

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The core objectives of the present thesis were to explore the nature of consciousness and the correlation, if any, between intentionality and reflexivity from the frameworks of Vedānta, particularly Advaita and Western phenomenology. We have elaborated and examined different Advaitic and phenomenological positions in the preceding chapters. And the study points to something decisive and novel to the understanding of reflexivity, intentionality and their correlation. It is observed that the questions on the nature of consciousness came into view at different times and each occasion both the traditions have revealed something more than what is usually realized.

The account of intentionality as has been examined in the preceding chapters after Husserl and latter phenomenologists calls our attention. It reflects the intensity of the group of scholars who are ceaselessly working to explicate and differentiate the nature of consciousness as opposed to object¹, as well as to interpret and to explore the transcendental aspect of consciousness in terms of its intentional function. The aim throughout is to grasp the object as it is given to experience without any influence and presupposition; however, the influence of tradition seems to prevail over their perception. Phenomenologists have started with the presumption that consciousness and mental states are identical and proved object-directedness as fundamental to consciousness.

As long as phenomenologists continue to concede self-awareness as an immediate and independent existence of consciousness, it is reasonable for an Advaitin to agree with their position. It is neither an act of reduction nor any attempt to objectify consciousness because any attempt to do so is a fallacy of misapprehending consciousness like any other empirical object. Self-awareness in the strict sense is not self-cognition that entails cognition of self in terms of the ordinary epistemic mechanism. It is not a perception of

consciousness like the perception of a pot or a table as something transcendent. It is not any special intentional act of consciousness which is directed towards its own being without pointing towards something outside, since it amounts to misattributing consciousness as both the subject and the object of its own experience. In other words, any attempt to define self-awareness in terms of any inner split would simply lead us to an infinite regress. Self-awareness therefore, could not be logically realized unless consciousness is free from the chain of duality.

It is simply the awareness of consciousness of its own being that pervades no gap between knower and known. As, what remains is the bare awareness without an object to be perceived or a subject that perceives. In brief, it is the state of awareness that contains neither subjective nor objective correlatives since consciousness cannot be the objective content of its own awareness. It transcends any dichotomy either internal or external and thus, can be described as the one enduring presence that ‘escapes the orbit of understanding so long as we approach it as mental phenomenon characterized by intentionality’².

As held by the Advaitins, the proof for *anubhūti* is the very being of *anubhūti*. Indeed, to Advaita, it is the ontological certainty of consciousness that confirms the epistemic awareness. In this context, it is worth to emphasize that Husserl too renounces any such naturalistic or empirical account of consciousness rather to him the existence of all objects including the world lies in the being of transcendental consciousness that manifests independently. Thus, the phenomenologists make remark: ‘experience is conscious of itself without being the intentional object of consciousness’ (Husserl 1984b, 399; Sartre 1936, 28-29)³. Again, to quote Husserl from *Ideas*, ‘consciousness has, in

itself, a being of its own which in its own absolute essence, is not touched by the phenomenological exclusion'⁴.

It is obvious thereby that as far as the reflexivity or self-awareness of consciousness is concerned both Advaitins and phenomenologists are invariable in their views. However, Sartre is quite ambiguous in this respect. Though he never intends to mean that consciousness is an object to itself, yet it is his extreme rigidity to intentionality thesis that induces him to assume self-awareness as an outcome of intentionality. Consequently he remarks, 'consciousness is aware of itself in so far as it is consciousness of a transcendent object'.⁵ It is very easy to figure out that what Sartre intends is a clear effort to reduce reflexivity into intentionality as also has been noticed by Zahavi. It is claimed that Husserl does not support any such reduction. But his contention to correlate the transcendental subjectivity with objective content exhibits his inclination towards intentionality. The transcendental being, according to Husserl, in its existence is not without reference to the world rather dwells in association with the world. In other words, to the phenomenologists the absolute is absolute in course of its relation to the intentional object. As Mohanty argues, 'It is only an intentional world-constituting consciousness which, by constituting a world, also constitutes itself as an item in that world'.⁶

However, the question is not who seeks to derive reflexivity from intentionality and who does not as it is not the objective of present study. The question is therefore, whether any such approach is logically permissible or not. It appears that all the phenomenologists are firm in their views to retain both reflexivity and intentionality as two inseparable, co-original characters of consciousness. As a result, it would not be wrong for them to conceive intentionality as compatible to reflexivity.

Here, by defending the Advaitic position I would like to argue that there is incompatibility between reflexivity and intentionality not only in the *pāramārthika* level but also in the *vyāvahārika* level where pure consciousness is unrealized. At the outset, it must be claimed that it is quite unconvincing to hold that absolute is absolute in terms of its relation to other. It does not mean that the absolute should be something isolated and silent spectator, yet absolute cannot be called an absolute in the absence of its autonomous and independent existence rather it would be a mere ephemeral presence. Likewise, if the absolute consciousness of phenomenologists is absolute in terms of its relation to other, it is better to regard it relative-absolute which is definitely a contradiction.

Each act of cognition by virtue of being directed towards the object presupposes the one that is foundational and objectless experience that correlates all fleeting states yet transcends them all. This is what constitutes absolute essences of consciousness as we find in Advaita. Since foundational consciousness must be non-intentional or contentless experience that is not immersed in the object but self-contained. Because if the absolute continues to relate itself to the fleeting states directing to the object it would fail to hold its absoluteness. To put it differently, consciousness is absolute not by correlating to the fleeting experiences or objects but by constituting and pervading them. It is the unity that merges all diverse acts of cognition, yet its own essence is without any split. And thus, goes beyond any sort of compatibility and incomparability. Since, to admit either of them is to permit further duality which the nature of absolute does not approve. In brief, the difficulty is that once we accept reflexivity as fundamental nature of consciousness then there is a logical illegitimacy to admit intentionality as essential to consciousness. It rules

out the very possibility of object-directedness of consciousness and consequently, the question of reconciling the two does not arise at all. In fact, it is known that Advaitic notion of transcendental consciousness excludes ego-centric notion of Husserlian consciousness, it is impractical therefore, to expect for any compatibility between intentionality and reflexivity.

It is also far from clear that why the act of intentionality is considered to be prior than reflexivity. If revelation of consciousness is due to its object-directedness it is equivalent to say that consciousness in itself is always unconscious but appears to be so in terms of its association with object. In brief, any attempt of denying or suppressing self-luminosity would imply that consciousness is intrinsically unconscious, which is quite illicit to argue. The nature of consciousness is self-luminous in the sense that it reveals itself unlike an object but it reveals objects too. This is a uniqueness that only consciousness owns. That cannot be categorized as 'an act of directing to the object' where conscious act posits an object. Since consciousness simply manifests its objects. The initial blunder phenomenologists have committed is to confuse this object-directed character of cognitive act with the object-revelation which leads them to place intentionality over self-luminosity. In brief, what one needs to understand is that consciousness is reflexive intrinsically while it turns to be intentional by virtue of being associated with mental states.

At this juncture another important point that strikes the mind is the objection on 'derivation' as raised by M.K. Bharda. In the preceding chapters, this elusiveness has been mentioned, as I faced in case of phenomenologists, particularly in case of Mohanty. Phenomenologists do not just stop by characterizing consciousness as intentional rather

they are radical to derive reflexivity from intentionality. We have come to notice that at least in case of later phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty and Mohanty, intentionality is not just exclusive to consciousness rather it is the body-subject which is intentional. Hence, the reason to derive reflexivity from intentionality as held by Mohanty is the all-encompassing nature of the latter. Intentionality is not just fundamental to consciousness rather there are unconscious mental states which are too intentional. It has a wide periphery of which consciousness is a fragment. It is certain thereby that even if all reflexive or transparent states are intentional, there are intentional states (unconscious mental states as claimed by Mohanty) which are not transparent.⁷

Now, this being the position of Mohanty and other phenomenologists, it is logically unacceptable. The difficulty is that intentionality being admitted as the essence of consciousness cannot be characterized to anything apart from consciousness. Just as the way, 'extension' being the essence of matter cannot belong to anything immaterial or 'humanity' being the essence of human being cannot be possessed by animal. Similarly, if intentionality is the very essence of consciousness, it cannot be owned by any unconscious state. More importantly, as Mohanty admits the existence of mental states which are intentional though not conscious, it is obvious that intentionality cannot be regarded as essential to consciousness. Rather it sounds better to state that though all mental states are essentially intentional, yet consciousness is not. Consciousness, indeed, as Advaitins claim is essentially reflexive but not intentional.

Again it can be objected that if there are unconscious states which are intentional but not reflexive, it does not just denote that intentionality has wider extension than the latter rather it ascertains that reflexivity is more fundamental and akin to consciousness than

intentionality. Since we cannot ascribe self-luminosity to anything without consciousness, which affirms more certainly that only consciousness is reflexive and thus it is analogous to say that to be reflexive is to be conscious. Though it is not proper to state that to be intentional is to be conscious. This is indeed what Advaita seeks to establish. Intentionality is intrinsically associated with the psycho-physical body due to its unique formulation and thus, distinct from consciousness. Though, in case of ordinary experience or any cognitive process we confront with a conscious state that is allied with mental faculty and thus seen to be 'object-directed'. However, the disparity is accounted for by the fact that Advaita strictly acknowledges the distinction between cognitive state and consciousness *as such* designating one as opposed to other and not as substratum of other. This is a distinctive feature of Indian philosophy, particularly of Advaita, that is not appreciated by the Western world.

It follows that any attempt to define consciousness absolutely in terms of intentionality is legitimate in some measure if and only if it is a case of perception or a cognitive process where conscious states contain objective contents referring to some entity either real or unreal. To be exact, it is only duality of empirical state that allows intentionality. In contrast, consciousness being always conscious is reflexive altogether in spite of being directed towards object. It does not indicate any attempt to reduce intentionality into reflexivity. Since both of them refer to two distinct dimensions of awareness, one apparent and the other obvious. There is, according to Advaita, a constitutional difference between the two. Intentionality is determined by the subject-object correlation, but the latter is an undetermined essence of consciousness.

It must be noted that the task of philosophy is not to take for granted whatever is directly given to perception rather to challenge and to question the commonsensical belief which is apparent though not obvious. The phenomenological approach as has been taken up by Husserl for describing the nature of consciousness is deplorably encircled within the range of psycho-physical subject. There is no intention in their part either to transcend the ordinary perception that lacks accuracy or to extend the phenomenological method to its ultimate extent which is rather incomplete. It is found, in contrast, that both contemporary and classical Advaitins have made every effort to go beyond the limits of Western phenomenological approach.

The analysis of the three states of consciousness and the denial of the non-difference between seeing and seen as referred earlier prepared the edifice upon which Advaitic contention for non-intentional consciousness is based. It is indeed, the most important argument that Advaita has developed for the refutation of intentionality thesis. According to Advaita, the consequence of describing consciousness solely through intentionality is to misapprehend the very transcendental nature of consciousness and to get bound within the purview of ephemeral nature of empirical consciousness. Indeed, Śaṅkara's analysis of the three states of phenomenal consciousness, following Śruti, ascertains that along with the waking and the dream states even the state of sleep cannot be accounted for without the self-luminosity of consciousness.

On the other hand, the consequence of defining reflexivity as the very essence of consciousness is to confirm the appearance of intentionality and to recognize the reality behind this appearance through which it sustains. Whereas the basic difficulty in categorizing consciousness as non-intentional lies in explaining the phenomenal

perception that is out and out object-directed and does not virtually give a scope to affirm any experience that is realized without any objective reference. Yet one must admit that one transcendental non-intentional consciousness is the logical presupposition of these conscious states which are always directed towards the objects and thereby transient. The discrepancy arises because Husserl delimits consciousness within psycho-physical being and tends to portray its nature as it is reflected in the psycho-physical operation of the being. However, one's adherence to reflexivity thesis in the strict sense does not allow to accept any reconciliation between intentionality and reflexivity. Intentionality sustains insofar as we conceive an ego-consciousness that is multidimensional while Advaitic notion of egoless consciousness entertains neither intentionality nor any reconciliation.

In this regard, K. C. Bhattacharyya's account of subjectivity has given us a better dimension. Though Bhattacharyya's phenomenological study of subjectivity resembles to that of Husserl to a large extent, there is disagreement regarding their consequences. It has been seen that Rāmānuja like phenomenologists, even if he has approved the autonomous being of consciousness by characterizing it self-luminous, there is an obvious attempt throughout to set the limit of its autonomy as he has never considered its manifestation apart from its object. On the other hand, even after regarding the primary manifestation of consciousness in terms of the body-subject, K. C. Bhattacharyya never has ruled out its potency to be absolutely free. By a methodical analysis of different modes of subjective expression, he has shown us that it is the essence of consciousness to be free at each state of its relatedness to the world objects. Along with Husserl, Bhattacharyya concedes that primary stage of the manifestation of subjectivity is the body, though this body-subject is not the ultimate state of its manifestation. Unlike

object, subject is aware of its own identity and of its own being as well as of the being of others. It is thus, said to be free even in course of its relatedness to the object. It is this freedom that constitutes the essence of subjectivity and not its relatedness, which indeed disappears in course of its self-realization. In a distinctive way of theorization, Bhattacharyya goes on to argue that subjectivity is not only free from the perceived body rather there are successive stages of dissociation that certifies its absolute freedom. The stage of spiritual subjectivity is therefore, a stage of absolute freedom where from it can reflect on both the physical and psychic aspects which it transcends entirely. This incessant freedom is an obvious proof for the non-cognizability of consciousness, which only appears intentional due to its initial attachment with the perceived body and the objects. It is ultimately freedom in itself. More importantly, the study into the grades of subjectivity brings out a necessary distinction not only between consciousness and body but also between thought and consciousness. Bhattacharyya does not mistake consciousness as thought-content which is particular and object concerned. Since consciousness or what he calls subjectivity being free and pure persists even if no thought-content is subsumed by it. In this sense, Bhattacharyya's account of subjectivity does not only re-establish the autonomous nature of consciousness but also reinforces Advaitins' claim for the ultimate incompatibility between object-relatedness and self-awareness. Since the freedom of subjectivity lies in its capacity to rise above its relatedness and apparent limitation.

Anyway, the aim of present study is not to discard the worth of Husserlian phenomenology and the concept of intentionality. Rather it has been emerged in response to the comparative assessment undertaken by many recent scholars including renowned

phenomenologist J.N. Mohanty. But any comparison is fruitful only when we take into consideration the differences imbedded in their perspectives, methodology and ends towards which they are moving. In fact, even if both Husserl and Advaita quite uniformly pursue the same problem concerning the nature of transcendental consciousness and its role in the world constitution, the differences in respect of their perspectives, presumptions, methodology and ends have brought out severe disagreement among them.

It is known that apart from Brentano, Husserl is strongly influenced by Descartes that reflects from his aspiration for a presuppositionless philosophy. Husserl is certain to recognize his indebtedness to Descartes but he also has expressed his discomfort to admit the notion of Cogito that remains in isolation from the object. Instead of denouncing the existence of object or maintaining any mystical dualism, Husserl therefore, concedes that the essence of conscious subjectivity rests on its relatedness to the objective world and not in its isolation. In other words, it was Husserl's aim to overcome the gulf between the subject and the object that traditional philosophy has maintained and thus, he notes that object of consciousness is not unknown and unreachable. Rather it is manifested and gets meaning by the intentional acts of consciousness. In fact, the primary task of Husserl is not just to describe the essence of subjectivity rather he seeks to explore the correlation between the subject and the object that has been ignored by his predecessors. And, it is the intentional act of consciousness through which Husserl seeks to overcome the Cartesian solipsism by bridging the gap between the subject and the object. As a result, Husserl's account of transcendental subject, which is considered as the ground of all constitution, reveals its own being in terms of its association with the object, with which it is intentionally correlated. What follows from the above is that to Husserl, the essence

of transcendental consciousness is based not in its absolute existence rather in its co-presence with the world.

In contrast, the goal, for Śaṅkara, was not to explicate the subject-object association rather to bring to light the ontological essence of consciousness. To be precise, Advaita never intends to describe the intentional subject who is contaminated in the objective world rather the one that can be attained by transcending the phenomenal experience and all sorts of plurality. As a result, while Husserl assumes that the true essence of consciousness cannot be comprehended in absence of its intentional character that connects it with its object; for Śaṅkara, the essence of consciousness is not at all rooted in its association rather in its freedom. Needless to say, these are two opposing perspectives of Husserl and Advaita that have made them to maintain two conflicting standpoints. While Husserl endorses the very intentional subject as the transcendental and pure being, Śaṅkara challenges thoroughly this intentional nature of consciousness that pollutes the unity of transcendental consciousness.

To be explicit, Husserl though claims for transcendental subjectivity, he strives to unfold the ‘thinking I’, ‘the cognizer’, the knower, who is not self-contained but engaged in a constant interaction with the objective world. It is the ego that is bound in the plurality of thoughts through intentional acts. Whereas instead of pursuing the notion of I-consciousness, Śaṅkara’s aim is to unfold the one that is free, self-evident and absolute, that is both immanent and transcendental reality of the world. That is even after being associated with objective world transcends the limitation of epistemic trinity. It is neither the subject nor the object but pervades and surpasses the existence of both.

It appears from the above discussion that by reflexivity of consciousness what Mohanty assumes is the ego-awareness or the immediate awareness of the body-subject rather than the self-luminosity of consciousness, which indeed, leads him to admit the priority of intentionality over reflexivity. As in all empirical states the ego is found to be immersed in the mundane world. And, it derives its own self-awareness after becoming aware of its object. On the other hand, ego-consciousness to Advaita is never identical to what they call self-consciousness. Since, the ego being an object is always distinct and extrinsic to consciousness. The grievous consequence of admitting an ego within consciousness is to permit the plurality of consciousness. Hence, the empirical state, according to Advaita, is not the undifferentiated, non-intentional consciousness rather the ego-consciousness that is consistently moving towards its object due to its inherent nature. It must not be assumed what they are talking about are two different sorts of consciousness rather two different aspects of one universal consciousness. While being transcendental it is one and self-luminous but being empirical it appears intentional and multifarious. Indeed, to be precise, it is not manifestation of two different orders of consciousness rather these are two different levels of apprehension.

In brief, one needs to consider the dissimilarities between these two traditions while expecting for any comparative assessment. It is found that while Husserlian analysis seems quite extensive and more appealing than Advaita in respect of providing an elaborate account of intentional consciousness, the latter is unparalleled even in contemporary era in explicating the nature of reflexive consciousness.

At the end, I must acknowledge that the problem of consciousness is one universal problem and one of the most perplexing issues where we cannot simply think of reaching

any concrete end. Therefore, there is no such conclusive understanding either through Husserlian account of consciousness or Sartre's account of consciousness or Advaitic account of consciousness. What they indeed have tried is to give a pathway to reach the problem and to proceed towards a comprehensive understanding without falling into any trap. We rather take the path for granted without pursuing it further to the end. The merit does not lie in sticking to a particular approach, rather in the openness to admit the limitations and to appreciate the one which goes even further. In brief, a comprehensive and evenhanded assessment of the nature of consciousness should not restrict us only to the empirical intentional consciousness that perception ordinarily reveals to us, rather must enable us in apprehending the one which is unyielding and shaping the ground of the empirical consciousness all through and which the ordinary perception fails to endorse. Hence, the popular Western way of thinking and perceiving the nature of consciousness in terms of intentional act and through objectifying consciousness is neither the only philosophical way nor the ultimate way in solving the problem of consciousness.

Notes and References

¹ For phenomenologists, consciousness and object are opposed to each other, but not in the sense that they exclude each other. Rather they are correlated to each other in terms intentional act of consciousness.

² Nataraju, A. (Ed.) (2013), *The Limits of Thought and Beyond*, New Delhi: Bloomsbury, p. 19

³ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/self-consciousness-phenomenological/>

⁴ Husserl, E. (1983), *Ideas Pertaining to A Pure Phenomenology And To A Phenomenological Philosophy*, Translated by F. Kersten, USA: Kluwer Academic Publisher, p. 65

⁵ Sartre, J.P. (1957), *The transcendence of the Ego*, Translated and annotated with an introduction by F. Williams & R. Kirkpatrick, New York: Hill and Wang, p. 40

⁶ Krishna, Daya and Sharma, K.L. (Ed.), (1991), *The Philosophy of J.N.Mohanty*, New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research in association with Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. p. 210

⁷ Ibid., p. 208