ultimately gains his social identity only by viewing himself through the spectacles of other's perceptions.

2.9   UNIT-END ACTIVITIES

1. Divide the class into two groups of seven students each. Introduce a debate on love marriage versus arranged marriage. Make seven pairs wherein one student defends the concept of love marriage and one defends arranged marriage. Together they have to convince the opponent to concede to the other side. Ask the rest of the class to observe and note in-group and out-group behavior, prejudices and stereotypes.

2. Ekta is a differently-abled girl who is 13 years old. Her father is a driver at a local clinic. She wants to be a classical singer but is afraid to share her thoughts with her parents. Why do you think she is afraid? How can she be helped?

3. Do you regard failure as opportunity to learn and bounce back? Or is it the end of the road for you? What is the meaning of success to you: fame, wealth, beauty? Who decides all this for us? Discuss some of the socio-cultural, religious and temporal factors responsible for shaping our sense of right and wrong, success and failure.

4. Facebook is a fast growing social networking site wherein people create their profiles. These profiles are carefully constructed to present a manicured image to the world. Do you agree? Why do we need to build up a virtual identity to please others?

2.10   ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

Do you agree with these prejudices? Do you also feel the same way? If, yes what has led you to feel that? These prejudices are all examples of a cognitive shortcut which allows us to make sense of this world.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Language symbolically represents our world. The nouns and verbs we use are culturally and socially learnt. Different words mean different things even in the same dialect.

2. In this society you will hardly find anyone completely self accepting. We are always to change but not necessarily evolve in the process .Remember self acceptance comes before accepting others. This tendency to find faults with others and even our self leads to many complexities and makes us inflexible.

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UNIT 3   REVISITING THE SELF

Structure

3.1   INTRODUCTION

This unit is a journey into one's childhood in order to develop an increased awareness about oneself and understanding and compassion towards self & others. Children and childhood are concepts imbued with stereotypes-stereotypes that we adhere to even though we have journeyed through those ages. This is so because perhaps we have forgotten or perhaps because we learnt to look at our experiences through the lenses of others.

What does it really mean to be a child? What constitutes a childhood? Is there an 'appropriate' template for childhood? Do all children experience childhood in similar ways? How and which of our childhood experiences shape us? These are some of the questions this unit will attempt to engage with. Primarily reflective in nature these explorations are essential for understanding one's own self and developing empathy for a child's world. Teaching involves the ability to engage with the child as a 'person' and not just another roll number in a so called homogenous classroom. This can only be done if we are aware of ourselves and our inner journey and accepting of all that we find within – the good and not so good. It is only then can we hope to understand children; to explore their world with respect and interest, realising perhaps that we are not as knowing as we like to believe. The compassion we thus develop may sensitise us to the contradiction of the universality and the individuality of the human experience.

3.2   OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you should be able to:

* examine what it means to be a child;

* relook at his/her journey of childhood;

* appreciate their selves, especially their strengths and areas of growth;

* become aware of the various contexts in which childhood can be placed;

- visualise the various parallel forces that impact childhood;

- become aware about the diversity of childhood and thus the diversity among human beings

- develop acceptance and respect for difference; and

- engage with compassion with the similarities and differences of the journey through childhood of self and others, especially the peer group.

Since this is meant to be more of an experiential exercise than a theoretical one, it would be useful if you *keep journal* to record not just the exercises but also your thoughts and feelings while doing the same. We will be revisiting this journal at various points of reflection within the unit. It is important to highlight here that *there is no one right answer to the questions you are being encouraged to explore*. All that is required is honesty and awareness.

As you go through the unit, you will observe that at the end of every sub-unit, there are some points for reflection. These are meant to serve as guidelines for further awareness of 'Self and the Other' in our Worlds. The answers will depend on the specific life situation of the reader and will be subjective in nature. Since these are specific to each individual, you will find no answers to these points in the Unit.

3.3   REVISITING ONE'S CHILDHOOD

Task 1: Make a list of 10 qualities that you would attribute to a child [e.g. curious, innocent, stubborn etc]. Till what age are these applicable? At what age does a human being cease to be a child? Examine what is the source of your beliefs/ information.

The word 'child' is linked in our minds with a lot of labels – usually of a being with little knowledge but lovable, precious, desired and pure. But do these labels apply to all children? In all contexts? Do these labels change as the communities we examine change? Let us take the example of the position of a girl child versus a boy child in our country. Would you say they are looked at having the same qualities and desirability? Would the position be different in a matriarchal society? Very clearly our labels are our templates of what we expect children to be. Equally clearly we internalise these from our environments. Our templates decide the 'shoulds' we have for our children and ourselves and consequently impact the way we rear and treat our children.

Task 2: Make a list of at least 10 qualities of a 'good' child. A good child could be any child you like / are proud of - your version of a perfect child.

Task 3: Make a list of 10 'shoulds' that you have for yourself. The 'should' is any expectation / rule you have for yourself e.g. 'I should be hard working'. What is the source of this 'should'?

Now examine the two lists of tasks above and see if you see any similarities between them

It is very possible that you will discover similarities between the rules that you have for yourself and your expectations from children. That is because

we castigate ourselves with the same rod that we fashion for others. This is why an awareness of ourselves is so important if we aim to look at children as individuals we wish to walk with and perhaps guide rather than little clones who have to be trained to perform along expected lines.

So what does it *feel* like to be a child? It is important to notice the word highlighted – feel. Feelings are the code in which our bodies store memories. They are the true indicators of how we are experiencing a situation.

Task 4: Play a make - believe game with another adult. You might remember playing ghar-ghar or teacher or doctor as a child. You have to do the same except you have to enact the role of a child and your partner of an adult [a parent or teacher or relative or neighbor etc]. It's also essential that you crouch or kneel so that the difference in height between you both is similar to that of a child and adult. Now examine how you feel in just being physically smaller of the two. What do you feel in context of your relationship with the adult – Safe? Powerful? Trusting? Free to express yourself?

Consider again what it feels like to be a child. Does it feel how you expected it should feel?

Task 5: Draw your earliest memory. It does not matter if it's a memory of you at one month of age or at 12 years of age. Go as far as you can in your memory and draw what you remember. Use whichever colours you like. The accuracy of the drawing does not matter but make sure to represent all the details. You will notice that sometimes our memories are constituted of familiar smells or sounds. Depict each one.

How does it feel to be the 'you' of your memory? Who are the people who were important to you and why? How do you feel as a child? Is it the same feeling as when you were the child in task 4?

Task 6: Make a list of all the people who have been / are significant for you in your life. Now on a paper, place them in proximity to yourself or to others according to how close you think they are to you and to others.

For example if your father, mother and sister are the three people you consider significant, and you feel your father and sister are closer to you than your mother then you will write their names nearer yours and that of your mum, further away. Furthermore if mother is closer to father than to sister then you will place her name nearer father than sister like this
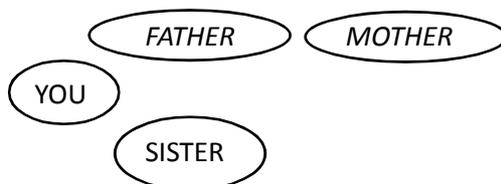
Notice that sister has a bigger circle because she is a greater influence on you than mother or father. Draw all the people who are significant in your life in this manner on a sheet. You can also include people not related to you – family friends, teachers, domestic help etc.

Who have been the major influences in your life? How included do you feel in this group that you drew? Did this depiction throw up any

surprises for you? What other forces [e.g. religion, cultural beliefs, political situation of your state, infrastructure and facilities available etc] may have impacted the relationship of the group members with each other and you? Do you think this chart would have been different if you had made it 10 years ago?

It is an often repeated phrase that *'no man is an island'*. We are influenced by forces directly and indirectly in contact with us. This has been brought out very well by the *Ecological Systems Theory* given by Urie Bronfenbrenner (Berk, 2006). Bronfenbrenner posits that we are all developing in an environment of influences embedded in each other. He uses the term Microsystem for the first layer if interactive forces to influence the child. The Microsystem includes people/institutions directly in contact with the child e.g. parents, neighbours, school etc. The Mesosystem is the layer that consists of the relationships within the elements of the Microsystem such as between the parents and the school or the family and the neighbours e. g. The child's progress in school is deeply impacted by the level of collaboration and trust between the parents and school. Similarly the neighborhood can be both a source of support, especially for the lower income families, or a force of discontent and negativity.

The next layer is called the Exosystem that consist of elements not directly involved with the child yet significantly influencing their experiences such as parents' work place, health services in the community, religious institutions, the social network of the parents etc. A pertinent example would be the impact of the amount of maternity leave allowed to the parent on the child; or the influence of the support provided by family friends to the parents on the parent child relationship.

The outer layer of his model is called the Macrosystem which consists of cultural values, laws, customs and resources. The importance that these forces give to children per se and definitions of a 'good' child will influence the support they receive at the inner levels of the environment. e.g. if the culture values male children more than female children then the kind of child rearing experiences will be different for each gender.

All these layers of influence are set in the larger framework of Time that Bronfenbrenner called the Chronosystem. Time in the Chronosystem is looked at in two ways. One in the context of the changing age of the child [infancy, adolescence etc] and the other in the context of the socio - political and climatic conditions all children experience as a factor of existing in that particular time frame. e.g. all children growing up during the time of famine or war will share a particular set of experiences just as a result of being there at that time. Every element in these systems are constantly changing and therefore the dynamics within are changing too.

It is important to note that at all points the child is influencing the environment as much as the environment is influencing the child. The relationship is clearly bidirectional. We are not passive recipients of our world. Our very being brings changes in the elements we exist in.

Task 7: If you had to present a snapshot of your life in 20 slides what would you put in them? See if you can determine common patterns in your responses

to life events. Identify your strengths and areas of growth. Can you see where the 'shoulds' that you identified in task 3 came into your life?

*What are the forces that have influenced your development so far? Use the elements given in Bronfenbrenner's theory to widen your exploration. What effect have **you** had on your environment?*

Task 8: Imagine you are a rosebush. What kind of a rosebush would you be? What colour flowers would you have? Would they be fragrant? Would they be in bloom? Where would you be located – a garden, a meadow, a cliffside? Would you have enough sunshine, water and air for your sustenance? Would you be alone or surrounded by other plants? Would you have thorns? What would these thorns represent about you – how you protect yourself or your limitations?

Take a few minutes to reflect what you have learnt about yourself.

Task 9: You would have noticed that in the olden days kings had shields for their protection. These shields often had some emblem that represented the quality of the king or his family e.g. a lion or a hawk. Reflect on your strengths. If you had to create a shield for yourself what emblems would it have? Draw your shield with at least 4 emblems / symbols on it. What did you learn about yourself?

Points for Reflection

Reflect on the following:

1. What does it feel like to be a child?

2. How did you feel as a child?

3. How do you perceive the world? How much of this perception is linked to your childhood experiences?

4. What do you expect of yourself?

5.   What are your strengths?

6. What are your areas of growth?

7. What are the factors that have influenced your development?

3.4 EMPATHISING WITH OTHER CHILDHOODS

If we examine the contours of the elements that have shaped us we will see many parallel forces/ pathways coexisting with each other. Many of these are to do with cultural histories, communities, family and economic factors. The cultural context consists of not only shared activities but also shared meaning. Thus culture is both inside and outside a person. In fact our very experience and understanding of 'Self'- whether as an independent, separate, self-contained, unique being or an interdependent connected entity whose identity exists in a continuity of relationship - is determined by culture. For

a child, much of the meaning of his social and concrete experiences comes to him/ her from the interpretations given by the others (usually older to him/her). Meaning is drawn not just from the way others react to the same experiences but also through the active communication (usually through language) of how others gauge these experiences for themselves. Thus it is the day-to-day living within the group that gradually establishes for the child, the meaning of his/ her experiences. Our routines of everyday life are organised by the activities delineated by our culture which further determine the pathways of development of the child (Weisner, 1998). These activities and daily routines hold in them [both implicitly and explicitly] the goals of that specific culture, and are shaped by both the broader socio-historical circumstances and the structural constraints of social class, caste and economic group.

This being so, how can we even expect all children to go through similar experiences? Since very clearly there are multiple contexts [e.g. class, gender, race etc] that children grow up in, there must be multiple kinds of childhood possible for a child. This understanding cautions us against having one 'norm' as expected and desirable and hopefully creates in us a space to endeavor to understand those who are 'different' from us. We are primed to respond with fear and apprehension when faced with the unfamiliar. However, understanding that existence of differences is the norm rather than homogeneity may make our paths easier. It helps us realise that a 'difference' is not an inadequacy; instead it is just an alternate way of knowing.

Task 10: Examine the possible differences present in the Indian classroom [e.g. gender, religion, class, caste, ability etc]. Pick a difference/ diversity and create a show and tell for it. Remember to focus on the difference as an alternate way of knowing rather than a weakness. Did you learn anything new?

When we narrowly define a child as determined by his age and consequently as 'not knowing enough' and the adults as older and therefore 'knowing more' we create a hierarchy wherein children lose their power and their voice. The adults delineate their own expectations as 'normal behavior' with the hidden agenda of forcing all to 'fit in' by rationing approval and opportunities.

In this whole discourse the recognition of children's agency and participation gets lost. As we have identified in the earlier sections, we as children and children in general, exercise an equal influence on the environment and the way it responds. Children are active resilient beings who make their own meanings and endeavor to survive and live in the limiting conditions they are given. Even the most pampered child has to struggle against pre - existing cultural imagery and a host of expectations about what a child 'should' be like, while being placed in a position of less or no power vis-à-vis the adult. Children are not merely passive recipients of cultural knowledge; rather they are innovative and active participants, who are constantly reshaping the cultural pathways of development. Becoming increasingly competent with time and experience, they not only acquire but also resist, and thus change, the cultural processes they are exposed to.

This is why appreciation of difference is so essential. It allows us to hear children's voices, to give them their power back and empowers them in their participation in the co-construction of their lives. Most importantly it allows us to be who we are because we no longer have to fit in to belong. This is because we, like the children need to be respected, to be loved, to belong and feel useful and validated in our milieu. These needs contrarily, are the universal commons behind the individual differences that exist.

Task 11: Conduct a case study of a child who is different from you on any variable of gender, class, caste, religion, ability or region. Examine the forces that shape this child. What kind of childhood does this child have? Is it similar to yours? Can the 'shoulds'/rules that you have for yourself apply to this child? What are the forces that are influencing his life? How is this child contributing to his/ her own development?

Points for Reflection

Reflect on the following:

1. How do children become different from one another?

2. Are there any universals of development?

3. How do children shape their own development?

4. How do children understand various kinds of social differences and inequalities?

3.5 CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES OF PEERS

By now we have examined and become aware of the different pathways of childhood and the myriad factors influencing it. We are conscious of those elements that are common to all humans even while our journey remains individual. Yet the primary data to uphold this understanding is so far of our own journey. Our own experiences and beliefs about childhood, while very valuable for our growth, are just a single person's account of the world. To further explore the question of multiple childhoods it would be useful to explore and share the experiences of our peer group.

Peers are our cohort group. They are our reference point for understanding experiences; our support systems; and often catalysts that result in broader perspectives by creating cognitive disequilibrium. They may consist of, but are not always, our best friends and age mates. In fact peer groups can consist of anybody – friends, neighbours, classmates, and colleagues - anybody who is sharing a context or an experience with us. Peers are a core influence on our development. They are the most significant socialising context where we discover and practice being ourselves and learn about relating to others and our social world.

Since we aim to explore and discover the experiences and world views of our peer group, all tasks in this section are to be done in a group or at least in pairs. Your classmates, friends, neighbors or siblings can be the possible pool of people you could share with. Try as far as possible to group with

people of similar age. At the end of each task examine what you have learnt about yourself and others.

Task 12: Each group member teaches the others a childhood activity that they were fond of but haven't done for a while. It could be something as simple as a game. All group members then try out the activity before going on to the next person.

*Task 13: This activity is to be done over multiple sessions. In each session the group explores one element while sitting in a circle. It is important that the sharing and listening are done in a space of safety and respect. This sharing space is aimed at developing empathy and **not** competition.*

1. *Each group member shares various social practices and ceremonies of their childhood.*

2. *Each group member shares when according to them they ceased to be a child and why.*

3. *Each group member shares about a long lost dream they held.*

4. *Each group member shares two things their inner critic is constantly scolding them for.*

5. *Each group member shares a moment/ quality they are proud of.*

6. *Each group member shares two strengths they have.*

Task 14: All the members of a group create a scrapbook each representing their own childhood. This can include [but is not limited to] important events/ milestones, important people, objects, places, memories. Depiction can be done using drawings, photos, pasting, writing, poems etc. each member then shares their scrapbook with their group

3.6   LET US SUM UP

Let us go over some of the concepts we have studied in this unit:

*   Children and childhood are far more than the labels we fix on them.

*   An awareness of our own journey sensitises us to be empathic to the world of a child.

*   We are all shaped by a range of forces, some visible, as the family and some invisible, as cultural narratives.

*   Equally true is the fact that children are resilient, active participants and co-constructers of their lives.

*   Diverse circumstances lead to multiple versions of childhood.

*   Each version of childhood is equally valid and valuable.

*   Difference rather than homogeneity is the norm and thus should be

accepted and embraced.

- Difference does not mean 'a lack of' rather it just means an alternate pathway.

- Despite all these differences our innate needs remain the same. That is what makes us human and worthy of compassion.

3.7 UNIT-END ACTIVITIES

Reflect on the following:

1. What are the similarities and differences in your childhood journey and those of your group members?

2. Do you think one journey is more valuable than the other?

3. How do dynamics of social class, gender, religion, ethnicity etc impact childhood?

4. Do you agree with the notion of an appropriate childhood?

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