

Fellow Beings Sharing Relations: A Study in the Intersubjectivity of Alfred Schutz

Abstract

The paper concentrates on examining Schutz's theory of intersubjectivity. The terms like *face to face relations*, *'stock of knowledge'*, *public world*, *intersubjectivity*, *reciprocity of perspective*, and *'biographical determined situation'* are examined. The study also seeks to understand how intersubjectivity is constituted in the setting of two roommates sharing relations in a single cubical room. In all, seven rooms were studied - four rooms in the first phase and three rooms in the second phase in terms of interacting roommates. The data were collected by following method of naturalistic inquiry. The social world or intersubjectivity is analyzed as an ongoing emergent reality. The level of intimacy in the relationship of fellow beings is difficult to establish. The findings indicate the roommates of the first phase were more intimate and spend time together whereas of the second phase enjoy more freedom within and outside the hostel and like to be with their friends in the university library and for outings.

Keywords: Intersubjectivity, Face To Face Relations, Reciprocity of Perspective, Fellow Beings.

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Introduction

The fellow beings live, work, organize, experience and interpret on the foundation of the common origin of cognition, which is initially experienced as world of *'natural attitude'* and later on, *life-world* by Husserl (1963) is presented to us in our daily existence. This world is also called *life-world* of *'natural attitude'*. Schutz (1967) calls it as an *intersubjectivity*¹ confined to *"paramount reality"* of waking life as different from scientific knowledge and from dreams. The social universe is created by the existence of fellow beings in mutually engaged activities in multiple ways in many spheres and domains of their lives. This world is historically based, is handed over to the fellow beings by their ancestors and predecessors through heritage and tradition, language and communication and all typifying objects, recipes and modes of behaviour². Schutz describes intersubjectivity as a public world which is shared with the fellowmen (predecessors, successors and contemporaries). It is extended in space and time and usually accepted, but sometimes partially modified on the basis of experience.

The biographies in terms of birth, family and socialization and in Schutz's terms, our *'biographical determined situations'* vary and intervene, which provides the actors/fellow beings with their *'stock of knowledge'*³-meaning, a frame of reference and a point of view where they happen to be placed or located in the outer world in a given spatial temporal context. Thus, their perceptual experience differs and through reciprocity of perspective established through *'interchangeability of system of relevance'* and congruence of different systems of relevance, fellow beings understand each other. (Zaner, 1961)

In face to face relations, fellow beings are recognized as persons not as commodities or things known as *'contemporaries'*⁴ in general and consociates in particular. They communicate with each other in a unique and peculiar way where their bodies as an organism are presented vis-a-vis each other and mind and mental psychic life remains appresented⁵. Although feelings, thoughts, opinions and ideas are shared yet it may be difficult to establish nature and level of intimacy in their relationship. In Schutz's words in *'straightforward attitude'* an actor being subject bound performs an on-going action having *'thou orientation'* is directed towards future which is goal oriented and project directed involves phantasing and imagination at the level of self having ontological orientation on

the part of actor. If goals imagined become real, and take a form of sedimented thought, completed act, and stock of knowledge. In this way imagination converts into reflection.

Weber's focus was on action in terms of understanding subjective meanings, whereas Schutz's focus was on identifying its source i.e. intersubjectivity is created and how they find meaning in their existence while interacting with their fellow beings. He also separates objective and subjective dimension of action. It is important to understand how actors perceive meaning in their intersubjective world by following typification which may enable to understand the personality of fellow beings in terms of their motives, his attitudes and behavior.

Research Methodology

The study attempts to understand intersubjectivity in the context of two residents sharing a single cubical room. In all seven rooms were studied in two phases. The four rooms were examined in the first phase and three rooms in the second phase in terms of interacting roommates. The data was collected by following method of naturalistic enquiry. Social world or intersubjectivity is constituted by the interpretation of situations by actors/room mates who represents an on-going emergent reality which cannot be held still for observation. Therefore, the efforts is made in the direction of understanding intersubjectivity.

It may not be possible to analyze one's intersubjectivity in the true sense of the term, but this exercise is undertaken for the purpose of analysis in a given spatial context, before examining the intersubjectivity of each individual in a sharing room their biographical characteristics are examined.

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand Schutz's concept and theory of intersubjectivity.
2. To examine biographic characteristics of roommates sharing a room.
3. To analyze how two roommates, constitute intersubjectivity.

Biographical Characteristics –First Phase

Anju and Manju joined a post graduation in the faculty of languages in the campus of Panjab University. They were of the same age- Anju 21 and Manju was 22 years old. They were Hindu by Religion and hailed from the semi-urban area of Himachal Pradesh. Anju's father was a senior executive in a public sector and her mother was a housewife whereas Manju's father was a middle ranking officer in a private sector and posted in Punjab and her mother was a teacher at primary school. Anju was the eldest among her siblings and her younger brother and sister were pursuing matriculation in a school and graduated in Dental surgery in a college respectively. Manju's elder sister was married and out of her two younger brothers-one was pursuing graduation in arts in a college at their native place and another in engineering in another state of India.

Deepali joined as a research scholar in one of the of the faculty of sciences department, whereas Rupali joined graduation in Law (LLB). Both were Hindu by religion. Deepali was Meitaei and Rupali

was Khatri by caste. Deepali's father was a professor in a University whereas Rupali's father was reputed lawyer in their respective places. Their mothers were homemakers. Among their siblings Deepali's elder brother was a Scientist pursuing career in research at the University level and her younger brother post graduated in Management was preparing for Civil Service Examination whereas Rupali's elder sister was a medical doctor and was married to a doctor and they were running a Nursing Home. Her second elder sister was practicing Chartered Accountant and her younger brother after being graduated in engineering was preparing for master's in business management. Deepali, after being post graduated from her native state in the North East India and Rupali after having passed graduation in Commerce and also cleared All India Examination in Chartered Accountancy from her native state of Haryana. Jasleen and Jaya were sharing third room. Jasleen joined post graduation in one of the departments of Arts and Jaya got enrolled as a research scholar for a Ph.D programme in the Faculty of Commerce and Business management. Jasleen aged 23 years and Jaya 25 aged years. Jasleen was Sikh and Jat by caste whereas Jaya was Hindu and Khatri. Jasleen hailed from rural areas of Punjab and Jaya from urban areas in Himachal. Jasleen's father was a farmer, but he also hired a taxi and mother was a housewife. Jaya's father was teaching at the college level and mother was in an office job in a semi-government organization. Among her siblings Jasleen had two elder sisters and a younger brother. Her first elder sister got married after matric to a farmer and second one got married to non-resident Indian (NRI) having graduated from a college in a city close to their native village. Jaya's younger brother was studying in a college. Jasleen had her initial primary education from a government school in the native village. Further, she pursued her secondary school and college education in a city close to her native village. Jaya had her primary and secondary education from a convent school and graduated from a college and post graduation from a department of Commerce located at the University campus in her native state of Himachal.

Both Ridhi and Nidhi were sharing a third room and joined post graduation in the same department of language after being graduated from their native place. Both were of same age, i.e. 21 years and Hindu by Religion. Ridhi was khatri by caste and belonged to the urban area in Punjab whereas Nidhi was Jat by caste and belonged to rural area in Haryana. Ridhi belonged to well to do and very reputed business class family of Panjab where they have orchards and good export business of fruits. Nidhi's father was a junior engineer in one of the government departments of Haryana and they had enough landed property. Nidhi lost her mother a few years back and her father remarried. Among her siblings, she had two real sisters, younger brother and a stepsister too. Her elder sister got engaged after graduation and younger sister was pursuing graduation. Both her younger brother and a stepsister are studying in a school.

In the following section the biographic characteristics of residents of second phase are examined. Amrit and Amrita were allotted a same room. They were of same age. Amrit was Sikh and Amrita was Hindu by religion hailed from Punjab and Chandigarh respectively. Amrita joined university as an undergraduate student and now she is in the final year. Her father was a senior executive officer in Air-force and mother was a homemaker and she was a single girl child with no siblings. After taking retirement he joined as a senior executive in the corporate sector. In the second room-Priya and Sumita were sharing a room. Priya father was a businessman and her mother was in the cosmetic business. Among her siblings she had a younger brother, who was 12 years old. Priya was pursuing masters in Indian Theatre prior to this she graduated in English and her interest in literature became instrumental in joining Indian Theatre. Sumita was pursuing post graduation in science department. In the third room Jaspreet and Sonia were pursuing Post Graduation in Public Administration and in law (L.L.B) respectively. Before joining masters, Jaspreet did bachelor's in integrated programme of education. They were of same age. Jaspreet aged 22 years and Sonia 23 Years. Jaspreet hailed from Punjab and Sonia from Haryana. Jaspreet father was in politics and mother in medical profession whereas Sonia father was working in industry and mother was a home maker.

Sharing of Infrastructure in a room

In the preceding section we have examined biographical characteristics now we examine sharing of infrastructure in the micro world of the room of the first phase of residents. They were made to share limited space almirah, bookshelf and study table. Both Anju and Manju were compatible and had cordial relations with each other in terms of using and sharing different objects and in maintaining their room spick and span. They would sweep the room, clean the study table, dust the bookshelf and almirah almost daily with mutual understanding. Deepali was neat, tidy, meticulous whereas Rupali was not tuned to be like this. She would keep everything in an orderly manner as a routine, but she found very difficult to share a room because of congested space, i.e. two beds, study table almirah and essential stuff of two residents in cubicle room. Deepali would often settle Ruplai's stuff in her absence. In case of Ridhi and Nidhi both were not regular in terms of maintaining and cleaning their room, therefore, sharing of physical objects like almirah, rack and study table was not a problem for them. They could make up their room once or twice a month and their bookshelf was often found loaded with books. Still, they were conscious of giving a decorative look to their room for which they brought bed cover of good design and some decorative pieces. They would use each other's cosmetic and other stuff without any inhibitions.

In the following discussion we are examining residents sharing of room in the second phase. Amrit and Amrita in the first room and Jaspreet and Sonia in the third room expressed that there was reciprocity and mutual understanding regarding cleaning and sharing different objects in the room. Interestingly the

management of the hostel has allotted separate almirah/wardrobes and bookshelves for the residents. Because of congested space both had removed table outside, whereas they expressed that because of separate almirah/wardrobes and bookshelves they enjoy privacy in the room. In the second room Priya expressed that she hardly came to the room in the daytime therefore there was no issue in terms of sharing room.

Study time in a room

Regarding observance of study timing within a room each set of roommates presented a different picture. Both Anju and Manju were meticulous in observing their specific study timings, Anju would study early in the morning whereas Manju would study late at night. Since their study timings differed, both of them could make use of the study table and table lamp as and when required. Therefore, they would switch off the main light. They would discuss about their studies and classes with each other during their free time since their subjects were same. Both of them had understanding about the use of study table, Deepali would use the study table whereas Rupali would study in bed. Deepali preferred to study early in the morning (4am-7am) whereas Rupali preferred to study when Deepali left for the department, i.e. between 9am-12pm as she was pursuing Law in the evening batch. Rupali also studied late at night and would get up in the morning too. Initially, she used to get disturbed as Deepali would start her studies at 4am in the morning but she adjusted herself subsequently. Both Ridhi and Nidhi hardly studied as routine. They would study during exam days on their respective beds and did not feel the need for study table in the room. Jaya would spend maximum time for her studies in the morning and evening in the room. Jasleen sleeps comfortably by hiding her face into the quilt or bed sheet. Also switching on and off the light is no problem between the two. Both of them were compatible with each other.

In the context of observance of the study time in the three set of roommates in the second phase all of them mentioned that they prefer to study in the library. Sumita expressed that she preferred to study during exams and than only she would spend time in library. Priya said that she remains busy in the performance of professional art because of applied nature of her discipline Jaspreet acknowledged that she loves to spend time in social work activities and Sumita wants to join legal profession.

Identification of goals

All residents were asked to identify their goals and motives in life, Anju and Manju, in addition to successful completion of their post graduation have shown interest in pursuing their career. Anju desires to be in civil service Manju wants to opt teaching as her career. Ridhii plans to do a Bachelors in Education (B.Ed) after completion of Post Graduation whereas Rupali wants to pursue the higher research after Ph.D and wants to be scientist of high repute. Deepali wants to join corporate sector and wants to take up jobs relating to legal and financial matters. Jaya is inclined to get into academics and teaching at the university level after completion of her

Doctrate degree in management whereas Jasleen wanted to marry her friend who is graduate and endeavours for immigration to Canada. In other words, she could not specify her goal in life and she only expressed that she wanted immigration to Canada. Jasleen had very strong, intimate parental bond with her father who wanted her to go for higher studies and achieve excellence in life. He also cherished same feeling for her sisters also. Her elder sister was first to join high school in a nearby town but got married after matriculation and second sister who joined the college for graduation. But she was only one from her family who could get an opportunity to pursue post graduation at the university level. She expressed that her father's untimely death was a bolt from blue and the biggest loss as she was attached to him and perhaps being the youngest in the family, she used to get preference for everything. Deepali expressed that her parents instilled career aspirations in her. Her father being professor in university wants her to take up research as a career. She found that her department and the university provided her exposure, which could fulfil her career aspirations. Rupali expressed right from her childhood days she was influenced by her father's profession who being leading advocate would deal with her clients in such a manner that influenced her a lot and she decided to take law as a profession.

In the second phase it is interesting to analyze Amrita is preparing for competitive exams and wants to join educational core of Air Force. Amrita is also a career minded and right from her school days she wanted to pursue her career in science and research. She said that she was fortunate enough to get admission in graduate programme of honour school in science and after 12th class. She also expresses that university is the best place to pursue interest in higher studies. Priya aspires to become an artist and Jaspreet wants to dedicate her life for a social cause.

Sharing relations within and outside Hostel

In the first phase of residents it is found that Anju and Manju move together while going to department, library and market. Anju often gave ride to Manju on her scooter. Sometimes they had differences with each other too, but they never ended up with confrontation. For instance, Manju wanted to visit home almost every weekend after her elder sister's marriage as her father was posted outside and she wanted to share her mother's responsibilities and domestic problems to which Anju would find difficult to stay alone. She felt insecure for which she might have to call someone to stay in the room with her or she would move to her guardian's place. She would definitely get angry when Manju would return but would never react knowing the reason and after some time they would get normal. Anju had a good circle of friends and was fond of going out to restaurants with her friends for which Manju never showed interest in accompanying her as she knew her limitations. Both Ridhi and Nidhi as roommates were found to be compatible. One could observe some issues of reciprocity in their relations. Ridhi would often bring eatables and fruits from home and market, which she

would nicely present and share generously with Ridhi. She also organized a surprise birthday party and brought a lovely gift for Nidhi which she appreciated but never reciprocated. Other point which questioned the reciprocity of relation was that Nidhi has lots of guests, mainly her sisters who used to come and stay with her very often. She herself would talk quite loudly, especially in the presence of her guests and relations and the room would become intolerable. The whole unit would get disturbed. Nidhi could manage to get some study notes, which she never shared, with Ridhi. She felt hurt and after their examinations, decided to change her room and her roommate as well. In Jasleen and Jaya's case, Jasleen was conscious to keep her room tidy whereas Jaya was less tidy and never bothered it. Both Jasleen and Jaya had cordial relations with each other. They would talk for a long time on cell phones but were conscious of not disturbing each other. They often accompanied each other for visiting market and for an evening walk. Jasleen, sometimes faced problems as Jaya would use her makeup kit without her permission and knowledge. Initially she grumbled, but steadily understanding was developed. Although, their habits were opposed to each and their perspectives of life were totally divergent but being roommates, they would never enter into confrontation with each other. There was a huge difference of intellectual level between the two. Jasleen was inclined towards fashionable look wearing good clothes, doing up hairstyles, applying makeup. Jaya's only interest was her studies and research work and was inclined to get into academics after her research work. She was a career minded, meticulous and hard working. Even for keeping room neat and tidy she would always say she would never waste her time. This was realized by Jasleen and she would appreciate her seriousness towards her career, but at the same time she would keep the room neat and clean and in an orderly manner which, Jaya also started appreciating. In this way, they felt that sharing of room and their relations have become pleasant as they understand, adjust and accommodate to each other.

Rupali and Deepali were really comfortable in terms of sharing their room and eventually they had developed a very harmonious relationship with each other. They exchanged ideas, traditions, customs, values and found it interesting to imbibe and learn from each other's culture. Deeply could learn the Hindi language, whereas Rupali developed an interest in Manipuri language and culture of eastern states.

The intimacy of the two roommates has grown with a span of time and their bond became stronger. They celebrated each other's birthday, very enthusiastically.

Deepali, vividly remembered and described an incident when she fell sick with a viral fever. Being so far away from home, she got disturbed, but Rupali as a roommate cared for her in such a manner that she never felt homesick at all. Rather, her whole unit also showed a great sense of concern. After a few months during their final examinations, Rupali fell sick with a high fever. It was a big blow to her as she was mentally quite perturbed mainly for her final

examinations. But she expressed that she was so well looked after by Deepali that she could recoup within two weeks. One could judge the profundity of relationship during adversity as she could come close to each other as roommates.

Deepali was probed repeatedly that if she ever had some problem with her roommate, she disclosed that at times Rupali's friends would come to the room and sit for long hours, which would disturb her studies. She said in that kind of situation, she would go to neighbouring friends from a pharmacy department who was equally career conscious and they would discuss about academic matters. This is indicative of the fact that they had good equation with their fellow beings and also the next-door unit friends. They would sit and chat together in the terrace and sometimes order eatables from outside and would relish together. They would celebrate all unit mates' birthday and throw a party. They used to go out together in a group and enjoy exploring the beautiful city during weekends. Deepali and Rupali confessed that it was a very good experience to share a room. One tends to learn things of other cultures and values which changes one's personality to a remarkable extent.

In the second phase of residents it is found that residents follow different ways of life which may be attributed to their family background and socialisation. Amrita prefers to stay out with her friends outside the hostel-be it a library and even roaming and going for outings with friends. Amrit also expressed that they hardly meet each other in the room and she expressed that having busy routine in the department she comes back after 5 pm and takes a nap from 5-6 pm and during that time Amrita is not found in the room. She also goes to the library afterwards.

Priya said that the mobile phone of Sumita keeps her so busy that they could hardly share anything with each other in the room. Sumita expressed that Priya would never take the responsibility of keeping her stuff in an orderly manner in the room. Sometimes she also talks loudly but when asked she would go out. Regarding study and sleeping time switching off light was not an issue as they have separate lights.

Priya had the habit of asking her unit mates and roommate to lend her little stuff like cosmetics and toiletries if she was refused by others in the unit she would use her roommate stuff in her absence for which she was warned also

Conclusion

It seems the roommates of the first phase were spending more time in the hostel and sharing infrastructure objects with mutual understanding and compatibility. They were more involved and developed a sense of belongingness for each other. However, in the present context, the residents would use hostel as a pedestal to follow their interest and hobbies like Jaspreet in social work; Priya's in drama/play and performing arts; Sumita and Amrit in research and science and Amrita in the defense services. All of them prefer to meditate in the university library, therefore, the observance of study

time was never a problem for them. They enjoy more freedom prefer to be with their friends for outings like visiting market, mall etc.

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Footnotes

1. *The social world is an intersubjective one in several senses: first, it is the locus of my encounter with the "Thou"; second it is the scene of my own action which is directed toward fellow-men. My action reveals the world as "ours" does my encounter with you as my thou". (Natanson 1968:220-221)*
2. *The world in which I find myself at any moment in my "wide-awake" living is at the outset peopled with others, not only individuals with whom I am acquainted and others whom I know less well or not at all, or groups of others equally well or less well known to me, but also a multiplicity of "products" of the activities of others ("cultural" objects, institutions, values, and the like), all of which intrinsically refer to others (Zaner, 1961:73).*
3. *In so far as it refers to the world handed down to me, this assumption combines with the knowledge derived from my own experience to form my "stock of knowledge at hand." In terms of this progressively sedimented stock of experiences, the objects, facts, and events I encounter and deal with in the course of my life are experienced as "things of such and such a kind," in other words as types ("dogs," "trees," "strangers," and so on) (Zaner, 1961:73)*
4. *But since all social relationships and the other dimensions of social reality derive from and are founded on "my contemporaries," more particularly "my consociates," those whom I encounter in the "face-to-face relation," the problem of intersubjectivity is to be met with fundamentally on this level (Zaner, 1961:75)*
5. *Even in the face-to-face relationship with a fellow-man, the individual knows only an aspect of the Other. Although the Thou is given as a person, the mode of givenness is essentially adumbrated. Some aspects of the Other are manifest, others are presented in shadowy form or are completely opaque. (Natanson 1968:229)*