



# Reconceptualising Selfhood and Identity in Indian Tradition: A Philosophical Investigation

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## Abstract

This paper presents a synoptic overview of two key philosophical concepts – self and identity - in Indian tradition. Drawing on both Indian and Western studies on the concept of self-hood and its implications for conceptualising identity, the paper reviews the contemporary scholarship on self-hood and outlines its relation to identity needs to be rethought if ethical possibilities of self-hood are to be given due consideration. This paper asks and addresses the nature and experience of the self in the Indian intellectual tradition, how representative Indian thinkers conceptualised the self, how such a conception of self-hood engages with the overall conception of Western history of self-hood and so on. The paper offers a comparative study of self-hood that not only underscores the significant points of convergence and divergence as theorised in Indian and Western philosophical traditions but also highlights how certain conceptions of self-hood and identity enable the project of the self's ethical transformation.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Self and Identity: A Conceptual briefing

Investigations concerning human self-hood and identity, referred to by some philosophers as “the knot of the universe”, are of great importance in addressing many questions of contemporary relevance - philosophical, political, and ethical ones in particular. The question of understanding our “selves” and the “identities” they carry - their natures, potentials, pitfalls, possibilities - is one of the most fascinating fundamental human questions. Since there are no empirical facts that can help us decisively determine the exact nature of “selves” and answer whether we are no more than parts of our bodies, or incorporeal substances inhering in our bodies, or epiphenomena of our minds, it is imperative to find new angles to ask and investigate the question concerning self, identity and the relation between them. This paper is an attempt to invite us to take a fresh look at our understanding of the self, identity and their mutual relationship.

“Self” is a familiar, all too familiar word. It is undoubtedly one of the most frequently used words in both ordinary language and scholarly discourse. What is interesting about “self” is that its immediate sense appears to be quite self-evident, but a philosophical investigation of it reveals its polysemy, ambiguity, and even opacity. Of the plethora of approaches to the study of the self, this study defines self-hood in terms of having a sense of ‘I’ that involves self-awareness, self-knowledge, first-person subjectivity, and agency.

In our colloquial understanding, “self” functions as a self-referential term, always directed towards the subject in question. The suffix ‘self’ makes an ordinary object pronoun into a reflexive one. The reflexive pronoun is used when the object of an action or attitude is the same as the subject of that action or attitude. It is something where there is no duality of object and subject, here both the object and subject become one. This expression breaks the subject/object duality and unifies them. If one says he/she shot herself/himself in the foot, it explains that he/she not only as of the shooter but also as the person shot. Here, the duality of subject and object vanishes and both the subject and object refer to the same

being and identify as the same being. Self is also used as a prefix for names of activities and attitudes. Here, the object is the same as the agent, for instance: self-love, self-hatred, self-abuse, self-promotion, self-knowledge. The term 'self' has non-linguistic use as well. In psychology, it is used for the set of attributes that a person attaches to himself or herself most firmly, the attributes that the person finds it difficult or impossible to imagine himself or herself without. It is the set of attributes with which one sees oneself since the time of one's conscious interaction with oneself. This conscious interaction with oneself helps one to identify oneself to oneself, and at the same time distinguish oneself from others.

In Western philosophy, the historical origin of the word 'self' can be traced back to John Locke's famous work, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.<sup>\*</sup> Locke was followed by a series of thinkers whose principal concern was to think self-hood a new. The important names in this long list include Hegel, Nietzsche, James, and Bergson. Whether one believes in or denies the existence of a self, one almost always ends up positing a 'conventional self,' largely because much of our ordinary life is premised on such a sense of self. But there is great diversity in how "self" continues to be theorised. An overview of contemporary literature on self-hood in disciplines as wide as analytic philosophy, neuroscience, phenomenology, and religious studies, shows little sign of consensus.

In Indian philosophy - Vedas and Upanishads in particular - the self is paradigmatically seen in two dimensions - outward and inward. The outward aspect of the self consists in its objectively imposed qualities. The inward aspect has to do with what constitutes the inner life of the subject. Looking outwards means finding out one's self combined with some objective imposed qualities and examining those qualities as to whether they satisfy the nature of one's self. Looking inward means focusing on our physical and mental systems and examining them to find whether they satisfy the nature of one's self. The self, it could be argued, is just the flesh and blood person and that a person is a physical system. This view, however, can easily be challenged. The nature of Mind, Senses and Consciousness has convinced us that there is a fundamentally non-physical aspect of a person as well. These non-

physical aspects of a person can be grouped or considered as the mental system. In other words, it is not only the physical system that is considered as properties of a person but also the mental system. Mental properties are part of the mental system and physical properties are part of the physical system. Physical properties cannot be reduced to mental properties as well as mental properties cannot be reduced to physical properties. For instance: an eye and perception. These issues are considered as the mind-body problem. The knowledge of mental properties is distinct from the knowledge of physical properties. The knowledge we have of ourselves seems very unlike the knowledge we have of other objects in several ways, and this has led one to startling conclusions about the self. Understanding the self is of course an aspect of the discovery of the self. But for this an ability needs to be developed, one which helps one to know about and analyse one's self. Our success in knowing about things around us pales in comparison to and is distinct from our success in knowing ourselves. Let us examine the physical system, mental system and knowledge system to extract the nature of the self.

## **2. Self-Philosophical Tour**

As human beings, we are often curious about things concerning ourselves and questions like Who am I? appears to be one of the most raised questions among philosophers. And this fundamental question begs further critical investigation of the existence of one who raises this question and seeks to answer it. The possible answers are: I am the body, I am the senses, I am the mind, I am the soul, I am the consciousness, I am one of the human beings in the society and so on. Here, 'I' is locating itself in soul, consciousness, body, mind and so on and further seeking to understand itself in certain reductionist ways. But how are we to understand the relationship between 'I' and the body that it is situated in, the consciousness it is defined by, the senses and the minds it knows and thinks with? Are they parts of the whole called 'I'? Or are they mere instruments of 'I'? Do 'I' bear a mere instrumental relation to the body and mind? Or am "I" a constituent part of the body or mind? Can one bracket these off to understand the self-better?

Though each of these constitutive elements is crucial, why do they not provide us with an exhaustive account of the self?

When it comes to an understanding of the ontological nature of the self, then searching for a locus is the immediate action. It is thoroughly observed that the location of 'I' cannot be exhaustive of body, mind, senses and so on. but it should be 'I' itself through all-inclusive. Body, mind, senses are already definable and they cannot simply define 'I' or self. In the search for the answer to the question, who am I?, the possible answer to the above question should be 'I am I', here the location of 'I' is 'I' itself. Though in the process of knowing "I" one requires the help of mind, body and senses to know "I" it is a hideous process altogether. Now while wondering about who am I?, another question might eventually arise whether I will ever be able to realise the 'I' after bracketing out body, mind, senses and so on? Though each of these constitutive elements- body, mind and senses are crucial, they do not provide us with an exhaustive account of the self. So how do we understand the self? What does it signify? This dilemmatic situation is well handled by Vedic and Upanishadic notion of self, where the nature and location of self are transcendental and are not submissive to any empirical material constituents of the body.

Let's try to address the question etymologically. In the Oxford Dictionary, the term "self" means, "A person's essential being that distinguishes them from others, especially considered as the object of introspection or reflexive action."† It explains that the self is something that is close to a person and cannot be shared with other individuals. It is personal and intimate to the subject himself/herself. This implies that the notion of self is unique to one person and cannot be shared with another. Furthermore, the notion of self gives rise to two other concepts - identity (identify with oneself) and difference (distinguishing one-self from other). The self is considered to be an essential factor of a person that distinguishes one from another.

When we ponder upon questions concerning the afterlife domain, we are often confronted with whether the self is the body or more than the body? For instance, when a person is said to be dead, there is something that is separated from the body, and that mysterious thing or aspect is known as the self or soul. Or we can say that in

humans resides a permanent, everlasting and absolute entity, which is unchanging behind the changing phenomenal world. Metaphysically speaking, we have two sets of entities – one is constant, unchanging, permanent and the other is changing, impermanent, transient. The concept of self comes under the category of constant, unchanging and permanent while the rest of the world comes under the category of change, impermanence and transient.

In order to prove that the self is permanent in nature and constant, not changing, these qualities have to be qualities of something that has to be attributed to something. This attribution requires a substance to hold onto like every quality in this world requires a substance to repel its attribution. These attributes require a substance for whom these qualities are there. The task is to locate or attribute these qualities to something. What would that locus be?

The question of self is an ambiguous term that is widely used by everyone through such words as *ātman*, *thyself*, *yourself*, *themselves* etc. The word “self” can also be interchanged with the word ‘I’, subject, knower, experiencer in explaining itself. J. N. Mohanty asserted that when we think of ourselves or some other person, what comes to our mind is the ambiguous first-person pronoun ‘I’, which refers to the person ‘I am, then to myself, to the subject that I also am and lastly to my ego. Can we say that - is human being a self, or even more poignantly, is self the human being?

If we kind of accept this perspective that a human being can come into existence without being a self, then the nature of self would be different, aside from the human being. In this sense, humanness might be an aspect of being, but it is through becoming that we truly become human beings. The same human being may not be said to have a self of his/her own unless one introspects and reflects himself as distinct from everything else that is ‘not-self’.

The use of the word “self” is more lively, agential and at present. If we will alter the question and ask it in reverse - that is: is it possible for a self to come into existence without being a human? It can be said that a self is some kind of inner consciousness that is not the same thing as the human being, considered as a whole. Here, the

self is known in the process or exercise of introspection and reflection. However, we should be clear that it is not something that is created or constructed after the process of introspection or reflection is over. Rather, it is the self that does the introspection and reflection of one's self and it is present at the time of birth. So, if it is already there then why is one not able to know it at the beginning of one's life? The answer to this question is 'ignorance or avidyā' from the perspective of Vedāntic philosophers.

If the self is something distinct from the human being, now, the next in the array of questions is, what constitutes a self? The possible answer to the question would be: self is what one experiences in one's life; it constitutes a description of the past, a narration of the present and a prescription of the future. There is a kind of prescriptive push to the story, binding the retrospective horizon of description and a prospective horizon of prescription to the concrete present. It is very problematic to describe 'self' in terms of being a real or illusionary object. This question arises because as it is seen, the word 'self' cannot be agreed upon as a kind of attaining some property, which defines it to be a real object or as an illusion. Since 'self' is a term that is understandable by all, the problem arises of its place in nature. The problem arises in capturing it in some concrete sense like we understood other things like mind, memory etc. Many believe that the idea of "self" is an illusion or it is just a simple product of activity where millions of neurons in our brain work together to produce it and all of the thoughts and feelings that it incorporates. Francis Crick, a neuroscientist says, "you, your joys and your sorrows and memories, your sense of personal identity and free will, are no more than the behaviour of a vast assembly of nerve cells and then associated molecules."‡ The nature and meaning of self are subject to constant redefinition as it is the subject to be taken as a project by the participants.

The idea of "self" was viewed in a substantial and isolated manner in Descartes, where the self was a separate, autonomous thinking thing that was not historically or culturally constituted. It was a kind of essentialist's account of self where the activity of doubting led to the establishment of the doubter itself. He asserted 'thinking' as a property of mind/self and tried to substantiate the self which

itself cannot be said to be the activity. According to Rene Descartes, the self is an immaterial substance.§ The nature of this immaterial substance is thinking. For Descartes, human is essentially composed of two things that are- mind and matter. He believes that the mind is the permanent self. So, for him, the identity of self lies in mind. According to Locke, memory provides us with a sense of self. According to him, till the point in the past we can remember, we are the same self.\*\* In Locke, the nature of self is the realisation of sameness, and this realisation of the sameness is possible by memory. So, memory is the locus of self in Locke. Hume challenges the notion of self that can memorise and remember because, for him, self is a figment of the imagination. According to him, we do not have to think of self as substance theory. Substance theory means the existence of a durable self or a self that persists in time. He says we are constituted by those ideas and impressions that we have at any particular point in time. But those ideas do not presuppose any notion of substance. For any action to happen there has to be an agent who does that action. But according to Hume that is not the right way of looking at the thing. Action can just happen. It may happen through someone but it is not the case that the person is the author of that action.

Some believe in the permanent nature of self because they have a different set of presuppositions to believe it. Hume is questioning such presuppositions. According to him, there is neither substance nor self, we are merely passing impressions. There is no necessary connection between the impressions that we pass with certainty from one to another. All our given are fleeting impressions and not the thing itself. It is pure void. Thus, Hume asserts that “humans are nothing but a bundle or collections of different perceptions.”†† According to Hume, the self is just the bundle of ideas, where ‘I’ is fleeting sensations and not the self. Hume says, “When I enter most intimately into what I call myself I always stumble in some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I can never catch myself of any time without perception and never can observe anything but perceptions.”‡‡ According to him, in the case of self, there is no ‘I’ independent of a bundle of sensation.

Like Hume, Daniel Dennett in 'The self as a centre of Narrative Gravity says that "a self is an abstract object, a theorist's fiction." §§ Dennett does not believe that the self is real but rather fictional. Dennett conceives "the Self as a non-existent author of a merely fictional autobiography."\*\*\* The ability to understand human behaviour enables us to predict and interpret that behaviour. In addition, trying to make everything that happened in one's life fit with that character's coherency; he argues, we do create a convenient narrative context for our self-character. But the problem of determining the conditions of unity and continuity of the self translates into several problems, depending on the content that is ascribed to the term 'self'.

The above explanation of "self" is the examination of our body and mind to be the locus of self, like in Descartes it is mind, in Lock it is memory, in Hume, it is sensation and reflection and narrative account of the self, all of which fails to explain the 'I'. This is mainly because they seem to locate 'I' in memory, mind, sensation, which are transient.

In the Indian context, "self" is used as an abstract and formal essence of consciousness. The word self is used as the *jiva*, *ātman*, *jīvātman* etc. Each of these words enquires to discover the ultimate nature of the self. It was noted that the self is something that is eternal and becomes connected to a body to exhaust the good and bad karma it has accumulated in its many lives. The nature of self is distinct from the body and function of the body. The nature of self is essentialised in nature that it is already there at the time of birth and it is not constructive. This self was supposed to be able to regain its purity by following different spiritual paths as well as by focusing on the right action using which it can escape from the repeated circle of births and deaths. There is also a clear-cut distinction between the body and the self. It is suggested that the body is in the domain of karma, the fruit of karma makes a self to be born, again and again. Cessation of karma in the process of controlling oneself gives rise to the release of self from the bondage of body and karma.

There is another important aspect of the self that Upanishads foreground in its attempt to articulate the ultimate principle which is the basis of the universal self and the quest for the true nature of

the individual self. This implies that the conception of Brahman is considered as being identified with the personal self. The inquiry in the Upanishads was mainly speculative. It had the dual purpose of finding the ultimate principle that was the basis of the universe self and the true nature of the individual self. The first inquiry led to the postulation of Brahman (from root brh - to expand, burst forth) as the source behind the universe. This concept finally settled down with the notion of Brahman being described both as immanent in the cosmos (Chhāndogya Upanishad) and as transcending the same (Brihadāranyaka Upanishads). The other inquiry was directed towards discovering the identity of the self by analysing the inner nature of the human being.

In the Indian tradition, the whole exercise of philosophising stems from the deep-rooted desire to know oneself. Here, the starting point of human pursuit is 'ko ham' or who am I. Self, for many of the Classical Indian thinkers, is the ultimate reality underlying every individual human being. It is used as an abstract and formal essence of consciousness. The individual self stands self-proved and is always immediately felt and known. There is no means through which one will be able to realise the nature of an individual self. One is certain about the existence of one's self and there can be neither doubt nor denial regarding its existence. Nobody doubts that 'I exist' and this 'I' is the self. The 'I' is neither the body, nor the sense-organs, nor memory and nor the mind. The body is not 'I' as when one suffers from a broken leg, the man still lives and feels because he/she cannot be just compared to that part of the body. He/She is over and above his/her body parts and it's suffering. The suffering of this body part is temporal and the body itself is temporal. So, equating the self with the body does not take us very far. Senses are also not 'I'. The sense-organs are not 'I', because even after the destruction of a sense-organ the man can still be found to be alive and also at the time of realising one sensory feeling one can distance oneself from that sensory feeling. If one loses one of the parts of the sensory apparatus, one is still a self. Senses do not define who one is in reality. Sensory feelings come and go and are subject to the law of change but in reality, does not change in the course of changing sensory feelings. The mind is also not the 'I'.

In one's life span one realises that there is a constant change in everything and there is one thing that binds all to the changing aspects and gives identification as one, this may be called self. Who or What is that binds all our experience and identifies us as one single person? Is it memory? Who can claim to remember that I am the same person as I was yesterday? There are also flaws in memory. Memory cannot be the self because it does not remember every moment of our interaction with the world. Even in the state of memory loss, a person is considered as a self. If body, mind, memory, sense-organs are not considered as self, it is very difficult to locate the self in any one of them. The way the nature of self is uncertain, likewise, the locus of self in any particular factor of the human being is also uncertain. One can only infer the essence of the existence of the self through mind, senses etc. but one cannot simply reduce the self to the level of senses, mind, memory and so on.

Thus, the notion of self cannot be defined sufficiently with a definite definition. Self can never be possessed by the subject but it is the very moment of living. Self is not a product to be explained relating it to past or present but it is the very moment of one's existence. It is not a kind of abstract entity, but a term that is not graspable in language. The domain of language is insufficient in explaining the true nature of the self. The trial of grasping this moment is not self but it is an ever-failing task of life. The question of self appears because there lies a problem in understanding who we are. Self cannot be ascribed with any qualities, unity and continuity and it cannot fix the self because we may act or appear to act not in a purposive nature always. Sometimes, we may act without being reflective of ourselves. We may also appear to be different to ourselves in different moments of life.

### **3. Identity**

As we have witnessed the variations in self and its constituent elements, now it is important to engage the other part of the story which is related to self. If the nature of self is permanent and constant, then what can we say about identity? In the face of this complex system of society, how am I or the self to be conceived by my peers in terms of the identity one has of one's self? It is crucial

for the question of identity to be brought into the picture because it is only by understanding what identity is and consists of, can we grasp the true meaning of our existences as human individuals. What is identity? What does it consist of? What are the necessary and sufficient conditions of identity? Based on what do we identify living and non-living things of the world?

In philosophy, the word “identity” is derived from the Latin word: *identity*, which means sameness. Sameness can be defined as something that does not change in and through time but remains the same. It is the relation that each thing bears only to oneself. It is anything whatsoever that has the relation of identity to itself, and nothing else. The concept of identity can be applied in various ways. A thing can be identical with itself; for instance, a pot is identical with itself. Two or more things are identical with one another; for instance, a man is identical with another man. “The concept of identity is fundamental to logic, without it, counting would be impossible, we could not distinguish in principle between counting one thing twice and counting two different things. Miss-judgments of identity are possible because one thing can be presented in many guises”†††. I am going to concentrate specifically on the notion of identity of a thing to itself but not on the two different entities identical with one another. There is a small line of distinction between sameness and similarity. Identity deals with sameness but not with similarity. There is a possibility of similarity between two things but there cannot be sameness between two things. Sameness can be applied for one thing to itself. Here, I will concentrate on identical things, if they are one thing, not two. As it is the relation of one thing to itself that gives rise to other concepts such as recognition, known, verification and so on. Recognition, verification, known an. are the nature and function or outcome of “identity”. The concept of “identity” not only helps one to recognise, verify and so on but also helps one to define oneself. Identity is a kind of definition of what one is in reality.

Now, to have the philosophical meaning of identity it is very important to distinguish it from the notion of “identity” in psychology and the social sciences. The philosophical concept concerns a relation, specifically, a relation that a person stands to itself or is identical to itself. It is something that identifies a person

to be the same throughout one's life span. It is something that distinguishes oneself from the other. It is defined by the uniqueness of an individual which cannot be shareable. The sociological notion of identity deals with a person's self-conception, social presentation, and more generally, the aspects of a person that make them unique, or qualitatively different from others (e.g., cultural identity, gender identity, national identity, virtual identity and processes of identity formation). In this paper my concern would be towards the philosophical notion of identity instead of the sociological notion of identity and the sociological notion of identity will be discussed in the light of the philosophical notion of identity.

The philosophical notion of identity deals with the inner subjective nature of self, whereas the sociological notion of identity deals with the outer objective nature of the self. Objective identity can be judged because it is out there and is open to change and can be formulated in a better form. To think objectively is to think universally. However, objective thought can only grasp that which can be universalised. This is what can be called the sociological objective identity of self. Temporality is always there in this sociological objective identity. We can never capture ourselves by these objective universal qualities. The subjective nature of self is to be understood by a deep concentration of one's self as excluded from something objectively given. It is by human freedom we can imagine our possibilities of not this objective outward identity but an inward pure subjective identity in nature. Human subjectivity is to be understood by bracketing out the objective qualities.

In philosophy 'identity' is a predicate, which functions as an identifier, that is: that which distinguishes and differentiates one subject from another subject. Thus, identity in this sense focuses on the uniqueness of the concerned subject. It was the most popular thinker, Plato who famously made the distinction between 'is' as a copula in a phrase and the identifying "is". Later on, Aristotle distinguished identity in its numeric meaning as equivalence from an identifier that defines an object as an individual. The problem of identity became a problem of substance throughout the history of philosophy in the efforts to define the principle of individuation. Leibniz in his Discourse on Metaphysics summarised this principle

in a mathematical law: it states that no two distinct things exactly resemble each other; otherwise, they would be "indiscernibles" and therefore one thing. In other words: two things are indistinguishable and one single thing, if everything that truly can be said of the one may be said of the other as well. So, they become replaceable."††† The notion of identity gives rise to many philosophical problems, including the identity of indiscernible, that is: if  $x$  and  $y$  share all their properties, are they the same thing? Another question that arises in this context, is the concept of "change", that is: identity over time, what has to be the case for a person  $x$  at one time and a person  $x_1$  at a later time to be the same person?

Locke has different criteria of identity for different kinds of things i.e., animate and inanimate things. Inanimate object's identity: The Identity is completely based on Space and Time. Every object occupies a single space. For him, two objects cannot have more than one space. Two physical objects cannot be identical even if they look similar because they do not occupy the same place at the same time. The next one is, that identity is based on a unique beginning point. One thing cannot have two beginnings of existence and two things cannot have one beginning. Now anything that exists at one time and place is compared with itself that exists at another time. We do compare an object in two different timings so, what is there in an object that makes us identify that same object two times. It shows that the identity of two things of the same kind does not depend on the same place and same time. When we ask whether a thing is the same or not, we are always referring to something that existed at a given time, in a given place and that thing is the same as itself and not the same as anything else. It follows that one thing cannot have two beginnings of existence because it is impossible for one thing to be indifferently placed at the same time. And two things cannot have one beginning because it is impossible for two things of the same kind to exist in the same place. The last one is the Principle of individuation. Existence ties with a being at a particular time and place and that cannot be shared with other beings of the same kind. For example - an atom continues its existence at a particular time and place. It is the same and continues as the same, as long as its existence is continued. If two atoms are joined together into a single

mass, every one of those atoms will be the same as itself. They exist united together. If these atoms are rearranged then it will also be the same thing. Now, a problem arises if one atom is removed from the mass and put back; then it won't be the same mass anymore. Because the continuity is disturbed. At time  $t_1$  atom-1 is removed and at time  $t_3$  atom-1 is put back in its place then what is that object at time  $t_2$ . And again, if a new atom is added to the mass, then it won't be the same mass. But this does not work in the cases of living creatures. The identity of living creatures does not depend on the mass of the same particular creature but something else. In them, the variation of atoms does not change identity.

Now, when we talk about the identity of an animal: What makes one animal and continues it to be the same animal? This can be explained with the help of an example of a watch - What is a watch? Watch is the construction of parts organised to a certain end. An end that can be attained when sufficient force is applied to it. Suppose this watch is one continued body whose parts were repaired - added to and subtracted from then it would very much like the body of an animal. In an animal, the motion and fitness of the organisation come from within one's self. Whereas in a machine, the force can be observed pushed from outside. A ship is continuously repaired over the years by putting new planks etc. until no single piece of the original ship remains. All the discarded pieces are ultimately reassembled in the same order as at first and this would be a new ship in emergence. So, now we have two ships. Now, which one among them is the same ship with which we began? Locke's theory would say the first one is the original ship because it has a continuous history. Unique beginning and continuous history are the function definitions.

According to Peter Geach, these debates, as usually conducted, are void for lack of a subject matter: the notion of absolute identity they presuppose has no application; there is only relative identity. "A distinction is drawn between qualitative and numerical identity or sameness. Things with qualitative identity share properties, so things can be more or less qualitatively identical. Rama(male) and Sita(female) are qualitatively identical because they share the property of being human, and such properties also go along with that, but two female humans will (very likely) have a greater

qualitative identity. Numerical identity requires absolute, or total, qualitative identity, and can only hold between a thing and itself. Its name implies the controversial view that it is the only identity relation by which we can properly count (or number) things: x and y are to be properly counted as one just in case they are numerically identical.”§§§ As noted, it is at the centre of several philosophical debates, but to many, it seems in itself wholly unproblematic, for it is just that relation everything has to itself and nothing else and what could be less problematic than that? Numerical identity can be characterised, as was just done, as the relation everything has to itself and nothing else.

Time plays an important role in the notion of identity because it deals with change. Identity means sameness even though there is change. One can say that identity and change are opposed to one another. According to Heraclitus, one could not step into the same river twice. It is because new water was always flowing in. According to him, nothing in this world stays constant over time, everything is always in the process of change. In Heraclitus, the nature of being is non-being, there is nothing permanent to which the concept of identity can be assigned. According to David Hume, identity over time was fiction, and we substitute for a collection of related objects. According to one view, material objects persist by having temporal parts or stages, which exist at different times and are to be distinguished by the times at which they exist. Persistence plays an important role in the notion of identity which seems to be lacking in the writings of Heraclitus and Hume. For the concept of “identity” to arise, a thing should persist throughout the change of time. Persistence implies consistency of being the same, not affected by any kind of change. When we look at ourselves, we see that everything in ourselves changes with the change of time but still, there is something that persists in ourselves throughout the change. That persistence of thought that I am the same person as I was some years back gives rise to the concept of identity of oneself. The question of identity becomes the matter of our concern because we are challenged by the question: How come one feels like the same person through one’s whole life? There are so many changes that one goes through in one’s life like - age, health, social status, social value, the dignity of a person etc. but still, a person considers himself the same. So, what enables one to feel is the same ‘I’, the

same 'self', in all the different roles that one has to play in the changing course of world events? When one introspects about one's life one realises that he/she is the same self even after so many changes in one's life.

The term "Identity" is used in a very different way by Indian philosophers from how it is used by western philosophers. Some of the Indian philosophers have used the term identity as relation whereas some others have used it as the opposite of relation. The Buddhist admits that "identity" (tādātmya) is a relation, which will lead to another assertion that there are *relata* because a relation only remains in two objects as far as the Buddhist view is concerned. The Buddhists have used the term tādātmya (identity) in a very restricted sense i.e., in the sense of similarity. According to them, tādātmya or identity is the similarity in the sense that one *relatum* would be less extensive than the other. The Buddhists accept identity between a peepal tree and tree-ness. It can be said that wherever there is a peepal tree, there is treeness, but not otherwise as the property treeness has more extensive pervasion than peepal tree. From the peepal tree, one can easily infer treeness due to having the relationship in the sense of similarity (tādātmya) there. But, on the other hand, from the property of a treeness, one cannot infer peepal tree because treeness has got more extensive pervasion in the sense that we cannot tell - 'wherever there is treeness, there is peepal tree because 'treeness' covers all the trees in this world. That is why, the Buddhist concept of tādātmya is taken neither as completely identical nor completely non-identical, but in the sense of similarity. It may also be called identity associated with the feature called "distinction". Here, there is both identity and distinction. An object covering a narrower place remains in another object existing in wider places as shown above. When the predicate is a part of the subject, it is, therefore, not an absolute identity but it is a partial identity.

According to Navya Nyāya, the term "identity" is used only when difference or *bheda* is excluded. The term tādātmya or identity is to be understood as the absence of *bheda* (difference). If the term tādātmya is replaced by the term *abheda*, it would mean an absolute absence of a *bheda* i.e., mutual absence. Why is tādātmya called *abheda*? For, it is nothing but an absence of *bheda* that is

identity means the absence of mutual absence. Here, 'absence' means 'absolute absence'. The Navya Naiyayikas can distinguish these two objects like cloth and jar as having a mutual absence of cloth in a jar and a jar in cloth. In this case the syllogistic argument in the form - A cloth is possessing mutual absence from a jar, as it possesses clothes in it. From the above discussion, it can be said that identity (*tādātmya*) is nothing but non-distinction (*abheda*) which implies an uncommon property or unique property existing in an individual or a particular object. This uncommon property exists in one and only one object.

Among all the schools of Vedānta, Śamkara's Advaita and Rāmānuja's Viśiṣṭadvaita are conspicuous on the issue of relation. The former (Śamkara) for its rejection of the relation and the latter (Rāmānuja) for its advocacy of the same. Śamkara does not accept any kind of concrete identity in his nature of self, it is called absolute identity in Śamkara. In Rāmānuja, the relational identity plays an important role because he accepts duality in his nature of the self. Both the attitudes are occasioned by their concern to explicate the nature of the ultimate reality.

#### **4. The Concept of Self and Identity**

The foregoing discussion makes it clear that both the concept "self" and "identity" are related to one another. It is very difficult to explain one without the other and vice-versa. Both the concepts of self and identity are dealing with the unique and uncommon aspect of an individual that defines and identifies with oneself. This self has its identity at the bottom of every action and is involved in every bit of knowledge. While we talk of self-knowledge, it shows a straightforward meaning: cases of knowledge in which the knower and the known are identical and the subject and object are the same. Identity is a Person's Sense of self', it is the concept that an individual comes to realise when they answer the elemental question: who am I? Self and Identity are interlinked concepts. The explanation of one lies in the explanation of the other and vice-versa. Self and identity are inevitably connected. The answer to the question 'who am I' would be like this: I am this, here, there is a reference to something and this something is self. Identity plays an important role in the notion of self. Verification, confirmation and

recognition of self are possible by the notion of Identity. The answer is characteristically given concerning multiple groups or categories and represents how a person views himself or herself. While one focuses upon the question such as: what is that identity of 'one'-self? Then the answer would be 'self'. Self is the factor that gives rise to the concept of Identity. The notion of identity is understood because of the notion of self and vice versa. When one answers who am I? The answer would be 'I' or 'me' or 'myself'.

In this paper, I have tried to sketch the concept "self" and "identity" by various western and Indian philosophers. The paper has tried to critically expose their writings on self and identity. It acts as a historical overview of self and identity, two unavoidable and important concepts in both Indian and Western philosophy.

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\* Cf. George Makari, *Soul Machine: The Invention of the Modern Mind* (NY: Norton, 2015), 115.

† Oxford Living Dictionary

‡ Crick Francis, *The astonishing Hypothesis - The scientific search for the soul*, p. 3.

§ Descartes's dualism and the philosophy of mind by Lilli Alanen, Published by: Presses University of France, September 1989, Vol. 3, pp. 391-413.

\*\* Locke's account of personal identity: Memory as fallible evidence, Author - Anna Lannstrom, Source: History of Philosophy Quarterly, January 2007, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 39-56.

†† Humes, *Treatise on Human Nature*, p. 21.

‡‡ Ibid., p. 437.

§§ Daniel, *The self as the center of Narrative Gravity*, p. 2.

\*\*\* Vellaman, *The self as a narrator*, p. 2.

††† Williamson, Timothy. Identity, Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Taylor and Francis, 1998.

‡‡‡ Sollberger Daniel, On identity from Philosophical point of view, 2013.

§§§ Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy identity.

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