

CHAPTER II

Nature of Consciousness in Vedānta: Classical and Contemporary

2.1 Introduction

As the title suggests that the present chapter is an analysis of Vedāntic views on the nature of consciousness. In this chapter, I am dealing with two of the eminent scholars of classical Vedānta apart from Śāṅkara whose position would be discussed in the next chapter. The chapter is two-fold. The first half intends to look into the standpoints of two classical Vedāntic thinkers, particularly, Rāmānuja, the advocate of Viśiṣṭādvaita and Madhva, the advocate of Dvaita and the second half is an inquiry into the philosophical perspective of contemporary Vedāntin K. C. Bhattacharyya. It is very obvious thereby that even though the sphere of both classical and contemporary Vedānta is much wide and vibrant, I am confining myself in accord with the demand of present study. As all these three philosophers whom I am going to refer in the following discussion have rightly addressed the problematic I have proposed in the introduction, which will not only enhance the worth of present work but more than that it'll give us a wider framework to comprehend the issue in a more methodical way. In brief, while the first half of the chapter is framed with an aim to enhance the stance of phenomenologists by a critique of pure, non-cognizable and eternal notion of consciousness; the second half of the chapter is an attempt to fortify the notion of self-luminosity as upheld by Advaitins by pointing towards the possibility of transcendental, autonomous and non-intentional nature of consciousness. However, before going to initiate the core discussion, it is obligatory to put forth a brief sketch on the background of Vedānta philosophy.

Among the orthodox systems, Vedānta has occupied a central place in the domain of Indian philosophy as it expounds the ideas of the Upaniṣads with utmost transparency and acuteness. Being a union of spirituality and philosophy, Vedānta on the one hand provides the ground for spiritual faith, on the other hand, it forms the concrete rational base for comprehending the paradoxical nature of human life and the world.

Vedānta, the end of the Vedas or what is also termed as Upaniṣad is a systematic exposition of the philosophy of the Vedas. It is not representing any particular system like Advaita or Dvaita or Viśiṣṭādvaita rather there are layers of thought which are realized and revealed by the pious souls in the way of comprehending the highest Truth. In fact, Upaniṣads are endless records of truth unfolded by the saints through their intuitions. The philosophy of Vedānta seeks to interpret these vague and concise verses of the Upaniṣads to bring out their quintessence. It must be admitted that the grandeur of Upaniṣads has delighted not only the mystics but also the philosophers from time to time in all over the world. Appreciating the intense and mysterious insight of the Upaniṣads David Frawley, a well-known American Hindu teacher, in his introduction of the book *The Principal Upanishads* by Alen Jacobs writes,

“From the teachings of Krishna in the Bhagavad Gīta to those of modern masters like Sri Aurobindo and Ramana Maharshi, Upaniṣadic insights have remained shining brightly, like an inextinguishable fire, at the core of the soul of India.”¹

Again, cherishing the spirit of Upaniṣad Sri Aurobindo writes,

“The Upaniṣads are not once profound religious scriptures, -- for they are a record of the deepest spiritual experiences,-- documents of revelatory and intuitive philosophy of an inexhaustible light, power and largeness and, whether written in verse or cadenced prose, spiritual poems of an absolute, an unfailing inspiration inevitable in phrase, wonderful in rhythm and expression.”²

Every system of Vedānta has developed its doctrines following the verses of the Upaniṣads. But of course, Upaniṣad is not the only basis since the root of Vedānta is strictly based on *Prasthāna-traya*, which includes along with Upaniṣads both *Bhagavad-Gītā* and *Brahma-sūtra*. While Upaniṣad is considered as *Śruti-prasthāna*, *Bhagavad-*

Gītā and *Brahma-sūtra* are known as *Smṛti-prasthāna* and *Tarka-prasthāna* respectively. Nevertheless, all the schools of Vedānta are unanimous in admitting the authority of all these three texts in the process of enhancing and articulating their philosophical standpoints. By implication, there are some similarities among all the schools regarding their aim and method of approach in the domain of epistemology, metaphysics, ethics as well as soteriology. More or less, all the schools are equally indulged in thinking over the meaning and goal of life, essence of our existence, and the nature of highest truth.

However, it is noteworthy that there are ideological differences among all of them on account of their interpretations. As these three authoritative texts, particularly Upaniṣads and *Brahma-sūtra*, being extremely concise and incoherent in their expression run away from the reach of any ordinary intellect. Though, *Brahma-sūtra* itself is a brief organized compilation based on Upaniṣads by Bādarayaṇa, yet none of them can be properly ascertained without the help of a commentary by an expert in this field. It is for this reason all the great commentators have made meticulous attempt to interpret the triple text keeping in view the fundamental tenets. However, the diverging perspectives of the interpreters as well as the multifarious tunes of Upaniṣads have contributed in the emergence of several systems and sub-systems of Vedānta. They all agree regarding the ultimate concern or objective of Vedāntic inquiry, i. e., the knowledge of Brahman, yet they differ immensely in expressing the nature of this highest truth. These differences indeed result from their metaphysical and epistemological dissimilarities as well as differences imbedded in their course of interpretations of the texts. Nevertheless, these diverging perspectives of them have compelled me to undertake their views in present study since in order to reach an objective understanding the best way is to examine from the antagonists' standpoints.

There is no doubt that Vedānta is abundant with eminent scholars but as per the need and limitation of present work I would focus only on some of them. Hence, my emphasis would be only on Rāmānuja and Madhvāchārya, the chief advocates of Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita systems respectively, who reflect passionately on the core questions of reflexivity and intentionality.

The philosophy of Vedānta as we know is divided under the two broad heads of idealism and theism. While idealism is solely represented by Advaita, all other schools more or less are firm about the second alternative. In fact, Advaita in the true sense does not deny the theistic features of the Vedas but never mistakes it as the ultimate truth of Upaniṣads. In the view of Advaita, any positive attempt to conceptualize the highest principle or Brahman with our finite potentiality is futile and needs to transcend. Contrary to the theistic systems highest truth is construed by Advaita as one unqualified formless existence. This basic tenet of Advaita has been challenged by almost all the theistic schools and which leads to an unending disagreement among them.

Consequently, the notion of consciousness which is being considered as the very essence of highest reality is subject to enormous debate among all schools, specifically among Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita. While all of them concede that consciousness is essentially self-luminous, there is disagreement about the nature and meaning of self-luminosity. It is therefore, an analysis of the positions of Rāmānuja and Madhva is extremely significant in order to bring clarity in the understanding of the notions of consciousness and reflexivity.

PART - I

2.2 Nature of Consciousness: An Analysis from Rāmānuja's Perspective

Rāmānuja is foremost to bring out thorough transformation in the sphere of the Vedāntic tradition by qualifying consciousness with attributes. The philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita as espoused by Rāmānuja in his commentary on triple text is theism where Brahman is a symbol of adoration and love and not a mere rigid construction of the intellectuals. Reality is considered to be non-dual but is endowed with infinite spirits and matter. Thus, Rāmānuja's Viśiṣṭādvaita stands opposed to the Śāṅkara's Monism. The latter instead, is firm in establishing the indescribable nature of Absolute; since, to know Brahman is to become one with Brahman. It is simply our inability to understand the nature of the Reality that makes us to impose fake attributes on it. All attributes and differences belong to the finite world and not to the Infinite. Even our approach to describe the Reality as Being, Consciousness and Bliss is not to assign qualities to Him rather all these are one and same in connotation. Therefore, it can be stated without doubt that Brahman is Being, Being is Brahman; Brahman is Consciousness, Consciousness is Brahman; Brahman is Bliss, Bliss is Brahman; Brahman is Infinite, Infinite is Brahman. In other words, Brahman is *Satcidānanda* 'referring to the same difference-less identical entity, absolutely qualityless'.³

Rāmānuja, in contrast, has denied this notion of attributeless Brahman by ascribing Him all the positive qualities. The ground for such remark is our experience which never provides us with object without any quality. All our knowledge is qualified, thereby all objects are. An object without qualities is non-existence. Even if we try to prove a qualityless object, that very attempt will prove its quality by differentiating the object from others. Again, to describe something through negation is also an indirect way to

attribute the quality of that thing. Likewise, the Advaitins' way to describe Brahman through '*neti neti*' distinguishes the nature of Brahman from the objects of the world. This, in other way makes the Brahman qualified. Thus, by stressing that Consciousness is not finite, they characterize it as infinite. By claiming that consciousness is not factual, they ascribe it as eternal and so on. For, qualities like --infinite, eternal, all-pervading etc. can never subsist without any substratum and that is the all-embracing Brahman.

2.2.1 Ascertainment of Qualified Consciousness

Before considering the notion of consciousness or knowledge as formulated by Rāmānuja it is imperious to state at the very outset that the Rāmānuja's philosophical approach is altogether influenced by his realistic conviction. Rāmānuja, like the Advaitins, does not condemn the ontological or ultimate existence of the object. Instead, he has placed both object and subject on the same order of reality denying any priority of the latter over the former. Needless to say, the epistemological position of Rāmānuja about the nature of consciousness and its relation to the object is influenced by this metaphysical adherence, which will reflect in our subsequent analysis.

All knowledge pertains to some means, but there is no means of knowledge that can prove an attributeless, non-differentiated entity. All the major *pramāṇas*, says Rāmānuja, establish only a qualified object. Scripture, as a valid source of knowledge, consists of sentences and words that represent different meanings to us. And, these meanings denote different qualities of objects. Similarly, perception also provides us with objects of different qualities. Perception, either determinate or indeterminate, manifests an object with its essential features. Though, in case of indeterminate cognition all qualities are not apprehended, yet it is not an unqualified cognition. Again, inference as based on perception of invariable relation between *sadhya* and *hetu* testifies only objects with

essential features. Thus, none of the three major *pramāṇas* can apprehend any attributeless entity. Likewise, there is no question of thinking of an unqualified consciousness. Even if the Advaitins are denying to attribute any positive quality to consciousness, they cannot abstain from ascribing the negative qualities which differentiate it from the material objects. Indeed, Rāmānuja holds that consciousness has the positive qualities of self-luminosity, intentionality, manifesting object and so on. For, if consciousness exists, it must have attributes to prove its being. And, thus he is emphatic to remark on *Brahma Sūtra*,

“*Samvit siddhyati vā na vā, siddhyati cet saddharmatā syāt,*

na cet tuccatā gagana-kusumādivat”⁴

Translation: If pure consciousness is proved to be real, it follows that it has attributes; if it is not, then it is non-existent, like a sky flower⁵.

2.2.2 Revelation of Consciousness via Revelation of Object

Regarding the reflexivity of consciousness, Rāmānuja’s view is unique and contrary to Śāṅkara. Since, according to him, self-luminosity follows solely from the revelation of object. To put it clearly, though consciousness is qualified by self-luminosity it is not the essential nature of consciousness rather it is an apparent quality of consciousness and temporal. Rāmānuja’s contention seems obvious from his remark in *Śrī Bhāṣya*,

“Consciousness is not self-luminous always and to everybody, but it is self-luminous only when it reveals objects and not at other times, and it is so only to a particular knower and not to everyone....”⁶

Reflexivity or self-luminosity thus seems to be a conditional nature of consciousness in the sense that consciousness seems to be luminous only when it is intended towards an

object. In fact, it is this object-directed nature of consciousness which is the cause of its luminosity. A reflection of same understanding is found in Prof. Mohanty's argument as he said, 'consciousness is intentional, that is, directed towards an object (which however need not be an external, real thing in the world)'⁷. It is surprising that even if Rāmānuja has never used the term intentionality while delineating the nature of consciousness, yet his account of consciousness can be counted as a masterly exposition of intentionality.

In short, revelation of consciousness follows from the revelation of object. As the state of deep sleep does not support the presence of any intentional object, consciousness as well abstains from being luminous. In fact, in the absence of object, consciousness in deep sleep is also found to be absent. In other words, there is not a single state where consciousness seems to be luminous independent of any internal or external object. Reflexivity therefore, cannot be regarded as the real nature of consciousness rather it is a partial nature of consciousness relating to a particular object and subject.

Rāmānuja goes on to state that besides the state of deep sleep, there are numerous states of consciousness, which are not reflexive. Otherwise, all objects would have been revealed to all people. Experience shows that my awareness of an object does not reveal the object to other at the same time, nor my own past experience of the object reveal it to me at this moment. If, for instance, I have past experience of a wild cow, I would state that 'I perceived it before', instead of saying 'I perceive it now'. Here, my past conscious state is the object of my present conscious state. Similarly, the conscious state of one person can be an object of consciousness to other. Or else, any meaningful engagement would not be possible. Thus, it is not sound to hold that only an unconscious entity is liable to be an object of consciousness. An object differs from consciousness due to its constitutional variation and not because it is apprehended by the latter. According to

Rāmānuja, ‘to be an object of consciousness is not necessarily to be a non-conscious thing’⁸.

It is to be referred here that the account of intentionality and reflexivity Rāmānuja sought to maintain throughout his epistemological discourse is based on his understanding of consciousness that is quite distinct, indeed, opposed to the Advaitic interpretation. Consciousness to Rāmānuja is not pure, eternal, self-evident and absolute existence rather like an object it is qualified, fleeting, other-dependent and relative to the object. The only peculiarity that makes it different from an object is its ability to be conscious of other object and oneself. This objective account of consciousness as has been portrayed by Rāmānuja calls for our attention.

2.2.3 Dependence of Consciousness

Going against Advaita, Rāmānuja sternly challenges the self-evident nature of consciousness as for him consciousness depends on the object to reveal itself as well as to prove itself. Consciousness is very much like other ordinary things, depends on the means of knowledge for its manifestation and is thereby considered to be an object of cognition. When two people are talking about a particular subject the latter cannot understand anything unless he is conscious of the fact that the former is talking about. Here, conscious state of the former becomes an object of perception to the latter; the same occurs in case of inference and other processes of cognition. This consequently shows that consciousness is neither always self-luminous nor self-proved⁹ rather depends on the cognitive means to manifest as well as to prove itself.

2.2.4 Non-eternity of Consciousness

The consequence of bringing consciousness down to the level of object is the direct refutation of the eternal and immovable nature of the former. Eternalness consists in the persistent being of something, which according to Rāmānuja, cannot be conferred to consciousness. If consciousness were eternal and unlimited by time, all its objects that are revealed to different persons at different times would also be everlasting, ‘for objects conform to their respective states of consciousness’.¹⁰ Our ordinary experience makes it certain that an awareness that reveals the existence of ‘pot’ at present moment does not reveal it at all times to everyone. It follows that the revelation of consciousness is limited in time and space.

Furthermore, it cannot be claimed that just because the previous non-existence of consciousness is not established by Advaitins, it is eternal. Since, the non-existence of consciousness is proved by consciousness itself. Just as the way consciousness reveals the object of the past and future existence besides its present existence, consciousness reveals its own previous non-existence that does not require any co-existence of the two. Though, in case of direct perception the co-existence between consciousness and object is required but it is not required in case of other means of knowledge. This absence of consciousness cannot be proved by direct perception nor can it be known by inference. Even the scripture cannot give us any knowledge of its absence. The only valid source says Rāmānuja that proves this non-existence is *anupalabdhi* or non-perception. Explaining his point Ramanuja writes,

“according to this means of knowledge which is accepted as valid by the Advaitins, if an object capable of being apprehended is not so apprehended when all the conditions necessary for such a cognition are present, it is a proof that it does not exist.”

Thus, *anupalabdhi* which is regarded as a valid means of cognition by Advaita approves the non-existence of consciousness.

2.2.5 Absurdity of Pure Consciousness

While proving the impermanency and limitedness of consciousness, Rāmānuja was very much aware about the dichotomy that Advaita has made between phenomenal consciousness and transcendental or pure consciousness. But being a realist, Rāmānuja denies any such gulf between these two, as for him, experience allows us to confront only with experiences which are always delimited by time and related to some object. Experience is never experienced as devoid of any object or what Advaitins term as pure consciousness. Since consciousness is always realised in manifesting an object which in other way ensures its luminosity. Making his intention more clear Rāmānuja argues,

“So in the absence of objects, consciousness would turn out to be a pure myth or imagination, for consciousness, according to the Advaitins, is not an object of any other act of knowledge and, there being no objects revealing which it can manifest itself also, there will be no proof of its existence as pure consciousness”¹¹.

In the same way, it would be a mistake to contend that pure consciousness is experienced in the state of dreamless sleep where the ‘I’ and the object are absent. For, after waking up from deep sleep, no one remembers anything except the knowledge that he or she had a sound sleep. Indeed, what persists in deep sleep is the ‘I’ alone and neither the object nor the self-revealing consciousness. As consciousness in order to exist needs to be pervaded by the existence of object, which cannot be present in dreamless sleep. Thus, there is not a single state where the Advaitic notion of pure consciousness can be established. All we realize are the different successive states of consciousness invariably related to the intentional objects which are non-eternal in nature.

2.2.6 Contingency of Consciousness

From the foregoing discussion one could easily make out that Rāmānuja is hostile to admit any such notion of absolute consciousness. To believe that consciousness or awareness does not undergo any modification because it is beginningless seems unconvincing to him. For anything that has existence is bound to endure changes; thus, cannot be claimed to be absolute. The concept of *avidyā* or Nescience, for instance, which is conceived as beginningless by the Advaitins is also subject to modification and has a definite end after the achievement of right knowledge. In the similar way, consciousness which is regarded as beginningless and endless by the Advaitins, suffer changes due to its close proximity with the material body which is different from it. In other words, it is this association with material entity that confirms the contingency of consciousness. More importantly, consciousness being essentially qualified by contraction and expansion is condemned to be contingent; which, consequently, entails that Advaitic notion of pure consciousness is a myth.

2.2.7 Polarity among Self, Consciousness and Object

So far, we have examined Rāmānuja's position, it is clear that he is ardent to maintain a distinction between self and consciousness. It is surprising that Rāmānuja though is not ready to hold any ontological distinction between consciousness and object (of course, he does not admit any identity between the two) he is quite rigorous in keeping an important epistemological and metaphysical distinction between self and consciousness. Indeed, it must be noted that his adherence to the notion of intentionality to a large extent results from this mysterious distinction he maintains between self and consciousness.

According to Rāmānuja, the nature of consciousness is such that it is associated at the same time to both the subject and the object. Since knowledge itself cannot be the proof

for its own existence nor it can be known by an unconscious object; it thus needs a witness to be apprehended. The witness to which knowledge reveals itself to be known is the knowing self or ātman. Since, there cannot be an experience of pain or an experience of happiness or an experience of pot without any experiencer or a subject who undergoes all experiences. It is the self who lives through all these experiences. This experience or *anubhūti* is the attribute of the self. For instance, when one states “I know this is a wild cow”, it implies that the subject “I” has knowledge of a wild cow; and not that the subject itself is the knowledge of a wild cow. Again, this knowledge of the wild cow is not similar to the object ‘cow’. Likewise, consciousness being the knowledge differs from both the self and the object. Indeed, consciousness is more like a connecting knot between the knower and the object of knowledge. Expounding this mysterious nature of consciousness, Rāmānuja marks in *Brahma-sūtra*,

*“Anubhūtitvaṁ nāma vartamānadaśāyāṁ svasattayaiva svāśrayam
pratīprakāśamānatvaṁ svasattayaiva svaviśayasādhanatvaṁ vā”¹²*

Translation: the essential nature of consciousness consists in its manifesting itself at the present moment through its own being to its substrate (self), or in being instrumental in proving its own object by its own being¹³.

Consciousness, thus, in the philosophy of Rāmānuja, plays a dual role of being substance and attribute. It is an attribute of the self though it is not indistinguishable from the self. Self is conscious and not consciousness; self has the power to manifest itself alone but cannot reveal the object. Consciousness, on the other hand, reveals itself as well as the object of it, yet it is unable to know any of them. It is the self who recognises the object and consciousness through its attribute of consciousness.

It is to be noted that the distinction Rāmānuja has maintained between self and consciousness is based on his narrow understanding of self-luminosity and self-consciousness. While consciousness is regarded by him to be self-luminous it is not self-conscious, since it has only the power of manifesting itself and other. Whereas, the self is both a self-luminous substance and self-conscious subject; it is self-luminous as it is independent in manifesting itself without the aid of any other knowledge, yet the self is the substratum where consciousness inheres. It is also a subject, as it is simply not manifesting itself like knowledge rather it is the knower who cognizes the object. To be precise, self alone, for Rāmānuja, is the cognizing being, the knowing subject who comprehends the object only when the object is revealed by its attribute of consciousness.

The relation between self and consciousness is explained best by Rāmānuja with an illustration of lamp and light. As light being an attribute of flame illuminates the lamp and the objects around it. Similarly, consciousness being an attribute of the self illuminates itself and the objects around it to the self. As light is inseparable from flame, consciousness is inseparable from self. However, the light is also qualified by rays that are subject to contraction and expansion. Just as the way knowledge is qualified by its unique attributes of contraction and expansion. In terms of its relation to the self, consciousness is an attribute of the self, whereas, in terms of its relation to the qualities, like contraction and expansion, consciousness is the substance.

The peculiarity of this relation is that it is the consciousness which is the essence of self since self is intrinsically self-conscious; yet consciousness is called to be an attribute of the self as it is always found to be present in self and depends on it¹⁴. However, consciousness is not to be considered an ordinary attribute of self like the ‘redness’ of pot, rather an essential attribute of the self as it is always akin to the self just as the way

‘brightness’ is akin to sun. Indeed, consciousness is that permanent attribute of the self that belongs to it even in the state of liberation. As Rāmānuja writes,

*“Jñānasvarūpasyaiva tasya jñānāshrayatvam
maṇidyumaṇipradīpādivat”*¹⁵

Translation: consciousness (knowledge) is a unique adjunct of the self and is eternally associated with it¹⁶.

According to Rāmānuja, consciousness as the attribute of the self is known as *dharmabhūtajñāna*; whereas consciousness as the essence of the self is called *svarūpajñāna* or existential consciousness that is the ātman or knower. Certainly, the notion *dharmabhūtajñāna* has immense significance in the philosophy of Rāmānuja as it is this *dharmabhūtajñāna* through which the subject recognizes everything and that in reality upholds the relation between the subject and the object.

By way of conclusion, it can be argued that the notion of consciousness as *dharmabhūtajñāna* is pertinent to the understanding of intentionality thesis as found in phenomenology. Going beyond the longstanding idealistic account of knowledge that rules out any such pragmatic or epistemic interpretation of knowledge, the philosophy of Rāmānuja strives for the first time to objectify consciousness to formulate a constructive account of knowledge. Drawing a distinction between self and consciousness, he intends to reduce the so called gulf between consciousness and object. The essence of consciousness is admitted in its association with the object that it manifests before its own manifestation and not in holding any isolation from the object. Consciousness is no longer opposed to the object since the being of the object is the precondition for the revelation of consciousness.

Thus, the worth of Rāmānuja's account of consciousness as J. N. Mohanty claims is his attempt to circumvent the conflict Advaita is facing between reflexivity and intentionality. He has shown us a more appealing way to endorse the compatibility between self-luminosity and object-directed nature of consciousness. Moreover, Rāmānuja's intention to make intentionality or object-directedness prior to reflexivity indicates the close resemblance of his thought with Mohanty and other phenomenologists. It would not be wrong to claim here that Rāmānuja has anticipated all the great phenomenologists including Mohanty of 21st century. The thesis of intentionality was meticulously formulated by Rāmānuja around 12th century which is today associated with the names of Brentano, Husserl and Western phenomenologists.

However, as it is apparent from the examination of Rāmānuja's views on consciousness that he is not just opposed to Advaita rather also belongs to the group of Western phenomenologists. We shall therefore, consider his position more critically from antagonist's point of view in the subsequent chapters which will allow us to see the other aspect of his position and also will enable us to arrive at an unbiased position. So, right now, we move to the next section of this chapter where we would explicate the nature of consciousness as viewed by Madhva.

2.3 Nature of Consciousness: An Analysis from Madhvācārya's Perspective

Madhvācārya, also known as Anandatīrtha or Pūrṇaprajña is the proponent of the Dvaita or Dualism, belongs to the Vaiṣṇava tradition of Vedānta. Dvaita is one of the strongest opponent schools of the Advaita and has been developed mainly by criticising the philosophy of the latter, though at the same time it has drawn influence from the philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita to a large extent. Dvaita, as the name signifies has advocated difference in reality as opposed to unity. Like Rāmānuja, Madhva has recognised three

ultimate realities – God, Soul and Matter. However, unlike Rāmānuja, he has maintained inner differences among them, i.e., difference between God and soul, between God and matter, between soul and matter, between soul and soul, between matter and matter. Thus, it is evident that Dualism of Madhvācārya is not like Descartes’ mind-body dualism as we find in Western philosophy. Rather, Madhva has applied the theory of dualism in a more rigorous way than Descartes, in the sense that he has advocated differences even in the degree of acquiring knowledge and in the state of bliss among the liberated souls.

In the philosophy of Madhva, consciousness is the nature of both God and individual. God as the highest independent reality has absolute consciousness and pure bliss; *jiva* or the individual self being finite also possesses the quality of consciousness and bliss although not as equal as God. Each soul has a unique conscious experience of its own beside their essential characteristics that in fact differentiates each one from the other maintaining its sole individuality. Souls are not attributes of God rather they have real existence apart from matter and God. Referring the definition of soul in *Nyaya Sudha* of Jayatirtha as the best definition, B.N.K. Sharma asserts that soul is

“endowed with the triple properties of will, cognition and activity. The basis of individuality is to be found in the uniqueness of ‘personality’, which is a blending of consciousness, experience and works, in proportion to its intrinsic nature (*vogyata*). It is the core of all hedonistic, ethical and spiritual activities of man”¹⁷.

2.3.1 Self-luminosity as the *Viśeṣa* of Self

Essentially, the nature of self is said to be self-luminous or reflexive (*svaparakāśa*). According to Madhva, reflexivity or self-luminosity is the capacity of consciousness that enables it to reveal itself and to manifest all the objects of consciousness to the witness

‘I’. Reflexivity as the essential nature of the self is identical to the self, just as the way ‘light’ of the sun as the essence of it is indistinguishable from the sun.

Self-luminosity as he regards is the *viśeṣa* of the self and is not like the red colour of the pot that is an additional quality on the object rather *viśeṣa* here denotes the very basis that maintains the identity of the self. Redness as the additional attribute of the pot may change with time, which in no way makes any difference in understanding the nature of the pot. A blind person who is unaware of any colour can also recognise the pot without any idea of red or black by touching the object. However, the ‘light’ of sun is not the additional attribute like the ‘redness’ of the pot, since the absence of this ‘light’ prohibits the sun to be the sun. Likewise, self-luminosity constitutes the essence of the self in the sense that the absence of this reflexivity will prohibit the self from being what it is. The self is thus, self-related to its lustre, i.e., the potency of the self in itself. Self-luminosity is the essential nature of the self that differentiates it from other sentient and non-sentient objects. Therefore, consciousness, in the philosophy of Madhva, is not *nirviśeṣa* or attributeless, it is *saviśeṣa*.

It must be mentioned at this point that Madhva is not akin to Advaita in upholding the notion of luminosity; he does not consider luminosity to be identical with pure consciousness which denies any subject-object correlation. Precisely, to Madhva luminosity of self does not signify that self is independent of any other luminosity or it is free to reveal itself solely. Since self is not just consciousness or knowledge rather it is the knower of one’s own self and knower of other. More than it, in the process of revelation, self becomes an object of its own knowledge. Indeed, luminosity of the self is inexpressible in the absence of any objective reference or content¹⁸. Explaining Madhva’s assertion as developed in his essay *Tattvodyota Ṭīkā*, B. N. K. Sharma writes, ‘In the

absence of any objective or subject reference of luminosity, it would be just non-luminous'.¹⁹

Nevertheless, the position of Dvaitins regarding the notion of self-luminosity would be more definite in terms of their critique of Advaitic notion of self-luminosity.

2.3.2 Critique of Non-cognizability of Self

It is obvious that Dvaitins are unequivocally one with Advaita in upholding self-luminosity as the fundamental and a priori nature of consciousness; nevertheless, they deviate exactly in terms of their justifications of this notion which is brought about by their distinctive epistemological and metaphysical adherence. In the view of Dvaitins, the notion of self-luminosity as upheld by Advaitins intends to deny the objectivity of the self. As for Śāṅkara, the self as pure self-revealing consciousness can never be the object of knowledge that is totally opposed to its nature. Since, to consider the self as the object of cognition will take away the very essence of self, disregarding the fundamental opposition between subject and object. However, this view of Śāṅkara has been sternly demurred by the Dvaitins on some important grounds.

At the very outset, Madhva contends that to refuse the fact that consciousness is the object of knowledge is to refuse dialogue and all means of negotiation. The process of understanding other would be impossible unless consciousness of other becomes the object of one's own knowledge. Indeed, the Advaitins will fail to explain how inference, comparison and postulation would work if a person's previous self-conscious state cannot be the object of his present knowledge. It follows that Madhva has interpreted self-luminosity in a different way by regarding it a *viśeṣa* that empowers the self to be the subject and the object of its own cognition. Explicating the position of Madhva, B.N.K. Sharma says,

“The Ātman must be both a knowing subject (jnatṛ) and the object of his own knowledge. He should know himself and others and be known by them also.”²⁰

Objectivity, therefore, does not imply that only the unconscious material things or non-sentient beings can be the object of knowledge. Rather, it also allows the sentient being to know itself as an object which in no way undermines the essence of subjectivity.

Further, if the self cannot become the object of its own knowledge there would be no difference between self and the other non-sentient beings like stone that can never know itself. Revelation, in other words, inevitably ascertains the revelation of the object or else a ‘pot’ can also be regarded as the possessor of revelation and can be attributed as knowledge as the ‘pot’ too along with self fails to know its own being. Madhva therefore, ascribes the self as the doer, enjoyer and knower or *sākṣin*, which can know itself and other; thus, the nature of self-luminosity distinguishes the self from other material objects of the world.

Madhva goes on to argue that knowledge of one’s own existence as ‘I am’ or ‘I exist’ is the indubitable experience that confirms the self-luminosity of the self. This is neither the knowledge of the ego nor the function of the mind, which are in themselves the objective contents of consciousness. Drawing the reference of the Upaniṣads that confirms the knowership of the self, Madhva argues that the famous assertion of *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* -- ‘*Aham Brahmāsmi*’ not only declares the existence of the Supreme Brahman as the Highest Reality of the world but also justifies his omniscience. Since He knows everything and fully aware of His own existence that assures that Brahman is the knower of Himself and others – the fact that is completely ignored in Advaita. Furthermore, Vyāsa Tīrtha protests that if the essence of self-luminosity as held by Citsukha and other Advaitins is non-cognizable then Brahman being the pure self-luminous consciousness

would always remain unknown which is not only an unacceptable consequence but also will renounce the very significance of Advaita philosophy²¹. Hence, accusing the antagonists, Dvaitins claim that in the strict sense the notion of ‘self-luminosity’ does not belong to the Advaitic notion of self that denies knowledge of one’s own existence.

According to Vyāsa Tīrtha, both Brahman and self must also be the contents of at least some mental state²². Since, both self and Brahman being essentially self-luminous must reveal themselves in cognition or else there would be no way to establish their existence; consequently, there would be no meaning in attributing them with self-luminosity. Moreover, the very expression ‘*Satyam Jñānam Anantam Brahma*’ implies that Brahman is the object of verbal cognition. Even though, this cognition does not certify the knowledge of all infinite qualities of Brahman, yet this confirms the knowledge of His existence. Thus, it is evident that content of mental state is not identical to the form of the object of awareness. Since, the object of *vṛtti* may have qualities more than what the *vṛtti* apprehends. However, the object being a content of mental state simply testifies its own existence.

2.3.3 Critique of Immediacy of Self

Dvaitins seem reluctant to admit immediacy of the self-luminosity. Since, for them, unless there is a revelation of the self in ordinary experience, there would not be any revelation of pain and pleasure. For, the mental state is able to cognise things which have objective existence, like jug or pot. In the Vedānta epistemology, the mind goes out through the senses and posits the form of the object existing in the external world, thereby we cognize the object. However, feelings like pleasure or pain do not have any such objective form and thereby, could not be apprehended by the activity of the mental state or *vṛtti*. The self therefore, directly reveals the pleasure and the pain by its luminosity

without the intervention of *vṛtti*; which respectively affirms that the self-luminosity is not immediately intuited rather it is cognised in ordinary experience.

Moreover, the question Madhvites are strongly raising is how the non-cognizable consciousness can be apprehended immediately. In fact, to them, it is nonsensical rather inconsistent to admit the immediacy of revelation while the self is subject to non-cognizable²³. The distinguishing feature of immediacy in respect of revelation, as argued by them, is to exhibit some object. It is thereby, not understood how can there be the immediate revelation of consciousness or self without it being cognized. Vyāsa Tīrtha contends that if the self is to be recognised as immediate then it is imperative to hold that self is an object of immediate cognition, like pot. Since immediacy literally implies ‘that which can be the object of immediate knowledge’.²⁴ It seems that Advaitins are left with only two extreme poles; either they have to admit that self-luminosity is immediately realized then it is a mistake to call it non-cognizable or they have to adhere with non-cognizable nature of self which fades away the possibility of its immediacy.

Going a step further, Vyāsa-Tīrtha contends that the so called ‘immediacy’ is not exclusive to self or Brahman, as *yogins* and Gods, who are assigned with supernatural knowledge, may have immediate apprehension of virtue and vice. Even ordinarily, in case of our experience of virtue and vice there is an immediate inferential apprehension of them²⁵. It is therefore, not applicable to self alone. In other words, this characterization of self-luminosity as being immediately known is too wide in connotation. The Advaitins thus, have failed to elicit the proper meaning of self-luminosity.

Nevertheless, at this juncture it must be claimed that the above charges that Madhva and his followers have put forth seem to be based on some misinterpretations. As Advaitins did not fail to realize the connotation of self-luminosity rather they differ essentially from

the other Vedāntins on the meaning of self and luminosity. What Advaitins mean by consciousness is certainly not equivalent to object and therefore, it cannot be claimed to be revealed or manifested as the way an object is revealed. Revelation of self is undeniably an independent act of manifestation that is not associated with the revelation of any object nor the self can be reduced into the level of objectivity. Since, objectivity or cognizability says Madhusūdana, a latter Advaitin, is attributed to something that has a definite content and contains at least some describable characteristics²⁶, which the indiscernible self cannot logically possess. It is this non-cognizable and self-independent nature of self that confirms its corresponding immediacy.

It is observed that the battle between Advaita and Dvaita is not simply mechanical rather essential that is due to their initial presumptions based on which they seek to support their respective positions. Accordingly, there is a close similarity between Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita regarding the meaning and condition of reflexivity as both have renounced the basic tenets of Advaita. Hence, a methodical exposition of Advaitic position is necessary to get a better view of their perspective in contrast to their opponent, which indeed we would pursue in the subsequent chapters, for at this moment we will move on to the second part of this chapter.

PART – II

2.4 Nature of Consciousness: An Analysis from K.C. Bhattacharyya's Perspective

Indian philosophy is enriched by the deep insight and novelty of contemporary thinker K. C. Bhattacharyya. Overcoming the limitation of a commentator, K. C. Bhattacharyya has shown extreme acuteness in constructing a new system of thought of his own. He is a critical yet constructive thinker too. In the course of his interpretation, Bhattacharyya has employed the method of 'speculation' thoroughly in all his studies. However, what we find most interesting and unique in his writings is the distinctive phenomenological style which he perhaps for the first time has advanced in the era of contemporary Indian philosophy. Though, he was influenced by Indian classical thought and philosophy of Kant, he is really keen in keeping his own identity in the formulation and expansion of his own thought. Especially, his minute description of subjectivity is remarkable in present context. Though, in terms of historical progress, the advent of Bhattacharyya is prior to Husserl, yet the resemblance between them in terms of their methods to unfold the nature of consciousness is notable. Recognizing the harmony in their phenomenological understanding, J. N. Mohanty writes,

“It is almost surprising to note to what extent Professor Bhattacharyya's work 'The Subject as Freedom' approaches Husserl's *Ideas*, considering the fact that Professor Bhattacharyya's lectures were delivered in 1929, whereas the first English translation of Husserl's work appeared in 1931”²⁷

It is known to us that K.C. Bhattacharyya never intends to give any explicate account of intentionality like Husserl, yet his interpretation of consciousness or subjectivity is highly relevant and necessary for the on-going study. Particularly, the gradation of subjectivity which Bhattacharyya has proposed from the rudimentary level to the highest level is

imperative to examine. However, it needs to be clarified that there is no intention to describe the entire philosophical account of K.C. Bhattacharyya rather to explore the nature of consciousness or subjectivity in terms his view on ‘relatedness’ and ‘dissociation’ of the subjectivity; which will definitely enable us to appreciate the problem of intentionality and reflexivity from a new perspective. Although his account of consciousness or subjectivity is found to be developed in different pieces of his writings, it is developed systematically in his essay, *The Subject as Freedom*. Hence, to uphold and to examine his position, my focus would be specifically on this particular text along with his other significant works.

2.4.1 Alienation between Subject and Object

K. C. Bhattacharyya’s understanding of subjectivity often echoes his conviction on Advaitic notion of consciousness. Though, he has redefined the classical view into a new dimension by expounding several stages of subjective expression. The subjectivity has not been defined by him as pure consciousness in dissociation from objectivity rather in different stages of manifestation it has been found to be blended with objectivity. Hence, a comprehensive account of subjectivity in Bhattacharyya’s philosophy is invariably hooked up with the notion of objectivity. An explanation of objectivity for this reason is not just necessary in fact, prior to the understanding of subjectivity. It can be said that according to K.C. Bhattacharyya, a better apprehension of subjectivity initially derives from the understanding of the object or what it is not. Since, often a direct approach fails in yielding the true essence of the subject, particularly when the latter is distinct from any other known entity. Precisely, subjectivity is regarded by means of what is non-objective or what is not meant. Clarifying his standpoint, K. C. Bhattacharyya in the very beginning of his essay *The Subject as Freedom* writes,

“The ‘object’ is what is meant by the ‘subject, and the subject is other than the object. The subject cannot, therefore, be a meant entity, yet it cannot be denied that there is some awareness of the subject. This awareness must then be something other than meaning-awareness.”²⁸

It is to be noted that even if the primary concern of Bhattacharyya is to explore the nature of subjectivity he started with expounding what is meant to be an object. Since the so called object is the only competent counterpart of the subject. The object is therefore, what is meant by the subject, it is the meaning-awareness that the speaker asserts and the corresponding hearer understands. The object being a *meaning* content is common in nature. Neither the speaker nor the hearer is the part of the *meaning*, yet they both comprehend the same entity. When for communicating the meaning of an object the speaker indicates it by ‘this’, it is not only understood by the hearer but he too is able to denote the same meaning by using ‘this’. It is because the meant object is universal to all. While the term ‘I’ is used universally by any speaker to represent his or her self, ‘I’ has different reference to the hearer than to the speaker. The term ‘I’, says Bhattacharyya, as *used* has a uniquely singular reference, but as *understood* it is general²⁹. To phrase in different words, subjectivity being represented by the term ‘I’ does not have meaning content like object. Though in that case it cannot be said to be a meaningless reference for it will definitely lead us in misappropriating the meaning of subject. By subjectivity, thus, K. C. Bhattacharyya intends what is being felt but not a known content³⁰. Contradicting the prevalent Kantian view that ‘the self is thinkable though not knowable’, K. C. Bhattacharyya admits that the self or subject is not literally thinkable though it is knowable. Since, the subject cannot be a meant content like the object. Opposed to the object, subject is known in itself without being related to the former. It has some awareness other than the meaning-awareness. Subject is therefore, said to be free from

the object with which it is found to be related ordinarily. Emphasizing the certainty of subject over the object, Bhattacharyya writes,

“The subject understood as the unique speaker of ‘I’ and the object that is meant as distinct from the subject are the two things that are known. But the object is not known with the same assurance as the subject”³¹.

Undeniably the certainty of subjectivity lies in its free expression and uniqueness that is understood in its function of ‘knowing’ as the self-evidencing reality of the subject itself³². It is the reality which is to be believed but not known as a fact. This knowing function of the subject, according to him, is the free reference of the subject to the object. Though, in its being related to the object, subject is not lost in the objectivity. As the subject being not a meant content is beyond any assertion or denial rather is only the awareness — the felt content, whereas, the object being the meant content is always subject to doubt and thereby, cannot be claimed to be known with the same assurance as the subject.

The distinction between the subject and the object would be more clear in terms of the analysis of the terms ‘I’ and ‘this’— which respectively signify the subject and the object. It is quite interesting that even if the same speaker uses the terms ‘I’ and ‘this’ to express something, both these symbols convey two different senses to the listener. When the speaker applies the symbol ‘this’, it denotes the same individual object both to the speaker and the hearer. Whereas, the same speaker when applies the term ‘I’, it indicates speaker’s ownself and not the hearer; similarly, if the hearer too uses the word ‘I’, the latter implies it to mean herself or himself and not the former. It is the uniqueness of the term ‘I’ that it stands only for the subject who carries it and not for the *meaning*. Illustrating this point, Basant Kumar Lal writes,

“The word ‘this’ can symbolise the object shows that the object has a generality about it, but the subject as expressed by the word ‘I’ has a uniqueness because it is neither singular nor general, or in a sense, both singular and general. It is general because everybody can use it, it is singular because everybody uses it for himself only”³³.

It is evident from the above statements that the opposition between ‘I’ and ‘this’ results from the inherent distinction between subject and object. When the speaker says ‘this’ to indicate the object-consciousness, what is being understood by the hearer is only the ‘object’, the meaning content. While in case of communicating the self-consciousness or ‘I’ what is being understood by the hearer is not the bare ‘self’ or meaning, but the subject who is expressing itself and who is free. It is something that the other can never intend even if he were to say it. Since the subject who is carrying the term ‘I’ is transcending and expressing itself and not simply being expressed. It is thereby, K.C. Bhattacharyya asserts, ‘what then is meant and is expressible as this is not what is conveyed by the word I’.³⁴

It rather seems totally paradoxical to note that the object being limited in nature cannot be transformed into the subject by any means; yet the subject being always free cannot be delimited even after it is pronounced as the object. In other words, even if *I* is objectified or is referred to as ‘this’ or ‘that’ like an object, subject is always distinct from the latter. Moreover, the peculiarity of the subject is that it always gets the freedom to refer itself as *I* even if it is indicated by the words as *you* or *he* or *she*. However, while Bhattacharyya is maintaining the gulf between the subject and the object throughout his analysis, he is not unaware of the illusive correlation between the two. Admitting the identity between the *I* and the body at the very preliminary level of subjectivity, he comes to state that there is no room for the object to unite with the *I*; yet the *I* is implicitly identified with the body, which is a mere object to other. It is through this body that we first apprehend ourselves

as the subjects and also consider other individual as the subject. The body is distinct like other object from the *I*, yet it is one with the subject when it is compared with other entity. Likewise, says Bhattacharyya, ‘I am somehow conscious of an identity between another person and his body, conscious of them as distinct and yet one’.³⁵

However, this seeming relation between the *I* and *body* is the initial point of knowing the subjectivity that finally yields in dissociating the two from each other. The body as the object cannot know itself without relating to the subject; though, the subject is always known in itself without being related to the object. At the best, it can be said that the subject is one that is found to be dissociated from the object with which in other way it is said to be identified. This aspect of subject comprises its freedom. Thus, Bhattacharyya writes,

“.....the freedom of the subject to relate to object without getting related to it, which is believed to be more certain than the object but is not known”³⁶.

Further, explicating the idea, Gopinath Bhattacharyya states,

“The freedom of the subject lies precisely in the fact that it is known by itself and that in relating to the object, it does not get related to the latter”³⁷.

It must be stated at this point that regarding the act of ‘knowing’ of the subject Bhattacharyya has slightly diverse view. The ‘knowing’ of the subject to him is not a passive state as Śāṅkara upholds. Rather, it is a function of some sort. As to know is to act in different way. Though, it is an activity which is neither physical nor psychic. It is, according to Gopinath Bhattacharyya, is *sui generis*, it is activity only in a symbolical sense³⁸.

The above discussion on the conflicting nature between the subject and the object gives away a light to the problem of subjectivity. Particularly, the notion of freedom as advocated by Bhattacharyya impugns the thesis of intentionality as upheld by Husserl. Unlike any Western phenomenologist, it is for the first time Bhattacharyya has shown us that the correlation between the subject and the object does not simply presuppose the intending subject that is always found to be directed towards the object rather it endorses the perpetual freedom of the subject that keeps on expressing itself in all stages of its association with the *meant*. Since, to Bhattacharyya, the modes of relating are at the same time the modes of freeing from objectivity³⁹. However, this revelation of subjectivity or what K.C. Bhattacharyya calls freedom of the subject would be more explicate in terms of his analysis of three stages of subjectivity – bodily subjectivity, psychic subjectivity and spiritual subjectivity. As Bhattacharyya says, ‘This cult of the subject, as it might be called, takes various forms but they all involve a feeling of dissociation of the subject from the object, an awareness of the subject as what the object is not’.⁴⁰ Hence, a detailed examination of these different stages of subjectivity would prove the freedom of subjectivity manifesting in different forms of its being.

It must be mentioned at this point that for Bhattacharyya, the nature of this freedom that continues through these different consecutive steps of subjectivity is spiritual and progressive. It is spiritual not in the sense of being a celestial or otherworldly quest rather this spiritual progress, according to him, implies the awareness of the subject as free. It is a kind of activity of the subject towards itself for realizing its own deepest being distinct from objectivity. It is astounding that Bhattacharyya never regarded this task of describing the different stages of subjectivity a phenomenological task, yet like a staunch phenomenologist, he gives a detailed account of the nature of subject or consciousness the way it is given to itself. The distinction lies at the point that while to Husserl, the

mode of relating to the objectivity or what he calls intentionality is the knot that connects consciousness to the objective world; to Bhattacharyya, it is the same process of relating to the object yields in freeing consciousness from the latter. However, this would be more obvious in course of our analysis of these three stages and sub-stages of subjectivity as described by Bhattacharyya.

2.4.2 Bodily Subjectivity

Reappraising the customary view of Classical Vedānta, Bhattacharyya argues for a form of subjectivity that is comprised of bodily-consciousness. The first state of freedom Bhattacharyya notes is the awareness of bodily subjectivity as distinct from the world of object. The body of the onlooker has unique singularity in contrast to external object. The external entity tends to be an object in course of its place in space that is relative to the percipient's body. Yet, perceiver's 'own body is uniquely different from the other perceived objects and has no place in the objective world that he conceives to be presentable to him as a solipsistic observer'⁴¹. In other words, the percipient's own body is not founded as the way the object of his perception is constituted.

The body as the incarnation of the subjectivity is not a mere confinement that limits the autonomous existence of consciousness rather it is the means to realize freedom at the very periphery level. It is the awareness through body that enables us at first to actualize our freedom over the external objects. The perceived object is therefore, not akin to the perceived body that belongs to the subject. Though like external objects the body appears corporeal, yet contrary to them, the body enjoys awareness of its own existence as well as confirms the existence of other. It is through this sensual body that we know, we appeal and interact to the objective world outside. The body thus, assures its own freedom without depending on them. For instance, in recognising the book on the table, I also

reassure my own body awareness that perceives the book there and which is independent of the book known. At this level of awareness the subjectivity relates itself with other physical objects, yet it is on account of this bodily awareness the subject comes to realize its uniqueness from the objectivity of the world. The body-subject inherently contains a sense of dissociation from the object; according to Bhattacharyya, this awareness of detachment is called freedom of the subject. However, this freedom of the bodily subjectivity is the pre-condition for the realization of absolute freedom.

We must not here seek to equate Bhattacharyya's standpoint with the materialistic account of subjectivity that considers body alone as the subject; since the latter fails in this process to affirm the unique singularity of the body. In fact, an objectivistic account of body as advocated by materialist is insufficient to bring to light the uniqueness of the body-subject, which 'is a kind of fusion of subject and body'.⁴² It is a body in terms of being a corporeal entity that communicates with the physical world outside, but it is a subject too that is aware of its own freedom of not being a determined entity. Precisely, the body-subject is not to be defined simply as a perceived object as it is empirically thought of. Since, it has also an awareness of dissociation from the object that essentially consists its being.

However, our understanding of freedom of the bodily subject would become more explicit in terms of the distinction that Bhattacharyya has shown in this context, between the perceived body and the felt body. The perceived body and felt body, as Bhattacharyya argues, are the two aspects of body-consciousness which are basically one; yet can be apprehended distinctively. The felt body is the bodily feeling which is not seen like perceived body, yet one is immediately aware of it from within. Unlike any physical object, this feeling is a psychic fact, the interior, from which the perceived body is different. Of course, this bodily feeling cannot be experienced in the absence of the

perceived body; howbeit, the interiority of the felt body is neither perceived nor can it be imagined to be perceived from the outside. To be precise, the felt body is one with the perceived body, though in its way of appearance as inward, it is more essential expression of subjective freedom. To quote Bhattacharyya,

“The facthood of the subjective is constituted by the feeling of detachment or freedom. The first hint of this freedom is reached in the feeling of the body....When the perceived body is distinguished from the felt body, the exterior from the interior, we have an explicit feeling of distinction, detachment or freedom from the perceived object...”⁴³

Hence, to Bhattacharyya, it is not any symmetry between the perceived body and object nor any relatedness to the object that can define subjectivity. Rather, it is only the distinction from the object that imparts the way to apprehend the subjectivity. And, this becomes obvious by the experience of the felt body that confirms the freedom of the subject. Going a step further, Bhattacharyya states that it is the awareness of the felt body, which is in fact, the awareness of *me* or *myself* rather than mine, gives rise to the freedom of the bodily subjectivity.

More than it, the awareness of the bodily subject, as Bhattacharyya considers, incorporates the awareness of absence too. According to Bhattacharyya, the absence is known not through perception but by means of conscious non-perception, which indeed later Advaitins call a method of *anuplabdhi* or non-apprehension. Different from the perceived body where we refer to some perceived object, the awareness of the negation or absence refers to an unperceived particular, not known through sense perception. While perceiving a bottle on the table we directly become aware about the object, but in case of perception of negation, we do not see the absent object rather the bare locus where the object was present before, though we immediately become conscious too about

the non-existence of the object. It is therefore, not a cognition through perceived body rather an act of imagination of the previously present object which the body cannot contact directly due to its limitation. It is an act of imagining something absent in the perception of something present. What Bhattacharyya intends to point in this context is that while awareness of absence is not known by the perceived body as it is not present in the way the perceived object is found in the external space; ‘but it is not dissociated from the felt body’.⁴⁴ Since, the absent object is not a physical thing to be perceived by the body rather is imaginatively perceived; whereas the conscious non-perception is related with the felt body, which is definitely not detached from the embodied subject. Thus, this awareness of absence points us to the higher level of subjectivity than the felt body as we become aware of something neither spatial nor concrete but of something Bhattacharyya calls psychic fact. It is a higher level of consciousness as it has empowered the subject to go beyond the physical perception to the realm of thought and imagination. In fact, Bhattacharyya holds that it points to a highest level of freedom of bodily subjectivity.

It is found thereby, that the very first and basic level of freedom follows from the realization of the subjectivity at the bodily level; though beyond this perceived body the subject in its attainment of freedom unities with the felt body, which is distinct yet related with the perceived body. More than it, the knowledge of negation permits us to transcend even the felt body and directs to the realm of the psychic fact. Bhattacharyya expresses this view as follows,

“Conscious non-perception then is a transitional stage between body-feeling and imagination with which psychic fact begins...the first clear hint of the subjective fact would be realized in the knowledge of absence through conscious non-perception”⁴⁵.

2.4.3 Psychic Subjectivity

Psychic subjectivity appears when the subject dissociates itself from the objective fact of absence and identifies itself with psychic consciousness. Faraway from the bodily awareness, the subjectivity of this stage is cognitive. At this stage, the subject comes to identify itself neither with the perceived body nor felt body nor even with conscious non-perception, rather with image and thought— which signifies a higher dimension of subjective freedom.

Bhattacharyya claims that unlike the bodily subjectivity, the awareness of image has no position whatsoever. In fact, absence too is known as present or *now*, while the image is not known as *now*⁴⁶. To phrase it explicitly, the awareness of image has neither space-position nor it has any time-position; it is thus free from the objectivity of the body-subject. When one has an image of a mountain, for instance, one does not locate it any space. Since, it is beyond any spatial or temporal determination. It is said to be a kind of quasi-object. In order to imagine an object, it is not necessary to know it as absent now; as it can be imagined when it is perceptible. Likewise, we can also imagine it when it is known to be absent. It implies that the very image at this stage is dissociated from the object which is present and even from present absence but not from absent. Image therefore, is said to be appeared with objective form, but it is not with objective position.

Now, the next level of psychic subjectivity is what Bhattacharyya calls ‘thought’, a stage of higher subjective freedom from ‘image’. The uniqueness of thought is that it is still about the object, yet it is definite and unobjective. While the image even if lacks space-position but it still appears spatial in form and temporal as forming or becoming and as such implies a belief in its possible objectivity⁴⁷. Thought, on the other hand, completely lacks objectivity and thereby, the degree of freedom is higher than image. Here, drawing

a distinction between pictorial thought and non-pictorial thought, Bhattacharyya claims while the former is quasi-objective, the latter is clearly apart from the object, even the quasi-objectivity is drooped⁴⁸. Referring to universals, thought is far distant from object, bodily subject and image. However, it must be noted that even if thought is absolutely free from spatial or temporal objectivity and therefore, is eternal; it is about object and therefore, has presentational character. To phrase it different way, like body-subject and image, thought is intentional too. As it always has a content of which it is conscious. And hence, thought too cannot be regarded as pure subjectivity. Thought being a presentation is not a free subjectivity. “Thought”, says Bhattacharyya, “is objective and objective in its very dissociation from objectivity”⁴⁹. Elucidating the idea Basant Kumar posits,

“...thought invariably maintains a distinction between ‘content’ and ‘consciousness’.

The truly subjective is above this distinction. It is both ‘the content of its consciousness’ and ‘the consciousness of its content’”⁵⁰.

Hence, the objectivity of psychic stage turns our focus to the final stage of subjectivity.

2.4.4 Spiritual Subjectivity

The final and absolute stage of subjectivity is spiritual subjectivity. It is a stage where subject is not just free from the objectivity of preceding stages rather it realizes freedom. Subject at this stage enjoys positive freedom as it denies any conscious reference to the object even in the way of dissociation from it⁵¹. The realm of spirituality is characterized by feeling and introspection. Of course, the feeling of this spiritual subject is not like the bodily feeling that is associated with the embodied subject rather the feeling of this spiritual subject is clearly unobjective. It is said to be a state of pure subjectivity. While in case of awareness of thought, there is an essential duality between ‘content’ and ‘consciousness’; the awareness of feeling does not suffer from any such duality between

the two. Since, the unthought or unmeant content of feeling seems distinct in itself but not as distinct from feeling.⁵² The awareness of feeling is detached from meaning. It is, writes Bhattacharyya, the awareness of a content as *unmeant*.⁵³ Bhattacharyya here makes a distinction between higher and lower stages of feeling in terms of their relation to thought. In the lower stage there is freedom from actual thought, which is the feeling of self-being; the higher stage, on the other hand, denotes freedom from possible thought, which is one of self-negation. This is also characterised as *feeling of feeling*. However, this *feeling of feeling* is not the highest awareness as this awareness is not entirely detached from felt being and therefore, the thrust for pure freedom leads the subject to the realm of introspection transcending the awareness of feeling.

Introspection at this stage does not mean any ordinary or psychological introspection as it does not entail any distinction from object. It is introspection in the sense of being a pure knowing function. In other words, the function of introspection, according to Bhattacharyya, is identified with self or *I* which is distinct both from thinking and feeling. It is indeed, the awareness of 'I', or the 'I-function'; which can be called neither unmeant nor meant. As by *I*, we neither understand any content nor it is something meaningless; however, it has a meaning-function though it is itself not a meaning. It is the I-awareness of the subject through the symbol 'I' but not through the meaning of the 'I'. It is simply can be called as the expression of introspection.

However, this introspective self cannot be called pure or absolute freedom as it is still an I-awareness even though it is free from both meaning-content and felt content. Hence, to realise this highest freedom even this I-awareness has to be suspended. Subject in this way transcends even its individuality by going beyond introspection and arrives at the state of absolute freedom where there remains nothing to contradict. As it is a state devoid of any content and free from any duality, a state of silent *I*, which is self-enjoying.

To be precise, the subject as freedom, according to Bhattacharyya, is free from any implicational dualism between content and consciousness. This does not mean any identity between content and consciousness, since what remains at this stage is nothing but consciousness alone.

2.5 Some Observations

It follows from the above discussion that K. C. Bhattacharyya is not just an acute observer but a thoroughgoing phenomenologist in the domain of contemporary Indian philosophy. Starting from the bodily subjectivity to spiritual subjectivity, what he has portrayed is not a mere task of imagination rather a systematic revelation of the conscious experience as it is given to itself. Nevertheless, the descriptive account of subjectivity as presented by K. C. Bhattacharyya holds close symmetry with Husserlian approach, though there is essential divergence regarding their consequential perspectives. In the tune of Husserl, Bhattacharyya concedes that the very 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. For Bhattacharyya, 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 has shown 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 physical and psychic aspects which it invariably transcends. It is thus, admitted that the persistent freedom of subjectivity is an obvious proof for the unobjectivity of the subject, which only appears intentional in terms of its initial relatedness to the perceived objects. It is

however, 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 or subjectivity. 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 in it.

It is observed that the understanding of K. C. Bhattacharyya concerning the notions of consciousness and intentionality is immensely distinct from the classical Vedāntins' understanding, particularly whom I have referred in the first half of this chapter. Even if they approve the autonomous being of consciousness by characterizing it self-luminous, there is an obvious attempt throughout to set the limits of its autonomy as they never considered its absolute detachment from the object. Whereas, K. C. Bhattacharyya though has admitted the primary manifestation of consciousness in terms of bodily awareness, he has never ruled out its potency to be free. By a methodical analysis of different states he has shown us that it is the essence of consciousness to be luminous or free at each state of its relatedness to the world objects. It is the uniqueness of consciousness that it persists ceaselessly even if it gets away from all associations. This, in a different way proves the unconditional being of reflexivity. Thus, Mohanty writes,

“...for phenomenology in general, consciousness is intentional; being directed towards an other is constitutive of subjectivity; whereas for K. C. Bhattacharyya it is just the reverse; consciousness is, so far as actuality is concerned, intentional, but it also shows, at every stage, even at the stage of bodily subjectivity, a felt freedom from the object, so that a completely non-intentional consciousness is to be recognised as a possibility to be achieved..”⁵⁴

Notes and References

-
- ¹ Jacobs, A. (2007), *The Principle Upanishads*, London: Watkins Publishing, p. 1
- ² Aurobindo, Sri, (2016), *The Upanishads*, EBook, Kolkata: Edition Next, p.1
- ³ Dasgupta, S. N. (1975), *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Vol. III p.165
- ⁴ Radhakrishnan, S.(2011), *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, , p. 635
- ⁵ Ibid., p.635
- ⁶Rāmānuja, (2012), *Brahman-Sūtras: Śrī-Bhāṣya*, (Translated by Swami Viresswarananda and Swami Adidevananda), Kolkata: Advaita Ashram, 1.1.1
- ⁷ Mohanty, J.N. (1978), *Lectures on Consciousness and Interpretation*, (Ed. with an introduction by Tara Chattarjee), New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p.33
- ⁸Rāmānuja, (2012), *Brahman-Sūtras Śrī-Bhāṣya*, (Translated by Swami Viresswarananda and Swami Adidevananda), Kolkata: Advaita Ashram, 1.1.1.
- ⁹ Ibid., 1.1.1.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 1.1.1.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 1.1.1.
- ¹²Rāmānuja,(2012), *Brahman-Sūtras Śrī-Bhāṣya*, (Translated by Swami Viresswarananda and Swami Adidevananda), Kolkata: Advaita Ashram,1. 1. 1
- ¹³ Radhakrishnan, S. (2011), *Indian Philosophy*, (with an introduction by J.N.Mohanty), New Delhi: Oxford University Press, Vol. II., p. 637
- ¹⁴Rāmānuja,(2012), *Brahman-Sūtras Śrī-Bhāṣya*, (Translated by Swami Viresswarananda and Swami Adidevananda), Kolkata: Advaita Ashram,1.1.1. (p. 35)

¹⁵Rāmānuja,(2012), *Brahman-Sūtras Śrī-Bhāṣya*, (Translated by Swami Viresswarananda and Swami Adidevananda), Kolkata: Advaita Ashram, p. 61

¹⁶ Sharma, C. D. (1960), *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., p. 344

¹⁷ Sharma, B.N.K. (2002), *Philosophy of Shri Madhvacarya*, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., p. 253

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 266

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 266

²⁰ Ibid.,p. 264

²¹ Narain, K. (1986), *A Critique of Mādhyā Refutation of the Śāṅkara School of Vedānta*, 2nd Edit. New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., p. 79

²² Dasgupta, S. N. (1922), *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd. , Vol. IV p. 215

²³ Narain, K. (1986), *A Critique of Mādhyā Refutation of the Śāṅkara School of Vedānta*, 2nd Edit. New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd.,p. 79

²⁴ Dasgupta, S. N. (1922), *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd. , Vol. IV p. 312

²⁵ Ibid. p. 312

²⁶ Ibid. p. 216-217

²⁷ Mohanty, J.N.(1993), *Essays on Indian Philosophy*, (Ed. with an introduction by Purushottama Bilimoria), New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 255

²⁸ Bhattacharyya, K. C.(1983), *Studies in Philosophy*, (Ed. by Gopinath Bhattacharyya), Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Vols. I & II, p. 367

²⁹ Ibid., p. 367

³⁰ Ibid., p. 367

-
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 367
- ³² Ibid., p. 369
- ³³ Lal, B. K. (1978), *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., p. 242
- ³⁴ Bhattacharyya, K. C.(1983), *Studies in Philosophy*, (Ed. by Gopinath Bhattacharyya), Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Vols. I & II,P. 382
- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 383
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 388
- ³⁷ Ibid., P. xxx
- ³⁸ Ibid., p. xxx
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 394
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 394
- ⁴¹ Ibid., p. 372
- ⁴² Garfield, Jay, *Solving Kant's Problem: KC Bhattacharyya on Self-Knowledge*, The National University of Singapore, p.14. Available at: <https://jaygarfield.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/kcb-on-self-knowledge1.pdf>
- ⁴³ Bhattacharyya, K. C. (1983), *Studies in Philosophy*, (Ed. by Gopinath Bhattacharyya), Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Vols. I & II, p. 416
- ⁴⁴ Garfield, Jay, *Solving Kant's Problem: KC Bhattacharyya on Self-Knowledge*, The National University of Singapore, p. 21
- ⁴⁵ Bhattacharyya, K.C. (1983), *Studies in Philosophy*, (Ed. by Gopinath Bhattacharyya), Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Vols. I & II, p. 422 - 423
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 426
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 432
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 432

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 433

⁵⁰ Lal, B. K. (1978), *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., p. 250

⁵¹ P. p. 435

⁵² Bhattacharyya, K. C.(1983), *Studies in Philosophy*, (Ed. by Gopinath Bhattacharyya), Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Vols. I & II, p. 377

⁵³ P. 377

⁵⁴ Mohanty, J. N. (1993), *Essays on Indian Philosophy*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 295