

The Emergence of Inner Self-Experience: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Modern Self Conception

A Thesis submitted by

Shruti Sharma

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy



॥ त्वं ज्ञानमयो विज्ञानमयोऽसि ॥

Indian Institute of Technology Jodhpur

School of Liberal Arts (SoLA)

August 2023

Conclusion

If we observe our everyday thought process, then it is evident that we have an inner world centered around an inner self, which is generally referred to by first-person concepts (FPC). This way of conceptualizing ourselves is generally assumed to be an innate feature of our species. However, as pointed out before, this assumption is under attack due to new empirical findings in various disciplines. Nevertheless, the claim that inner self-experience is not an accompanying trait since the beginning of our species might not be palatable to many. To strengthen the claim that the inner self is not an innate accompanying trait, from both phylogenetic and ontogenetic perspectives, the thesis supports a modified version of liberal naturalism. According to it, abstract and metaphorical entities, such as self, need not be constrained by laws of physics and must be admitted in our everyday ontology. Considering inner self-experience as not merely a product of physical entities, the thesis attempted to argue that inner self-experience cannot be reduced to mere physical sciences. Eventually, inner self-experience is more a matter of historical and cultural factors, which emerge under certain cultural and linguistic conditions. The major objective of the thesis is to inquire into the conditions responsible for inner self-experience.

The second chapter began with a discussion of dualism to explore the origin of a dualistic mentality (or inner self mentality). If reality is divided along dualistic lines, then the inner self-experience cannot but be dualistic. However, dualism as an account of reality is unsatisfactory, and therefore, both substance and property dualism fail to answer questions related to the origin of inner self-experience. Nevertheless, there is a recent version of dualism called predicate dualism that has the potential to explain how a dualistic or inner self mentality emerges. To harness the possibility of predicate dualism to explain the emergence of inner self-experience, the thesis makes use of embodied theory to show how the language of the physical realm creates mental and metaphorical entities.

Language, in general, and metaphorical language, in particular, plays a major role in the emergence of inner self-experience. The thesis discussed the role of the development of conceptual metaphors in the origin of inner self-experience. Conceptual metaphor theory (CMT)

argues that the mental experience is constructed and largely influenced by our physical experience. Thus, it brings in the role of the physical body and claims that the physical experience is of utmost importance and is a foundational basis of the way we conceptualize our inner world.

The thesis attempted to explore the role of language in the origin of inner self-experience in ontogenetic and phylogenetic contexts. The fourth chapter discussed the role of language in developing an inner self in the case of young children (in the context of ontogeny) and brings out the role of propositional attitudes in the appearance of a robust first-person perspective. Using a propositional attitude is an evidence to claim that the person using it understands herself as a subject. Propositional attitudes are complex intentional states that involve first-person concepts, and this is evidence to substantiate the presence of an inner self-experience. This chapter proposed that the development of metaphorical language and the usage of propositional attitudes in young children can run parallel during developmental age. That is to say, by the time a child acquires metaphorical language usage ability, she is capable of using propositional attitudes.

To support the central claim of the thesis that inner self-experience is part of the later development in humans in the context of phylogeny, the fifth chapter argued that the ancient human mentality was a fringe mentality that lacked a sophisticated inner self mentality. Further, it argued that self-consciousness or the manifestation of self can range from simple to complex. To argue for it, a weaker version of Julian Jaynes's bicameral hypothesis has been used. He proposes that a transition from a bicameral mentality (a different mentality in our ancestors) to an inner self-conscious mentality took place with linguistic sophistication and other factors. However, much of the available evidence for a different mentality is done in the Western context.

The sixth chapter discussed some attempts to study different types of ancient mentality in cross-cultural contexts. After giving an account of some work in this regard in Tibetan and Chinese contexts, the thesis tried to extend the cross-cultural examination of a different mentality in the context of ancient India. It tries to find out whether a weaker version of the bicameral hypothesis can be used to explain the mentality found in an ancient *Sanskrit* text, namely *Rigveda-Saṃhitā*. It analyses the linguistic usage with respect to the reference to the 'self' in the text. The text is devoted to praising and praying gods for obtaining material entities such as horses, sons, wealth, protection of kin from enemies, victory over enemies in war, etc., through the medium of hymns, which pleases gods. Most of the hymns in the text 'ask', 'thank', or 'praise' gods. Benefits that come to the worshippers after worshipping are reaped at a

community level, not at an individual level. The benefit of riches and wealth that *gods* give is enjoyed at a community level, not for personal benefits. However, the current work is only a small attempt, and much more work is needed to substantiate the claim that the *Rigveda-Saṃhitā* people had a different mentality.

LIMITATION AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Since only the first twenty *sūktas* are analyzed here, much more future work is needed to make a claim about the whole *Vedic* literature. *Rigveda-Saṃhitā* has many interpretations, and this makes the task much more difficult. However, it is one of the most suitable texts to be explored entirely for establishing the claim that a different mentality existed in our ancestors. However, other ancient *Sanskrit* texts of the *Hindu* religion (and other religions) may contribute to the task of finding out a different mentality. Analyzing how the language itself has changed and evolved from the past to present-day usage is a fertile ground that is central to the ongoing project. The existing empirical study individually shows that metaphorical understanding and usage of first-person concepts emerge around the same age. More empirical work is needed to correlate, in a single study, that metaphorical understanding and first-person concepts appear together during ontogenetic development.

If the self is a cultural and historical construction, then it follows that the future self can be different from the present-day self. Entertaining the idea that the self will change in future opens the possibility of exploring what kind of change and how the future self-manifestation will differ from the present-day self-manifestation. The change can be gradual and slow and depends on various available factors at the time it occurs. Thus, exploring various cultural factors that can bring change in future mentality is fertile ground for further research. Factors such as advancement in technology, practices such as mindfulness, etc., can be some factors that can bring change in the future self.

...

