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Q6(a)

According to Mead the idea of self develops when the individual becomes self-conscious. Explain.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 marks · Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx

Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx - Historical materialism, mode of production, alienation, class struggle; Emile Durkheim - Division of labour, social fact, suicide, religion and society; Max Weber - Social action, ideal types, authority, bureaucracy, protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism; Talcott Parsons - Social system, pattern variables; Robert K. Merton - Latent and manifest functions, conformity and deviance, reference groups; Mead - Self and identity.

Core demand of the question

- According to Mead the idea of self develops when the individual becomes self-conscious. Explain
- Keep the explanation within a 20-mark length

Revision summary

- **Mead:** the self arises in self-consciousness, when one takes oneself as an object.

Significant symbols make the speaker respond as the hearer does.

Play, then game, then the **generalised other** organise that capacity.

The Me is others' attitudes; the I is the novel act.

Power decides whose other is generalised; Mead left that thin.

Introduction

George Herbert Mead argued that the self is not given at birth as a soul. It arises when the individual can take herself as an object, that is, when she becomes self-conscious in social interaction. Mind, self, and society are one process, not three boxes.

Body

Self-consciousness as taking the role of the other

- In Mind, Self and Society, the self appears when the organism can indicate to itself what it indicates to others.
- A gesture becomes a **significant symbol** when it arouses in the speaker the same response it arouses in the hearer. Language is the medium of this sharing.
- **Self-consciousness is this doubled view:** I see myself as others see me.

Play, game, and the **generalised other**

- **In play, the child takes one role at a time:** mother, teacher, police. The self is still a series of parts.
- In the game, the child must take the roles of all others in an organised activity, as in cricket or a classroom.

- The **generalised other** is the organised community's attitude. When the child answers that attitude, a stable self is possible.
- **Charles Horton Cooley's looking-glass self is a cousin:** we imagine appearance, judgment, and a self-feeling. Mead is more about organised process than about a mirror of vanity.

The I and the Me

- The Me is the organised set of others' attitudes that one assumes. It is the self as object, the conventional side.
- The I is the novel response to that Me, the moment of impulse and creativity.
- Self-consciousness is the conversation of **I and Me**. Without the Me there is no object to be conscious of. Without the I there is no living act.

Implications

- The self is social before it is private. **Durkheim's** claim that society exceeds the individual meets Mead on this path, though Mead starts from interaction, not from social facts as things.
- Erving Goffman later staged the self; Mead supplies the developmental condition for any stage.
- **Indian childhood in joint households and schools multiplies generalised others:** caste, kin, and nation may conflict, which is role strain, not a disproof of Mead.

Limit

- Mead underplayed class and gender power in whose "other" becomes generalised. Harding and Oakley would ask which community's attitude is internalised as the Me.

Flow diagram

Significant symbols -> Self-consciousness
 Play one role -> Game organised roles
 Game organised roles -> Generalised other
 Generalised other -> Me as object
 Me as object -> I as response as response
 I as response -> Self

Conclusion

For Mead, the self develops when the person can take the role of the other and become an object to herself. Play, game, and the **generalised other** build that self-consciousness. The I and the Me are its inner conversation. Society is the condition of mind, not a later add-on.

Facts & figures

Significant symbol

A gesture that calls out the same response in speaker and hearer, typically language.

Generalised other

The organised attitude of the community that the self assumes.

I and Me

Mead's two phases of the self: conventional object and creative response.

Cooley

Looking-glass self: imagined appearance, judgment, and self-feeling; a related but not identical account.

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