

## SELF-IDENTITY AND SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

Writing in the April 1974 issue of the Indian Philosophical Quarterly my friend and colleague Dr. Ram Chandra Gandhi has put forth an interesting account of 'Self-consciousness'. His analysis is quite penetrating, but the same, it seems to me, is beset with an age-old assumption. The assumption is that *in self-consciousness I do and must seek 'a unique and bare particular-soul' to 'identify' 'myself' with, and the same is never accomplished or hardly makes any sense*. Clearly the two aspects of this assumption do not go together, the latter almost sets aside the former. Dr. Gandhi is conscious of this impasse but makes a bold bid to circumvent the same by taking recourse to 'imagination.' He seems, to me, thereby to land himself in a position, albeit unwittingly, that amounts to holding that in seeking to identify the 'self' in self-consciousness with a bare particular 'soul', we are doing some such thing as falling in love with a princess who resides in a Castle in the air in the city of demigods, her body emits a smell as fragrant as that of a sky flower, has an hairdo as good looking as the horns of a hare, and above all, who is the daughter of a barren-woman. For, I wonder if Dr. Gandhi is not satisfied with the sort of answer "I am R. G. father of L. G. etc." to his question 'Who am I?' Then why is he satisfied with the view that the notion of self-consciousness should be regarded as being at last the notion of oneself imagining that one was being non-referentially identified by another person? Why does it not occur to him that self-consciousness is a notion or 'experience' more akin to perception than to imagination? In self-consciousness, I myself am supposed to recognize or identify 'myself' non-referentially and not merely imagine myself as being identified by another person.

It may be true as a socio-psychological fact that, in point of time, consciousness of the others comes first and self-consciousness as an experience arises later and perception is prior to imagination but that does not mean that self-consciousness or self-cognizing can be identified with self-imagining and the latter still as imagining by another.

Imagination, in comparison to perception, is a second order

activity. The experience of 'other-regarding' and 'self-regarding' are analogous to each other in so far as we have to acknowledge in both a distinction between a subject that is conscious and an object of which one is conscious, but the latter i. e. self-regarding does not depend for its contents on the former ('other-regarding') as imagination does on perception. We can and legitimately do say that this particular imagination derives its contents from this or that particular perception or perceptions whereas 'in claiming to be conscious of myself I must exclude any reference to another'. Even if self-regarding be a second order activity vis a vis other-regarding it is so in a different sort of way than imagination is vis a vis perception. Besides, even when we talk of second order and first order activities we must be aware that this situation too does not warrant us to confuse the two. Howsoever, vivid and perception-like imagination may be, it cannot substitute (or do the job of) perception and vice-versa. I do not, therefore, understand as to what is the purport of the observation 'that being self-conscious is a matter of being able to adopt an audience-stance, actually or imaginatively vis a vis an actual or imagined speaker'. For, I think that if either 'the knowing self' or 'the known self' is taken to be imaginary vis a vis the other taken as actual we must not be satisfied with the answer to the question 'Who am I?' as 'I myself', because a similar further question can be raised in this too as in that of the answer of the sort 'I am R. G. father of L. G. etc'. If in that case we ask 'But who is this person whom I have said that he is R. G. father of L. G. etc?' in the present case we must and do ask (sometimes) 'Is that imaginary being really myself?'

Better, in the situation, would perhaps be the view that the self is the general and collective name of innumerable aspects and experiences any of which is said to be taken to be the object of the phenomenon called 'self-consciousness' at a time, and the rest as the subject. None of the knower or the known then need be taken as imaginary and unique (except at a particular occasion and in a sort of a way) or a continuous bare particular. Let 'the passing thought be the only thinker' in a relative sort of way i. e., the self be regarded as the current coin, a name referring to a different series (assortment) of experiences and aspects each time we are supposed to have 'self-

consciousness'. If we do maintain such a view favouring flux, in which the 'self' in 'self-consciousness' is identified and yet not identified in a permanent sort of a way then the answer to the question 'Who am I?' as 'I am R. G. etc.', shall not only be genuine and authentic in a situation but also the only proper answer and yet replaceable with any other answer such as e. g. 'I am so and so, son of.....', '.....darling of my wife' '.....a favourite student of Professor B', '.....a popular teacher of Philosophy' etc. with the change in the situation. Each of these answers would be the true answer in its own proper setting, at a particular moment and yet about each of them a further question can be asked doubting its very genuineness. We need not feel disturbed by the fact that each time we ask the question 'who am I?' we do get a different answer and about every such answer a further question to the effect 'but who is this person whom I have referred to be such and such?' can be raised. For, that is bound to happen in a changing world of multiplicity the 'items' of which including each one constitutive of the 'self' in 'self-consciousness,' are dynamic and multifaceted. Our search for a unique particular soul behind every answer is a wild-goose chase that is sure to end in an inaffable situation like that of the peeling of an onion.

If we, however, are not prepared to have such a view as the above and do insist that the self must be a bare particular soul, something that is unique and unitary that remains self-identical, consistent and constant among all the changing experiences, including that of 'self-consciousness' then to me it appears, we may maintain either of the three following positions on the question of 'self-identity and self-consciousness' ! Under one of the two that hold fast to the view that the self-identical self cannot but be regarded as ever a subject and never as the object of knowledge a special perception-like experience called 'self-consciousness' that reveals the 'self as an object' is a misnomer. According to this position the 'object' in knowledge is always other than the self and each case of knowledge has three items marked one from the other and distinctly revealed as 'the subject', 'the object' and knowledge (cognition) and the self can be identified only with the subject. 'Self-conscious-

ness', thus, in a sense, is a feature of each and every case of knowledge-experience instead of being an experience of its own kind.

The second position does not allow any room for 'self-consciousness' even though it is very sure of the self-identity of the self as 'the knower' — the knowership of the self is an inferred conclusion with it as it considers that any experience from that of the gross material object to that of the most subtle and intimate intellectual idea, can and does only reveal an object and never the subject.

The third positing is that the self-identical self is the transcendental unity of the knower as well as the known which is one without a second, unborn, unchanging, indestructible etc. It is the same such self that appears in the experience called 'self-consciousness' or for that matter, in all experience as divided against itself as a knower and a known, dual in character, arising (taking birth), growing and decaying (changing) and getting destroyed (meeting with death) and so on, in a mysterious sort of way. We cannot wish this mystery away with any amount of analysis. 'Adopting an audience stance' — whatever it may mean — does show that 'self-address' is analogous to addressing another or being addressed by another but that does not permit us to say that a soliloquy is a sort of a dialogue. Our reason may not allow us to accept this contradiction but we cannot deny the fact that whenever 'I imagine, dream or perceive myself as such and such' I do have the conviction that I experience 'me myself' and the same is different from my experiencing another being or thing as also from an experience of another experiencing me. There is something within the experience of self-consciousness itself that leaves us unsatisfied with the duality involved in it and makes us think of a unitary self-consistent self, a unique bare particular, 'soul', but the same cannot be realized except in an experience that transcends not only the duality in self-consciousness but also the experience itself. It is achieved or said to be achieved at the cost of speakability.

I am aware that there are logical difficulties in all the four positions taken above, but they have the merit of being clear-cut and straightforward, having little room for haziness and hesita-

tion that seem to be there on the question of self-identity in Dr. Gandhi's analysis of self-consciousness. Dr. Gandhi might completely put my criticism aside by a single disarming remark that he did not address himself to the task of establishing self-identity but only to that of an analysis of self-consciousness and the question of self-identity was only incidental in his analysis. I must therefore close by saying that the present paper is not attempted or intended as a critical comment on his paper but is an endeavour to put forth my understanding of self-identity and self-consciousness which might as well have been done independently of his or any one else's paper. Yet I am thankful to him for providing me a provocation and an occasion to do so.

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