



Personality, Social Existence, and Ambiguity: An Exploration of Individual and Collective Identity

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Abstract

This paper examines the interplay between personality, social existence, and ambiguity through philosophical, literary, and sociological lenses. Drawing on concepts from existentialism, individualism, and social theory, it explores how individuals navigate their unique identities within larger societal structures. Using a Bengali anecdote as a starting point and analyzing Munshi Premchand's short story *Sadgati*, the discussion highlights the tensions, dualities, and ambiguities inherent in human existence. The analysis underscores that personal identity is not isolated but shaped by social interactions, conflicts, and cultural norms, often leading to profound dilemmas.

Keywords: personality, social existence, ambiguity, anecdote, *Sadgati*, etc.

I. Introduction: Before the Beginning

In a Western country, a Bengali family resided permanently. One day, fish soup seasoned with cumin and chili was cooking in their home. A Bengali poet—likely Subhash Mukherjee—passed by on the adjacent road. Suddenly, the aroma triggered a sneeze. From inside the house came questions: "Who is sneezing? Is it a Bengali or not?" Here, the sneezer is not identified as an individual but as part of the broader Bengali nation. This illustrates how people are sometimes defined not by personal traits but by collective social identities, such as nationality. This anecdote sets the stage for exploring personality, social existence, and ambiguity. It reveals how individual actions can dissolve into group affiliations, blurring the lines between the self and society.

II. Objective:

To examine the interplay between personality, social existence, and ambiguity through philosophical, literary, and sociological lenses.

III. Methodology:

An exploratory research approach supported by qualitative methods has been employed in this study. Given the focus on the relationship between personality, social existence, and ambiguity through philosophical, literary, and sociological lenses was conducted using qualitative data. This method allows for an in-depth understanding of literary contributions that are nuanced and culturally embedded. Data collection has been exclusively based on secondary sources, including books, peer-reviewed academic publications, historical texts, and literary critiques.

IV. Discussion and analyses:

The term "person" encompasses people, beings, or individuals. "Individual" implies independence, uniqueness, or a distinct entity. "Personal" refers to blossoming in one's own uniqueness, while "individualistic" prioritizes the individual over society. "Individuality" denotes the unique characteristics that distinguish one from others, often manifesting as "I am alone in the crowd."

Individualism, as a doctrine, posits the individual as superior to society, opposing socialism. It fosters creations that express personality, where the creator imbues characters with distinct traits. This can extend to hero-worship or devotion to great personalities.

In biology, "ontogeny" describes the development of an individual organism, contrasting with "phylogeny," the history of a group. Philosophically, existentialism emphasizes that worldly objects lack inherent value; individuals must imbue life with meaning through active engagement. As defined by Kitchin and Thrift (2009: 666), it seeks to understand human existence's structures, enabling free, informed actions. Flexner (1987: 678) describes it as the individual's role as a self-determining agent responsible for authentic choices.

"Being" signifies existence, excellence, purity, or truth, often with a social dimension. Social existence binds individuals by societal rules and tensions. Schatzki argues that individuals, actions, and thoughts cannot be understood apart from social practices, promoting harmony through "live and let live" and "give and take." Acceptance of this fosters progress via cooperation, while opposition breeds isolation, conflict, and crisis.

Bakhtin views existence as an "event," involving active participation. However, unique events like birth and death define individual existence, inapplicable to others. Existence encompasses: (1) the fact of being; (2) continuance in life (struggle for survival); (3) mode of existing (efforts for a good life); and (4) all that exists (global order).

Existence reflects social consciousness's mobility—upward or backward, positive or negative. Shifts in ideas or ideals highlight this dynamism. Yet, backwardness does not negate social being; even a "fool" contributes to society.

Humans rival the Creator, authoring their existence (Foucault: "I author myself"). Existence is a project, where rules are broken, beliefs adapted, and differences sought. Choices, joys, sorrows, dreams, and actions prove liveliness. Descartes' "Cogito ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I am") affirms existence through thought.

Existence is time- and space-bound, intertwined with society, culture, history, politics, economics, philosophy, and geography. Changes arise from environment or mentality, potentially fragmenting or piercing the individual. Hope sustains survival amid obstacles, yet not all achieve unshakable happiness. Ambiguity arises: "Why do I not get what I want, or want what I get?" Individuals may deny social norms, leading to isolation, emptiness, or self-destruction.

Ego, unique to individuals, develops within social rules. Bhattacharya (2006: 234) describes it as a collective expression of infinite othernesses centering the self. Self-preservation—"save your life"—is nature's first law, amplified by power into dominance.

Literature facilitates interaction between author, reader, and characters due to shared existential traits. Subjective ego forms perceptions of truth, potentially biased or one-sided.

Individuals possess multiple entities: buyer, authorial self, father, husband, intellectual. Psychologists identify id, unconscious, conscious, alter ego, and co-being. Social cooperation preserves individuality amid group otherness.

Individuals have social identities (ethnic, cultural, communal, religious, gender-based) alongside personal ones. This creates tensions: one versus many, individual versus collective, real versus imaginary. Knowledge exchange is bidirectional, fostering uniqueness: "I am alone in the crowd."

Entities' actions are unpredictable, depending on temporary states. One must forge their path—"be a king in one's own intellect"—yet may adopt others' tastes for survival. Unknown aspects render full understanding elusive.

Duality emerges between external and hidden selves, as in Rabindranath Tagore's *Chinnapatra* (Letter No. 39), where internal monologue creates imaginary companions. Mind-soul disharmony adds layers of wonder and madness.

Individuality implies otherness; consciousness is awareness of otherness, requiring distance for self-understanding. Tensions between self and other can conflict, yet society demands recognition through others' eyes. This ambivalence defines existence.

Society embodies duality: femininity versus masculinity, youth versus age, speaker versus listener. Literature, like songs or stories, requires collaboration (creator and recipient). Short stories capture dualities in beings, contradictions, writing styles, and consciousness.

• **Munshi Premchand and the Duality of Individual-Social Existence**

In Premchand's *Sadgati* (from *Mansarovar*, Part 4), dualities manifest in characters like Brahmin scholar Ghasiram, low-caste blacksmith Dukhi, and others. Caste dominance creates conflict: Ghasiram exploits Dukhi's labor, leading to his death, yet refuses to handle the corpse due to purity norms.

Ghasiram's wife embodies social propriety, denying food or fire to low-castes. Dukhi's wife suffers marginalization. Death's inevitability underscores life-death duality, extending to readers across time.

Dialogue reveals dual atmospheres: Dukhi views Brahmins as divine yet temperamental; Ghasiram sees low-castes as inferior. Tasks assigned to Dukhi highlight exploitation.

A Gond tribesman supports Dukhi, viewing Ghasiram with contempt, illustrating ally-opponent duality. Ghasiram's perceptions demean Dukhi, using insults like "father-in-law."

Dukhi internalizes inferiority, regretting desecrating the Brahmin's home. Village Brahmins avoid Ghasiram's house post-death, emphasizing caste divides.

Premchand contrasts Ghasiram's survival with Dukhi's death, highlighting social ambiguities for readers.

V. Conclusion

Personality and social existence are riddled with ambiguity, shaped by individual uniqueness and collective pressures. From existential self-authoring to literary dualities, humans navigate tensions of self and other. Premchand's narrative exemplifies how societal hierarchies amplify these dilemmas. Ultimately, existence thrives in harmony but persists through conflict, urging recognition of both personal authenticity and social interdependence.

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