

CHAPTER III

Reflexivity of Consciousness in the Philosophy of Śaṅkara and His Followers

3.1 Introduction

The history of mankind is the history of their curiosity, authenticity and acute cognizance. Human beings throughout the history have been striving to unfold the mysteries of life and world. And therefore, today even the most baffling truth of life has left itself unlocked in front of the profound insight of mankind. Needless to say, along with the world Indian seers and intellectuals have also enriched human civilization by answering and resolving several unsolved riddles of life. In all aspects of our existence these scholars have intensified the treasury of human wisdom. One such great saint and scholar who has not only enlightened the thought of his natives but even the entire civilization of mankind abundantly is Śaṅkarācārya, whose excellence exceeds any amount of appreciation. It is worthy to quote the gracious words of Prof. R. Balasubramanina in this context,

“There is no one to be compared with him before or after his advent. He is at once a hard-core traditionalist and an amazing radical, a fascinating idealist and a down-to-earth realist, a great mystic and a constructive religious reformer, an uncompromising intellectual and an ardent devotee.”¹

The *Prasthāna-traya*, which is the quintessence of Hindu religion, ethos and philosophy, is best represented in the masterly verses of Śaṅkara. However, Śaṅkara’s work is not confined only in interpreting the ideas and verses of the triple texts rather his effort to reveal the highest message of the Upaniṣads and to advocate the same idea throughout his entire works is an important contribution to Indian philosophy. He is not like an ordinary commentator whose goal is the accomplishment of textual interpretation and straight elucidation but a radical thinker and reformer who has made history through fine and rigorous speculation. Keeping in view the philosophical essence of the Vedas he has

uplifted the non-dualistic and transcendental thought of the Upaniṣads at the highest peak, which has been quenching the thirst of diverse seekers over the century. It is true that Advaita is as old as the Vedas yet its formal development and growth in a comprehensive form can be noticed only in Śaṅkara's Bhāṣya. Śaṅkara didn't stop by systematizing the verses of the triple texts rather reinvigorated the essence of non-dualism through strong logical argumentation and by his deep penetration. Since Upaniṣads do not convey the same tune and same expression always and thereby continue to affirm dualism, non-dualism, qualified dualism and all at the same time. However, the distinctiveness of Śaṅkara consists in reconciling all these apparently conflicting views and in unfolding what is underlying. He has made us aware about the significance of a tradition that can please at a time the philosophical, religious, moral and mystical urge of human beings better than any other policy or system existing in the sphere of earth.

Strictly, Śaṅkara cannot be regarded as the pioneer of Advaita tradition for two reasons. First, as it is already mentioned that the Advaita philosophy is as old as the Vedas and accordingly it is as eternal as the Vedas. And secondly, the formulation of Advaitic thought was done by Gauḍapāda in his *Māṇḍūkya-Kārikā*, Bādarāyaṇa in his *Vedānta-Sūtra*, Bhartṛhari in his *Vākyapadīya* and Maṇḍana Miśra in his *Brahma-Siddhi* even before the advent of Śaṅkara.² Among these four the first two are the most significant pre-Śaṅkara Advaita texts; indeed, *Brahma-Sūtra* of Bādarāyaṇa is one of the triple text on which Śaṅkara wrote his historic commentary and thereby is considered as the fundamental basis of the Advaita. According to one account, Pre-Śaṅkara Advaita owes its origin to *Māṇḍūkya-Kārikā* of Gauḍapāda (7th-8th Century A.D.) which represents the historical beginning and philosophical finality of the Advaita Vedānta.³ However, through his extensive and intense commentary on *prasthāna-traya* Śaṅkara has

rationalized the base of Advaita after Gauḍapāda, which all subsequent Advaita scholars have accepted as the ultimate authority. Of course, there are divergent views among these later Advaitins regarding Śaṅkara's real intention or approach on many epistemological, metaphysical and axiological issues, yet they never disregarded or questioned the truthfulness and authenticity of *Śaṅkara Bhāṣya*.

The list of Śaṅkara's creations is extensive and monumental. The major works of Śaṅkara are said to be his commentaries on the Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavad-Gītā* and the *Brahma-sūtra*. Śaṅkara wrote commentaries on all major Upaniṣads, namely – the *Chāndogya*, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, the *Taittirīya*, the *Aitareya*, the *Śvetāśvatara*, the *Kena*, the *Kaṭha*, the *Īśa*, the *Praśna*, the *Muṇḍaka* and the *Māṇḍūkya*. As stated by Radhakrishnan, according to some account Śaṅkara has also written commentaries on the *Atharvaśikhā*, *Atharvaśiras* and *Nṛsimhatāpanīya Upaniṣads*.⁴ He has composed commentaries on Gauḍapāda's *Māṇḍūkya-Kārikā* and *Viṣṇusahasranāma*. However, beside these momentous commentaries, *Upadeśasāhasrī*, *Ātma-bodha* and *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi* are considered as his exclusive independent works. He is even known for making several hymns in praise of God and Goddess, like -- *Dakṣiṇāmūrti Stotra*, *Harimūḍe Stotra*, *Ānandalaharī* and *Saundaryalaharī* etc.⁵ R. Balasubramanian remarks that many modern scholars have expressed aversion to accept authorship of Śaṅkara on some of the works which are conventionally referred to him. Even so, all agree that Śaṅkara's commentaries on *Prasthāna-traya* are the very fundamentals of Advaita.

Needless to say, the post-Śaṅkara era of Advaita is not less persuasive. The eminence of Advaita has not disappeared after Śaṅkara since the latter Advaitins' efforts are also noteworthy in establishing the authenticity of Advaita. The task of the philosopher as rightly pointed out by T.M.P. Mahadevan, is unlike the believer in a faith who does not require much argumentation to hold the heart on the unseen. But a philosopher is not a

blind adherent of a belief rather seeks to establish the truth by means of methodical argumentation and logical consistency. The dialectics of later Advaita thinkers are exclusive in their attempt to defend the tenets of Advaita from the opponents' charges. Indeed, the post-Śaṅkara works are vital in clarifying and elaborating the epistemological, metaphysical and axiological intricacies. Though in terms of their detailed analysis we often come across differences in their perspectives due to which several sub-schools have emerged in the post-Śaṅkara era but those differences are not contradictions rather these distinctive perspectives are usually found to be complementary to each other. As we by no means have seen them to violate the basic principles of Advaita nor they challenge its base embedded by Śaṅkara and his predecessors on the eternal authority of the Vedas.

Post-Śaṅkara literature in Advaita is endless and to prepare any ample account of that is not an easy task. Nevertheless, some of the notable works that I am about to consult for present chapter and even for the entire study in general need to be specified. The two well-known sub-schools of Advaita, namely, Vivaraṇa and Bhāmatī are abundant in their literature. While Vivaraṇa school owes its origin to Padmapāda's *Pañca-pādikā*, Vācaspati Miśra is the advocate of *Bhāmatī*, a commentary on the *Śaṅkara Bhāṣya*. Prakāśātman's *Pañcapādikāvivaraṇa* is a commentary on *Pañca-pādikā*, where from the school got its title. Further, Vidyāraṇya's (also known as Mādhava) *Vivaraṇapramēyasaṅgraha*, *Pañcadaśī* have enormous value and which also belong to Vivaraṇa tradition. Indeed, *Naiṣkarmya-sidhi* of Sureśvara, *Iṣṭa-siddhi* of Vimuktātman (A.D. 1050), *Nyāya-makaranda* of Ānandabodha (A.D. 1050), *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādyā* of ŚrīHarṣa (A.D. 1190), Citsukha's *Tattavapradīpikā*, *Advaitasiddhi* of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī (16th century), Dharmarāja's *Vedānta-paribhāṣa* are some of the major works of post-Śaṅkara period. The list does not end here yet these are some of the remarkable

works that reveal the ingenuity of these scholars while keeping harmony with the original thesis. As this chapter of my thesis particularly deals with the fundamental notion of Advaita, I have referred these later Advaitins' texts mentioned above in several contexts along with the major texts of Śaṅkara. Since for any minute investigation the later Advaitins' works are of chief concern which not only strengthen our argumentation but also enable us to enter into the depth of the subject by making us aware of its intricacy.

3.2 The Eternal Identity of Self and Consciousness

A philosophical inquiry about the nature of reality as R. Balasubramanian has pointed out may adopt either of the two approaches. One is object-directed that seeks to reveal the essence of physical phenomena which comprises the entire phenomenal world, which is inert and unintelligible in nature. And the second is that which begins from internal phenomenon. To put in more simple words, it is an inquiry into the nature of the subject which is ordinarily unperceived, yet enables us to perceive the rest of this world and thus more significant than the former.

Advaita philosophy as we know it quite well adopts the second approach in their course of investigation. Advaita made a detailed analysis to bring out the complexities of this knowing being which according to them, is the highest reality. Indeed, the curiosity and keenness with which Advaitins like Gauḍapāda, Śaṅkarācārya, Padmapāda, Vācaspati Misra and all have strived to unfold the nature of reality is beyond any comparison. The entire course of analysis in Advaita *per se* moves surrounding the reality that ceaselessly persists behind all existence. Thus, the ultimate goal to Advaitins is to divulge this reality, to articulate it and to make it explicit.

The nature of reality as Śaṅkara conceives after *Brahma-sūtra* is one unitary whole without any second – *Akamabaditiang*. It stands for ultimate identity by nullifying all

duality of this external world. That reality, for Śāṅkara, is nothing but the Self. As the Śruti states – “That (Existence) which is this (extremely) subtle thing, is the Self of all this (Universe). That is Reality; That is the Self. That thou art, O Śvetaketu.”⁶ It is the passive seer above and beyond all specifications which are often superimposed on it. Since, Self is *Satyam Jñānam Anantam*⁷(Existence-Consciousness-Eternal). These cannot be assumed as the attributes of Self rather the very being of the Self. Self alone is existence as all other existence is relative; It is alone pure consciousness whereas all empirical conscious states are determined and fleeting; Self alone is eternal for there cannot be two eternals. Śāṅkara has ascertained that the identity of Self and consciousness is self-evident, for denial of this truth leads to a self-contradictory conclusion. Consciousness is ever present, it is certain. So, the doubter of the Self even though doubts his senses, mental states and the world surrounds him, cannot doubt his own being, his own conscious presence. No one can claim, ‘I am not’, none can prove his own non-existence for that attempt itself proves his existence. To quote Śāṅkara, ‘*Sarvo ha ātmāstitvam pratyeti na nāham asmīti*’ (Śāṅkara’s *Bhāṣya* I.1.1.)⁸. Self cannot be refuted through any means of knowledge for it is prior to any cognitive application and essentially forms the basis for any epistemic proof. It is again impossible to grasp this Self by means of senses or mental categories or by any gross matter since these are all dependent on this absolute being to exist and to operate. While the Self is unperceived by them, it can perceive all. Self is thus, the fundamental postulate for any epistemic activity.

Here, the distinctiveness of Śāṅkara’s philosophy is the constructive criticism he has carried out throughout his entire work. Indeed, it was a very significant and prevalent way of doing philosophical inquiry in ancient India. Philosophical investigation used to begin by keeping a critical attitude towards the opponents. It is therefore, from the very

outset of his commentary on *Brahma-Sūtra* Śaṅkara has repudiated all the erroneous theories of consciousness which have been formulated by disregarding the essential reality of Self. There is one such theory that considers consciousness as the bi-product of four elements and associates it with body, which according to Śaṅkara is irrelevant. For even when the body persists for sometimes after death, consciousness does not, which proves their essential difference. Further, to claim that consciousness is momentary in nature is also absurd since it is the only persistent truth that never ceases to exist. Again, nihilist who has associated consciousness with matter and thus denies its existence in the absence of matter also failed to discriminate the Self from the not-self. Since, the essential nature of the Self is that it is opposed to anything that is not-self and cannot be connected with the latter. Further, there is a theory which characterizes the Self as an agent and enjoyer of all deeds and thus unable to realize the nature of the transcendental Self who is only the passive seer and thereby detached from activities that are attributed to the empirical self. Similarly, to say consciousness is an adventitious attribute of Self who is by nature insentient, is again not supported by reason because Self is identical with Brahman which is nothing but pure intelligence, truth and infinite. Thus, by stating the nature of Self, Śaṅkara writes,

“The one and the same Self is in all beings, and they are in It just as all beings are in the ether. As by the ether, everything is pervaded by the Self which is considered to be pure and consisting of the Light of Pure Consciousness”.⁹

Śaṅkara concedes that the identity of Self with consciousness is the ontological necessity and any exception of which is bound to raise contradiction. Self being the eternal witness is endowed with eternal consciousness for it has no origin.¹⁰ Self is, writes Śaṅkara, “the goal of the whole universe of sense-objects, senses, and internal organs, and as without interior and exterior, and wholly a mass pure intelligence”¹¹.

To assume different psychological or mental states as fragmented episodes of consciousness is to mistake the nature of consciousness which is indivisible. While different mental states are fleeting and liable to disappear, consciousness in itself is opposed to them. Advaita thus, presupposes the being of an all-pervading unitary consciousness behind these manifold conscious states. Or else, we cannot account for the ‘unity’ of consciousness in terms of the semi-conscious¹² mental states for like the objects the contents of these mental states are also flying and object-dependent. Nor, can it be explained through the fleeting mental states since there is no logical point to hold while contents are passing and finite, the mental states as the carrier of these contents will persist to unite. In fact, our ordinary experience does not support it. It follows thereby, that one persistent unitary consciousness that is essentially distinct from the transitory semi-conscious mental states and not even the synthetic composite of different mental states does exist. To elucidate the idea, Wolfgang Fasching argues that it is not some invariable or persistent contents rather ‘the very process of experiencing itself, as the permanence of witnessing, in which everything we experience has its being-experienced, and which is the constant ground of our own being.’¹³ This so called pure consciousness is free from any quality or content, unlike ordinary conscious state. It is indeed, the mere presence distinct from anything known or seen though the most intimate fact of our existence. It is the ‘experiencing consciousness’ that is foundational as all objects including internal and external are revealed by the light of this consciousness whereas its identification with ego is called *adhyāsa*.

Moreover, unless one persistent consciousness is acknowledged our normal empirical understanding cannot explain different states of experience particularly the state of deep sleep where no means either internal or external operate. It is for this reason the Śruti says ‘the knower’s function of knowing can never be lost’¹⁴ even if we deny to admit this

for thousand times. The mere absence of cognition does not imply the non-existence of the Self rather absence of the objects of knowledge. Just like the way, we cannot imagine the absence of light in the absence of objects of manifestation.¹⁵ Indeed, the acts of remembering, denying, doubting would be inexplicable if the existence of one eternal conscious Self is denied. It is the self-evident and self-luminous Self that proves its own being without any proof from outside. It is unchangeable, universal– *samvid-ekarupānabhidya*¹⁶ distinct from the objects that bear the quality of being transient.

3.3 The Notion of Reflexivity or *Sva-prakāśa* of Consciousness

The perplexity that has brought forth extreme uneasiness among different scholars irrespective of any age is Śaṅkara's exposition of the theory of reflexivity or *svataḥprakāśa* of consciousness. The doctrine has not only initiated an enduring controversy within the schools of Vedānta rather also has made a mark in the entire realm of philosophy including both east and west. Nevertheless, it is the reflexivity or *svataḥprakāśa* of consciousness upon which the Advaitic thesis of transcendental subjectivity, indeed the entire edifice of Advaita is grounded.

Reflexivity or self-luminosity being the essence of consciousness affirms that consciousness as the underlying principle of all beings reveals its own existence autonomously. The process of illumination is not restricted up to the object of consciousness besides it continues to illuminate its own being out-and-out. The peculiarity lies in the fact that whereas all other objects are revealed through extraneous means, the revelation of consciousness is intrinsic by its very nature. To put in other words, reflexivity entails that consciousness has the autonomy of being conscious or luminous without any another source. It manifests itself independent of any other being.

Using the metaphorical language thus, Śaṅkara defines consciousness as a light that does not require any second light to illuminate itself.

The doctrine of self-luminosity, as advocated by Śaṅkara, entails two essential characters. First, consciousness being the cause for the manifestation of all objects necessarily confirms its own existence as the very pre-requisite in all instances. Second, consciousness is the eternal witness that goes on revealing all objects including both the known and unknown. As it is often illustrated with the quote,

'sarvaṃ vastu jñātatayāvā ajñātatayā vā sākṣi caitanyasya viśaya eva'.¹⁷

(Vivaraṇa-Pramēya-Saṅgraha, Part 1, p.130)

Accordingly, in Advaita consciousness is assumed as the background screen where all things appear and manifest. If the screen is removed then nothing will be revealed. However, consciousness does not only permit its object to manifest, it also reveals itself along with other. But while the object necessarily presupposes the being of consciousness to exist, it is not vice-versa. Consciousness is the sole cause of its own being unlike other objects. In the language of Śaṅkara it may be argued that just as the way the light does not require any second light to reveal itself, similarly consciousness being conscious of itself is not cognised by any second-order consciousness. It is in brief, independent of other beings.

It thus, can be inferred that Advaitic doctrine of reflexivity or self-luminosity does not permit any epistemological or metaphysical distinction between the knower and the known or the subject and the object. Since, if consciousness requires a second-order consciousness in order to be known, the second one would also entail the third-order consciousness and that in turn would also lead to the fourth one and so on. Thus, there will

be an infinitely long chain of the different successive stages of consciousness that is psychologically impossible to determine. Moreover, this endorses plurality of consciousness which seems very unconvincing from the Advaitic standpoint of One Universal Consciousness. The notion of self-consciousness in Advaita therefore, needs to be realised by transcending the so-called subject-object dichotomy, which is the basic constituent of empirical cognition. Consciousness being the autonomous principle possesses the potentiality of manifestation within itself. Just as the way, sunlight and its substratum (sun), both are luminous and not entirely different, both being equally effulgent, and yet they are thought of as different¹⁸; so also the self-luminous consciousness though one appears to be different due to the constraint of the adjuncts. So, in principle, consciousness being one homogenous in nature cannot be the illuminator of itself like an object as it discards any such classification within itself. Śāṅkara thus, states consciousness is not the object of knowledge which is imagined by other to be a quality of consciousness.¹⁹

By emphasizing this unique nature of consciousness, Citsukha, a well-known Advaita thinker in his famous treatise *Tattavapradīpikā*, has formulated a more explicit and methodical account of the doctrine of reflexivity or self-luminosity. Reflexivity, defines Citsukha, is

“the capacity of being called immediately known in empirical usage while not being an object of cognition”.²⁰ (*Avedyatvasatyaparokṣa-vyavahāra-yogyatvaṃsvayam-prakāśa-lakṣaṇam*)

According to Ram-Prasad Chakravarthi, a more concrete and refined version of the above definition, which has been recommended by Madhusūdana, Dharmarāja and also by Citsukha, is,

“The occurrence of cognition consists in cognition of its own occurrence as an independent pre-requisite for cognition of objects. Understood as consciousness that is self-defining or auto-formal cognition (*svarūpajñāna*), cognition is never its own object. But in including cognition of its own occurrence as the intrinsic condition or capacity (*yogyatva*) for the objective content in specific non-cognitive mental states (*vr̥tti*) to be cognized, through its conditioned association with the letter, thereby generating specific cognitive states (*vr̥ttijñāna*). Ascription of cognition to its subject occurs through another association of cognition with an ‘I’ –form (*ahankāra*) that is unique to the mental states found within one subjective locus.”²¹

Precisely, the above exposition of the Advaitic thesis of reflexivity leads to the following major consequences.

First, consciousness is the sole means for its own being and thus independent of the being of any other object for which it is the very precondition to exist.

Secondly, consciousness as the self-defining principle cannot be the object of its own. Any attempt therefore to know consciousness as ‘this’ or ‘that’ is nothing but a psychological absurdity and that may lead to a logically untenable conclusion.²² Consciousness being intrinsically conscious is immediately apprehended.

And thirdly, the so-called intentional nature or object-directedness of consciousness arises due to the non-cognitive mental states which get illuminated by the transcendental consciousness and by means of which the empirical knowledge or *vr̥ttijñāna* generates.

Accordingly, in Advaita, reflexivity is intrinsic to consciousness in the absence of which it cannot be considered as consciousness. Moreover, to assume that consciousness becomes its own object or any such longing for ‘object’ is illegitimate to the essence of consciousness. Since, consciousness itself is fundamentally opposed to the nature of

object and cannot be equivalent to anything that is an object of consciousness. Though, this non-objectivity of consciousness does not entail that it is unknown to us. Since, in all the states of experiences, namely, perception, judgement, belief and so on, the conscious awareness is experienced.²³ So, it is very apparent that Advaita intends to establish consciousness completely on reflexivity by throwing intentionality out of its essence and by ascribing the latter to the non-cognitive mental states.

3.3.1 The Absolute Polarization between Self (*asmadpratyaya*) and Not-self (*yuṣmadpratyaya*)

The polarization between *asmad* and *yuṣmad*, i.e., the self and the not-self, or what can also be called as subject and object from epistemological standpoint is fundamental in Advaita. It is quite known that from the very outset of his commentary on *Brahma-Sūtra* Śaṅkara is committed to distinguishing the self (subject) from the not-self (object).²⁴ The Self, i.e. pure consciousness is logically distinct from the unconscious object and cannot be related to the latter due to their intrinsic nature. Objectivity indispensably belongs to the ‘unconscious substance’ or that is ‘known’ and not to the self-luminous consciousness. Self and not-self represent two categories which are mutually excluding each other as light and darkness. While Self is pure being, the not-self is neither pure being nor pure non-being, like hare’s horn. Any attempt to define one in terms of other therefore, is to commit a category mistake. Though, our ordinary perception precisely does not identify this distinction and fails to penetrate into the reality of Self. As in our ordinary activity, we are stuck in attributing the ego as the subject or Self. However, this bifurcation between consciousness and object has drawn the attention of many critics, especially those who advocate the *parataḥprakāśa* theory of consciousness, namely, the Nyāya and the Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsā schools.

The very core and foremost objection that was raised by the Nyāya is how can cognition take place in the absence of the known. If the nature of consciousness is such that it cannot be an object of knowledge how we can prove that it has existence. If anything is known then it must be an object that exists. So, if Advaita asserts that existence of consciousness is experienced, then it follows that consciousness too is an object that is known more or less like other objects²⁵. Moreover, the definition of reflexivity that stands for the self-sufficiency of consciousness entails that Advaita takes the one and the same being as both the subject and the object at once, which is again an instance of incoherence in reflexivity thesis. If, it is claimed that reflexivity is self-established and immediately cognised, then it follows that consciousness is its own object or known by some means and if there is no means to cognise consciousness, reflexivity cannot be proved at all²⁶.

It is essential to maintain in this context that ‘knowability’ according to the Naiyāyikas, consists in taking of a previous cognition as its own content.²⁷ Hence, to say that consciousness is self-conscious or luminous is to admit that consciousness has an objective content²⁸ that is, conscious state to be conscious has to be conscious of its own being. As Ram-Prasad Chakravarti explains that luminosity for the Nyāya fundamentally depends on the object of consciousness since a state to count as conscious is for it to be ‘about’ something²⁹. In other words, cognition is consciousness of an object.³⁰ Consequently, luminosity for them arises by taking the former act of consciousness as its object which the Naiyāyikas define as *anuvyavasāya* (after-cognition). In other words, cognition (*vyavasāya*) in order to occur must be a content of another subsequent cognition. Thus, the Nyāya maintains a clear distinction between cognition of an object (first-order) and cognition of cognition as an object (second-order).

The distinction is not regarding the nature but only about the form. Indeed, both these cognitions are the two subsequent phases of the same process.

In contrast, for Advaita, reflexivity stands for non-objectivity or non-cognizability of consciousness. Since, it is a mere dogmatism to hold that anything that is known must be an object of cognition. Consciousness itself is the proof for its being and yet it is not an object to itself. It is the uniqueness of consciousness that it reveals its being to itself without any other second mode of experience. It is an immediate non-cognitive self-experience. To express in other words, “it is something which does not remain unmanifest but is revealed in the most direct manner, although it is not revealed through any sensory representation.”³¹ It does not imply that the Advaitic notion of reflexivity overlooks the subject-object dichotomy. Since, for being an object, according to Bhāmatī, it is legitimate that an entity must be an end or result of an act and therefore, possess a character that is opposed to the nature of subject. That is something, which has been fulfilled in the definition of reflexivity that Citsukha has propounded. Self-awareness of consciousness is neither an implicit nor an explicit act rather the very being of consciousness. As consciousness being homogeneous in nature devoid of having any dividing line in it.³² Moreover, if we go by the definition of *parataḥprakāśa* then it follows that the Nyāya itself has committed the fallacy of assuming the same experience as both the subject and the object of cognition. The so called primary cognition and secondary cognition are not two different subsequent states but one and the same continuous process. Nevertheless, they hold it as two distinct acts.

According to T.R.V. Murti, the problem is that for the Nyāya anything that is verbal or can be expressed must be an object, which is entirely a hypothetical assumption. There are many such things which we speak about but they cannot become objects. Like, sky-

flower, circle, moral law, God and so on. Explaining the point of non-objectivity of consciousness, T.R.V. Murti writes,

“The Naiyāyika seems to think that any usage of words would mean objectifying the thing. The Vedāntist, however, makes a distinction. He accepts svayaṁprakāśa in a symbolic way, but it is not confronted as an object. That which is not known as an object is still something that can be referred to in significant discourse and can be said to be validly known.”³³

Śrīharṣa in his brilliant work *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādyā* remarks that reflexivity or self-luminosity in Advaita cannot be challenged with the allegation that one and the same consciousness cannot be both the ‘cognizer’ and the ‘content’. For Advaita does not admit any such dichotomy within consciousness as both the nature and function of consciousness is one. Had there been any such distinction it would have been impossible for the Advaitins to justify the luminosity of consciousness and what they mean by the act of cognition of an object. As Śaṅkara in *UpadeśaSāhasrī* has commented, ‘the Knower is eternal Knowledge only. The Knower and Knowledge are not different as they are in the argumentative philosophy.’³⁴

According to R. Balasubramanian, the object is one that is referred by consciousness and by nature present to it; it is something beyond consciousness and dependent on the former to be cognised. Whereas, that which is revealing the object by recognising it is termed as the subject.³⁵ In our phenomenal state, ‘subject’ is the ego-consciousness (the ‘I’) that is an individual possessing specific cognitive state, thought and unique personality. This accords the objectivity of conscious being in phenomenal affairs. However, in its transcendental realm the nature of consciousness transcends all empirical duality between knower and known and categories of thought. Object being the mere

superimposition has validity only in the phenomenal existence and not in the transcendental point where all superimpositions merge into the Ultimate.

Śaṅkara being profound in his position has challenged the realists' attempt to establish the independency of object without any determination by consciousness. Since, to assume that object has potentiality of being independent is absurd. Again, it would be similarly inconsistent to argue that objectivity determines the form of consciousness, as it is a case in empirical state and not applicable in case of the absolute. Nevertheless, for Śaṅkara, to state that object possesses the capacity of being independent or result of action, is itself an object of consciousness and thereby proves the relative being of the object. So, it is endorsed by Śaṅkara that consciousness being the sole principle of manifestation of all beings, itself would be undetermined and non-objective. Consciousness being absolute in its existence can never share any quality attributed to object, which is opposed to the nature of consciousness.

3.3.2 Immediacy of Consciousness

The non-objective nature of consciousness discards any possibility to reach it through ordinary means of knowing. So, the ultimate seer of all beings, in Śaṅkara's philosophy remains unperceived and unknown. The ephemeral nature of sensory means can comprehend the empirical object quite well though not the transcendental one. As the sensory means are in need of the absolute knower in order to apprehend all objects. And thus, admitting any endorsement from the ordinary means is opposed to the nature of the witness consciousness. In the words of Radhakrishnan,

‘It is the ineffable experience beyond thought and speech, which transforms our whole life and yields the certainty of a divine presence. It is the state of consciousness which is

induced when the individual strips himself of all finite conditions, including his intelligence.’³⁶

If it is thought that consciousness is dependent on succeeding cognition to cognise, the very essence of cognition will vanish. Moreover, it will lead to an endless regress. The first one is known by the second, the second one is known by the third, the third one is known by the fourth and so on. If it is stated that even though the series of subsequent cognitions are illegitimate, yet the second-order or third-order cognition is necessary as realists considered, yet this is an untenable claim.³⁷ If the first cognition remains unknown and requires a second then what is the assurance that the second or the third one will not be so? If the first experience is unknown, consequently the fourth would also be unknown.

Thus, consciousness in Advaita is not known through any *pramāṇa* or by any second-order consciousness. Nor even the internal organ can know the existence of consciousness for it is also an object of consciousness and thus dependent on the latter to cognise. This non-cognisability however, does not imply its non-existence. Since, it is immediately experienced to us. The proof for experience (*anubhūti*) is the very being of experience itself. As *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (III.4.1) recites,

‘*Yat sākṣād aparokṣād brahma ya ātmā sarvāntaras tam me vyācakṣvaiti*’ .³⁸

Consciousness, according to Śaṅkara, though unknown is immediately and directly experienced. It is *aparokṣānubhūti*. It is a case of *kevala-vyatirekianumāṇa* that only consciousness is reflexive and therefore, immediately known, there is no other instance of the same. Anything that exists must have something distinct to it which states the uniqueness or quality (*dharma*) of that entity. Just as presence of light makes it distinct from the darkness and thus, both have their own individuality. Similarly, if the objects are

knowable (*vedya*), there must be something which is not known like an object. Denying of which may lead to an undesirable consequence.³⁹

Citing an illustration of eye, T.R.V. Murti argues that just as the way our eye can prove the existence of object as well as its own existence without cognising itself as an object; in the same way, consciousness provides the evidence for the being of the object and its own being without knowing itself as an object. Thus, non-cognition does not mean here absence of consciousness. It just implies that consciousness does not share the same quality like an object.

It is to be noted that for Advaita, neither inferential knowledge nor knowledge derives through any other means of cognition is logically deserved to be called immediate. It is only reflexivity or self-luminosity that is immediately apprehended provided that it is not ordinary perception as it is generally conceived by the Nyāya and the Mīmāṃsā. It is direct perception that transcends the trinity of epistemic knowledge, or any contact between senses and mind. While immediacy of object in the realm of phenomenal cognition is precisely conditional in the sense that it requires the intervention of the *vṛtti* to apprehend the object, immediacy of consciousness is free from any such condition pervaded by the *vṛtti*. Since immediacy of luminosity is intrinsic in nature. Thus, while immediacy of ordinary perception in case of external things is secondary and derivative, the luminosity of consciousness is primarily immediate. As Śaṅkara goes on to write in his text ‘*UpadeśaSāhasrī*’,

“The consciousness of objects (which arises out of the functioning of the eye etc.) is mediately known; for it depends on an intervening reflection of the Self (in order to be Known). As It is the Self of (phenomenal) consciousness, Brahman is immediately known.”⁴⁰

One may further attempt to counter that even though the perceptual experience of external objects fails to satisfy the Advaitic criteria to be immediate, we cannot deny the immediacy of pain, pleasure, desire, feelings, wish etc. These are not known as the way phenomenal objects are cognised as they don't have any independent separate existence beyond our mental states. It follows that immediacy is not distinctive to self-luminous consciousness.

It can be defended that even our feelings, wills, pleasure, and all are the modifications of internal organ and not of consciousness. Thus, they too need to be revealed and known by consciousness which stands away from mental phenomena. However, to Ćitsukha, these mental states being superimposed on the self-luminous consciousness lack the eligibility to be called immediate.⁴¹

Consciousness being a real object of inquiry is untouched by any act of realization or non-realization, though all other corporeal objects are bound to be influenced by ordinary human perception and therefore, can never be regarded as absolutely real. In fact, metaphysically all spatio-temporal objects of knowledge are non-existent and unintelligible in themselves in the absence of consciousness. However, the nature of consciousness which transcends all instruments of empirical knowing and all mundane peculiarities cannot be described by anything apart from its own Self. Neither the uses of periphrastic language nor any amount of intellectualism would enable us to capture this which transcends all limitations. This does not entail that language is of no use, for in that case Śruti would lose its validity as the highest means of *Brahmajñāna*. Nor we can rule out the instrumentality of rationality that is required to eradicate all errors and doubts. Reason ceaselessly works by analysing and differentiating the knower from the known, and consequently fails to grasp the highest knowledge that surpasses all differences. What Śaᅅkara concedes thereby is the use of reason along with Śruti to create the base as

well as to avoid any trap of discursive reasoning. It is asserted by Śaṅkara that while immediacy of experience is accessible to all yet the nature of luminous Self is realized by one who is fit for this highest realization.

3.4 Distinction between Transcendental and Phenomenal Consciousness

It is apparent that the Advaita in particular and the Upaniṣads in general, are dedicated in demonstrating the nature of knowledge or consciousness that is pure and absolute, yet they never denied the fact of phenomenal knowledge that is within our apprehension. Maintaining a distinction between transcendental and empirical knowledge, Śaṅkara argues that while the knowledge of Self or consciousness is the transcendental knowledge, the knowledge of the not-self that is derived through the empirical means of cognition is called phenomenal cognition or empirical knowledge. As the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* reveals

“Those who have attained the knowledge of Brhman say that there are two kinds of knowledge – one kind relating to Brahman, the Absolute, and another kind relating to the phenomenal world, the relative.”⁴²

“*Tasmaisahovāca; Dveidyaveditavyeiti ha
Smayadbrahmavidovadantiparācaivaparāca.*”

Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad I,1,4

Śaṅkara asserts that phenomenal cognition though relative and subordinate to the transcendental knowledge is necessary in epistemic realm and eventually leads an aspirant of certainty towards transcendental knowledge that is lacking in the former. Śaṅkara thereby gives an account of the empirical knowledge that is ephemeral and relative. The distinctiveness of this phenomenal knowledge lies in its being a complex

of both consciousness and unconscious substance. Indeed, it is a mere psycho-physical process that is manifested by the light of consciousness. While pure consciousness for Śāṅkara, transcends all epistemic duality and characterization; the phenomenal consciousness is bound and operated through the *antaḥkaraṇa* in all cases of perceptions. It works throughout the entire waking state to realize the nature of objects and keeps on transforming itself along with the objects. Unlike the transcendental one it is subject to change and therefore, non-eternal and limited in its application. Consciousness, in Advaita thus, can be said to be of two-fold. One that is the ultimate seer or the very seeing whereas the other one is modified form and object of the former.

A thorough analysis into the nature and constitution of this phenomenal state of experience seems therefore very much inevitable in order to get a detailed account of our empirical cognition as viewed by Advaita as well as to mark the distinction between the transcendental and phenomenal realms of consciousness. Here, it is to be mentioned that Śāṅkara even if has affirmed the essential presence of internal organ in the process of phenomenal knowledge and explicated its nature and constitution in the course of cognition; a systematic and comprehensive account of the mechanism of internal organ is found more explicitly in the works of latter Advaitins.

3.4.1 Proof for the Existence of *Antaḥkaraṇa* or Internal Organ

According to Advaita, the individuality of a human being or the phenomenal cognition *per se* results from the operation of *antaḥkaraṇa* or internal organ that reveals all objects of the world existing outside and inside. Though, in the state of deep sleep this presence is not known for some period, it is incessant as long as one continues to be in this life-world. The sense organs being sited at the periphery level instantly approach their respective objects, though they are unable to cognize them in the absence of this internal

organ. The intervention of the internal organ is a necessary adjunct which in other way manipulates the entire course of action performed by the sense organs to give rise to the knowledge of the object. As in the absence of this *antaḥkaraṇa* either there will be the contingency of continuous perception of objects or non-perception of anything. Thus affirming the existence of internal organ as an indispensable aspect for phenomenal cognition, Śaṅkara writes,

“for unless that organ is admitted, there will be the contingency of either constant perception or non-perception. For when the accessories of perception, viz the soul, organs, and objects of perception, are in contiguity, perception should occur always. Or even if in the presence together of all the factors of perception no result is produced, then there will be the possibility of constant non-perception. But this does not tally with experience.”⁴³

While the sense organ works outwardly in its way to grasp the object, the internal organ works behind it by regulating and harmonising the actions of the former. Though, the internal organ approaches to its object via the sense organs, the latter themselves become dormant in the absence of the former. Since, all sensations and perceptual data received by means of sense organs are compiled and put in order by the direction of internal organ.

However, neither the internal organ alone can be regarded as the knower of the object as by its own nature internal organ is insentient and consequently unable to illuminate the object. Nor can the pure consciousness be regarded as the knower. Since, consciousness can never undergo any transformation that logically derives through the causal involvement of the knower and known in every act of cognition; consciousness is immutable by its essential nature. Even the bare senses cannot be the knower. Hence for Śaṅkara, it is rather the *jīva* or the empirical consciousness that emerges from the

association of the consciousness and internal organ acts as the knower and as the controller of the entire mechanism of knowledge in empirical state.

Accordingly, what we recognise as the attributes of the Self or transcendental consciousness, namely, happiness, fear, desire and so on, basically belong to the *antaḥkaraṇa* or internal organ which we mistakenly superimpose on the former. It is, says *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*, like a lump of iron that itself is lacking the property of burning, yet, we declare ‘The iron burns’ on account of its false identification with that of fire, which indeed is the substratum of the burning property; similarly, the use of the expressions such as ‘I am happy’, ‘I am miserable’ is due to the false identification of the Self with the mind.⁴⁴To say more precisely, it is the beginningless nescience or *avidyā* which constitutes the entire material world including the internal organ which is the cause of all phenomenal activity. The internal organ though material gets united with the reflection of consciousness and works as a conscious being in the life-world by producing the phenomenal knowledge. Since it is devoid of pure knowledge and qualified by the mental state, according to *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*, it is only figuratively designated as knowledge.⁴⁵

3.4.2 The Purpose of Internal Organ in Phenomenal Cognition

Explicating the role of Nescience in the mechanism of cognition Viḍyāraṇya in his famous treatise *Vivaraṇapramēyasaṅgraha* has stated that the *jīva* even if omnipresent and pure intelligent in essence, is covered by the *avidyā* or positive Nescience which results in projecting the world of multiplicity. However, the kind of illusory aspect of Nescience existing within the human body is called internal organ; which by pervading the object through the channel of sense organs assuming the form and structure of it to cognise it. Internal organ being fiery in nature is in a continuous process of expansion

and contraction. It goes on to transform itself with the change of object and with the requirements of extraneous conditions that co-operate the process of cognition. Being similar in nature like that of milk (which thereby can turn into curd), the internal organ undergoes self-modification in a proper way by penetrating the body to which it inheres and the object it cognises minimizing all distance between the two. Thus, as per the functions it performs the internal organ can be claimed to be made of three essential components – the agent or ego, the action or modification and the object of knowledge. To quote from *Vivaraṇapramēyasaṅgraha*,

“That part of it which is limited by the body is called organ of Egoity (*ahankāra*), and agent (*Kartṛi*). That part of it which stretches itself out between the body and the thing (e.g., the jar) is termed *vṛtti* (modification; function) or action (*kriyā*). And that part finally which penetrates the thing and constitutes it an object of knowledge is called ‘that which serves for manifestation’ (*abhivyakti-yogya*).”⁴⁶

Consequently, the indivisible consciousness gets manifested through these three essential components of internal organ. Consciousness becomes the ‘knowing-subject’ or *pramātā* when it is specified by the agent part of the internal organ. It acts as a ‘means of knowledge’ or *pramāṇa*, when it is reflected through the *vṛtti* or functional element of internal organ. And, lastly, it is called the ‘right knowledge’ or *pramiti* when it is ‘particularized by that part of the internal organ which serves for the manifestation of the object’⁴⁷. Likewise, in *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*, Dharmarāja Adhvarīndra states, according to the criterion of the perceptuality of knowledge, consciousness is of three kinds – one, associated with the object of cognition (*viśaya*); second, that is accompanying the means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*); and third, that is related to the subject or knower (*pramātr*).⁴⁸

It shows that there is a mutual superimposition of the attributes of one into other. The one indivisible consciousness which is free from all kinds of internal or external division appears as a complex of knower, known and the means of knowledge. Whereas these variations firmly belong to the internal organ, the Nescience which though is an unconscious substance, acts like a conscious being in the process of cognition. Hence, the subject of cognition is not the pure universal consciousness rather the internal organ which is 'qualified by the manifestation of consciousness'.⁴⁹ Consciousness even if by nature is all-pervasive, is obscured by the beginningless nescience and thus unable to reach the object of knowledge. It thus, cannot be the cause of cognition. However, it appears as the cause being 'manifested by the internal organ' through a gradual elimination of the Nescience. This continuous process of concealment and revelation does not affect the pure being of consciousness, yet its reflection is affected by means of the internal organ with which it is identified.

However, the Advaitins have marked out two peculiarities of the internal organ by distinguishing it from pure consciousness

Firstly, plurality of internal organs: even if the internal organ works behind all cognitive processes that the *jiva* pertains, the experience of one empirical self is entirely different from the other. It is quite visible in phenomenal world that when one experiences happiness the other is not necessarily bound to have the same realization. In other words, though each *jiva* is essentially conscious, there are differences among the states of experience that the *jivas* possess. What causes these differences is the very presence of internal organ which is unique for each of them. Therefore, the happiness or pain experienced by one is not known by other. This indeed marks the plurality of internal organs in *jivas*.

Secondly, finiteness of the internal organ: this is a logical consequence, for plurality necessarily implies finiteness. The experience of the *jiva* is quite limited and directed towards the particular objects. Since the *jiva* or the empirical self though is considered as a knower in the act of cognition, all cognitions are strictly attributed to the internal organ. The *jiva* is entitled to cognise only that particular object which is caught by the psychosis or *vṛtti* of the internal organ. It is on account of the limitation of causal apparatus (including merit and demerit, operation of the sense-organs and all) which influences the modification of internal organ cognition occurs⁵⁰. Internal organ thereby comprehends only that which comes directly to it and fails to correlate itself with all objects at a moment. Nevertheless, for Advaitin, those who have developed the ability of causal apparatus by supporting the modification of internal organ, like *yogi* is able to pervade all things at once without any constraint.

3.4.3 The Role of *Vṛtti* in the Act of Cognition

The Advaitins have laid emphasis particularly on the role of *vṛtti* or transformation or modification of the internal organ in the process of cognition of an object. For, the *jiva* by nature is detached from the object. A mood or a *vṛtti* of internal organ thus becomes necessary to bridge the gap existing between the *jiva* and the object in order to produce knowledge. The *jiva* though intrinsically conscious is covered by Nescience and does not cognise the object which is detached from it. Cognition thus arises primarily from the very activity of the internal organ, the modification of the subtle material substance, which goes towards the object and receives the form and shape of it. The *vṛtti* helps in eliminating the ignorance that enfolds the *jiva* and thus, subsequently the *jiva* knows the object which is assumed by the psychosis or *vṛtti*. This knowledge derives from the instrumentation of the *vṛtti* is called *vṛttijñāna* or phenomenal cognition. Just as the bare fire that is unable to burn grass becomes efficient to do so by associating with a ball of

iron; so also the nature of *jiva* that ‘though unable to manifest objects, does so when it is associated with the psychoses of the internal organ.’⁵¹ The existence of the internal organ and the corresponding *vr̥tti* is therefore a necessary conjunction for any cognitive act to occur.

However, this account of phenomenal cognition is subject to some serious objections. The very first and foremost problem that Advaita faces is: how the association between the consciousness and internal organ takes place where the former is essentially distinct from the latter. If it is stated that consciousness gets related with the internal organ during the act of cognition then it cannot be unattached. Moreover, if there is association with the insentient internal organ, there must not be any difficulty to hold that the object too is correlated with consciousness. It is clearly unsound to state that an internal organ is needed to manifest the object even if the latter is connected to consciousness. Since, it is consciousness only that manifests an object and not something inert.

Answering to the above charges, the Advaitins bring out the phenomenal difference between the *jiva* consciousness and the Absolute consciousness. The Absolute consciousness continues to illumine all objects without any extraneous aid. On the other hand, the *jiva* being concealed by *avidyā* is unable to do so, it illumines only through the instrumentality of the internal organ attached to it. Though any such assumption of the association between consciousness and internal organ seems unconvincing due to their constitutional differences, yet it is a prerequisite for carrying out of the phenomenal cognition. Following the *Vivaraṇapramēyasaṅgraha* T.M. P. Mahadevan writes,

“Just as the generality, cowness, though omnipresent, associates with the individual that has a dewlap, etc., not with any other individual, even so the omnipresent self associates with the internal organ, not with anything else. If this example be unacceptable, let there

be the illustration of the radiance of the lamp, which though pervasive of colour, taste, odour, etc., manifests colour alone to the exclusion of the rest. Thus, there is the requirement of the internal organ for the sake of bringing about the association of intelligence with objects.”⁵²

Of course, this mere association with internal organ does not give rise to cognition, for the *jiva* is entitled to perceive only that which is assumed by the *vr̥tti* of internal organ. It is precisely for this reason the Absolute is not cognised by empirical perception even after the association of It with internal organ as a material cause. For the *vr̥tti* cannot have any form of the formless Absolute due to which the *jiva* fails to cognise It like other objects. To quote,

“Brahman again no doubt is connected with the internal organ (for it is connected with all things), but there is no modification of that organ which has the form of Brahman; and this explains why the individual soul does not at all times cognize Brahman.”⁵³

The internal organ is unable to manifest the object unless and until it undergoes ‘Ego-modification’ appropriating apparently the light of the consciousness. As there is no ‘Ego-modification’ in the state of deep sleep when the internal organ remains quiet, so also there is no awareness of the object in that state.

In brief, it is not the proximity between the internal organ and the object that gives rise to cognition rather a necessary transformation into the form of internal organ that helps to cognise the object otherwise there is the possibility of constant perception of mind, intellect, ego and all, which are the very constituents of internal organ and thus present in itself. However, this very mechanism of internal organ explains the fragmented and impermanent nature of conscious states as opposed to one homogeneous consciousness.

3.4.4 The Constitution of Internal Organ or *Antahkarana*

The very nature of internal organ though inert is different from the other material entities like, body, senses and all. Because of its unique formation, it is able to reflect consciousness in the process of knowing. Just as the way a crystal stone when seen in sufficient light though colourless and transparent appears as red in the presence of a red rose in front of it; so also the internal organ though not conscious appears to be so in all acts of cognitions due to the presence of consciousness. This distinctiveness of internal organ is due to its transparent nature as well as for its closeness to consciousness. Being composed of the *sattva* aspects of five subtle elements, the internal organ is superior and subtler in nature in compare to the body, senses and other material objects. As a result, like mirror though devoid of real luminosity internal organ manifests everything by borrowing the light of consciousness. Though the senses are directly related to the object, the latter is known by the intervention of the internal organ illuminating like consciousness. Illustrating the correlation among senses, body, internal organ, object and *jiva*, the Śruti says, while the senses are like horses, the body is the chariot, internal organ is like charioteer and reins, objects are like the path or road for the horses and *jiva*, the individual self is the master.⁵⁴ It follows that the body and senses though are quite active and spontaneous in nature to run towards the objects, they are stirred by the internal organ manifested by the light of consciousness.

Śaṅkara goes on to argue that this internal organ though one, it is generally considered as fourfold due to its diverse functions. Broadly, the four aspects of internal organ are – mind (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*), Ego (*ahankāra*) and recollection or memory (*citta*). Though, this division is quite tentative as many latter Advaitins have incorporated the function of ego and memory under the first two.

The internal organ is named as *manas* or mind in all cases of doubt and restlessness. The mind facilitates in synthesizing and arranging the data collected through the sense organs. It is again termed as intellect or *buddhi* in terms of its ability for judgement, determination and transparency in perception. It turns into an ego or *ahankāra* while representing its identity, uniqueness and individuality to the life-world shared by other. Lastly, the fourth modification of internal organ is *citta* that aids in recollecting all previous impressions and experiences.

Interestingly, these modes as well as the nature of internal organ also have been endorsed by the Sāṅkhya philosophy. Like the Advaita, the Sāṅkhya has affirmed doubt, determination, self-assertion and recollection as the very attributes of internal organ differentiating them from the very essence of pure consciousness i.e. *Puruṣa*. The intellect, mind and ego are nothing but subtle forms of *Prakṛti* and thus purely material in nature. Though, the Sāṅkhya did not mention about *citta* or memory as the separate category. The function of which is subsumed in the activity of *manas* or mind. In phenomenal world, our ordinary conscious experience of daily life renders an impression of consciousness that is entirely identical with these various aspects of internal organ which the Advaita regards as empirical consciousness. An analysis into the different roles of mind, intellect and ego thereby is required to distinguish the essence of consciousness from that of internal organ.

3.4.4.1 The Nature and Function of *Manas* or Mind

Existence of mind as a necessary concomitant along with the operation of the senses is ascertained by Śaṅkara after Śruti. Since cognition of an object is suspended even after the contact is attained between the object and its respective organ of perception. The very statement ‘I was absent-minded’ or ‘My mind was elsewhere’ confirms that sense

organ fails to generate knowledge unless the mind gets attached with the senses to act.

Śaṅkara by commenting in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* maintains that mind

“which joins itself to the objects of all the organs, exists, in the absence of which the eye and other organs fail to perceive their respective objects such as form and sound, although they have the capacity to do so and in the presence of which they succeed in it. Hence it is through the mind that everybody sees and hears, for vision and the like are impossible when the mind is engaged.”⁵⁵

External organs even though work spontaneously, need the assistance of the mind to grasp the object. Indeed, senses even if operate, it is the mind that cognises the object, distinguishes it and analyses it thoroughly. Or else one who is faint should also have knowledge of his surrounding when the other organs of perception still continue to work except ‘eye’. However, experience tells us that we never come to know anything when we are in sleep or the mind is absent.

Moreover, being limited in potentiality the faculties of senses even if they interact with the objects cannot assume all different forms of objects and thus, fail to distinguish one entity from the other. The mind however, on account of its extreme flexibility associates with all organs of perception and thus embraces all objects too.⁵⁶ Being versatile and more pervasive than senses, it does not only conjoin with more organs at a time but also can discriminate among different types of perception which generate through diverse nature of objects. As the Śruti says,

“Because even if one is touched by anybody from behind invisibly, one knows it distinctly, that this is a touch of the hand, or that this is a touch of the knee, therefore the internal organ called mind exists. If there is no mind to distinguish them, how can the

skin alone do this? That which helps us to distinguish between perceptions is the mind.”⁵⁷

Sense organs in themselves though can go towards the objects, it cannot generate knowledge nor can it retain the knowledge for future purpose. The activity of the sense organ, therefore, is limited only in gathering the raw information of the phenomenal world while the rest of the work is executed by the mind. According to Śaṅkara, the effect being produced is dependent on the cause superior to it; similarly, mind being the cause is superior to the objects and senses. Just as objects, mind too is made of matter, yet it is superior as it is more subtle, pervading and closer to the Self.⁵⁸

It is important to mention in this context that the Advaitic notion of mind as the source of our cognition and deliberation is necessarily distinct and opposed to the Western notion of mind that is a conscious substance. In Advaitic account, the mind being a subtle matter is a product of *Prakṛti* and devoid of consciousness. In fact, all such acts of doubting, denying, wishing, confirming and so on are not constituents of consciousness. Since, all mental states equally like the objects of external world are known by consciousness and thus, susceptible to be the objects of consciousness. The difference lies in the fact that in case of external objects it is indirect perception occurred through the instrumentation of sense organs and internal organ while in case of our mental states it is directly known. Just as the way, the object present outside appears and disappears in consciousness similarly the mental act occurs and vanishes time to time and thereby, cannot be assumed to be identical with one indivisible consciousness. Thus, in thundering words the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* asserts, ‘Desire, resolve, doubt, faith, want of faith, steadiness, shame, intelligence and fear – all these are but the mind.’⁵⁹

3.4.4.2 The Nature and Function of *Buddhi* or Intellect

The phenomenal apparatus of cognition beyond sense organ and mind also presupposes one truth-determining and decision making principle called *buddhi*. The sense organs though go immediately to their respective objects, cognition takes place only by the participation and co-operation of mind. However, the mind itself is pervaded by the light of *buddhi*. Like the sense organs, the mind too is not independent in itself for it needs the collaboration of *buddhi* to actualize the knowledge. The intellect according to Śaṅkara like a lamp helps to discard the darkness in the process of perception. Śruti says,

‘Every object is perceived only as associated with the light of the intellect, as objects in the dark are lighted up by a lamp placed in front; the organs are but channel for intellect.’⁶⁰

According to an account, drawn in *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, the objects (the elements in their subtle and rudimentary form)⁶¹ are much subtler than senses. For the gross senses are produced by the objects in order to categorize them. The objects though have independent existence, are dependent on the senses to be known. However, the mind is even subtler to the sense organs and much wider in respect of its action. And thus, is considered as higher to them. Yet close to mind is the realm of *buddhi*, even much subtler to the latter and stands closer to the light of self. The *buddhi* being determinative in nature saves the mind from instability by guiding it and helps the individual in taking firm decision in all cases. The *buddhi* thus is considered higher in grade in compare to the senses and mind, though manifested by the light of Consciousness.

3.4.4.3 The Nature and Function of *Ahaṅkāra* or Ego

A very special modification of internal organ through which the individual self is represented in the phenomenal world is called ego or *ahaṅkāra*. Besides *manas* and

buddhi which operate the cognitive process in the empirical plane, ego plays a major role to represent the individuality of the being by distinguishing it from other. This ego constitutes the identity of the finite being in terms of self-assertion. It represents the body, the senses, the mind, in brief, the entire phenomenal existence of the subject. The ego accordingly appropriates the merits and demerits of all actions performed by the physical body and mind, as all actions are performed by the consent of the ego.

The Advaitins argue that the ego which represents itself through I-principle is distinct and opposed to the Self. It is the product of Nescience or matter and therefore, naturally belongs to the category of not-self. It is being unconscious and objective in nature cannot be identical with Self. Moreover, in reality the ego like senses and other objects is an object of conscious Self. Since, the expressions like, 'I was reading this book before sleep', 'I went market yesterday', ascertain the objectivity of ego. The ego is therefore, not distinct from the material world and the physical body, for the 'characteristics mark of objectivity belong to the organ of Egoity no less than to the body, the sense-organs and the rest.'⁶²

However, the ego being unconscious cannot truly represent itself or empirical being; it is indeed, the universal consciousness that enables the ego to act. Accordingly the ego appears conscious due to the reflection of universal consciousness upon it and forms the identity of the individual. The *jiva* in this way comes to exist because of the association of the ego with the reflection of conscious Self. Even the very sense of agentship or *kartā* belongs to the ego which acts as a limiting adjunct to the Self. It does not mean that the ego splits the universal consciousness into several individual conscious-experiences for the ego is limited and bound in its ability to influence the one indivisible consciousness. Agency, therefore, is not intrinsic to the individual self but to the ego as at the highest level there is no such dichotomy between individual self and cosmic Self. All activities

and their results are enjoyed by the ego that is liable to change. The Upaniṣad thus, states that the individuality of the self is based on two factors – the will or *saṅkalpa* of the individual and the ego or *ahankāra*. An individual however, small and tiny it always has a will or determination as well as an ego to act. The ego that expresses itself as ‘I am so and so’, ‘This is mine’, ‘I have this and that’ distinguishes itself by creating its own peculiar identity. This ego forms the essence of our finiteness and endures even in the most humble person.⁶³ It is this ‘I’-ness that dissociates the individual self from the universal Self by making the individual an object to former.

3.4.4.4 The Presupposition of Superimposition in Phenomenal Cognition

According to Śāṅkara, the polarity between the Self and not-self or ego though absolute, we fail to realize it in the empirical world. Being the victim of beginningless nescience, we impose the quality of the ego to the Self and vice-versa. We mistake the unchanging, pure Self as an agent, knower and enjoyer of all activities as well as we assume the insentient ego as the conscious subject. This process of mutual superimposition, according to Śāṅkara, is caused by *adhyāsa*. As a result, we attribute all false ascriptions to the Self by correlating it with the body, senses and with all different modifications of internal organ, which does not only manipulate all our waking experiences but the state of dream too. We thus, keep on confounding the unqualified Self as ‘tall’, ‘dark’, ‘male’, ‘female’, ‘blind’, ‘deaf’ and so on. Just as the way a man superimposes the quality of snake on a rope and gets frightened; we superimpose the quality of ego on the Self. Though, this process of superimposition does not pollute the nature of the Self; as we find that mistaking the rope as a snake does not transform the rope into a snake. Deliberating on the illusory nature of *adhyāsa* at the very beginning of *Brahma-sūtra*, Śāṅkara writes,

“One superimposes the characteristics of the body when one has such ideas ‘I am fat’, ‘I am thin’, ‘I am fair’,....So also one superimposes the attributes of the senses and organs when one thinks, ‘I am dumb’, ‘I have lost one eye’....Similarly one superimposes the attributes of the internal organ, such as desire, will, doubt, perseverance, etc. In the same way, one first superimposes the internal organ, possessed of the idea of ego, on the self, the witness of all the manifestations of that organ; then by an opposite process, one superimposes on the internal organ etc. that Self which is opposed to the non-Self and which is the witness of everything. Thus occurs this superimposition that has neither beginning nor end, but flows on eternally, that appears as the manifested universe and its apprehension, that conjures up agentship and enjoyership, and that is perceived by all persons.”⁶⁴

It seems rather astonishing that though Śāṅkara condemns *adhyāsa* as the cause of all our ignorance, it is the basis of all our epistemic process. Since, the Self in its pure nature ‘is neither an object of experience nor the subject of experience, but somehow transcends both’.⁶⁵ Hence, a false identification of the Self with not-self is a ‘working hypothesis’ for the completion of all acts in the empirical world. As an act of cognition is not explicable without a knower nor we can justify the purpose of action without an agent who executes it. It is therefore, the pure and unqualified Self appears as an agent or a knower owing to its attachment with the qualities of the not-self. Just as the way the jewel appears as red due to its transparency and proximity with a red rose though any such contact is illusory. However, this characterization of the Self as an agent or knower does not make It an object like ego. Being a passive witness or silent spectator, the Self is intrinsically untouched by any such fictional qualities that belong to the ego. Indeed, what distinguishes primarily the Self from the not-self is the self-luminosity of the latter. The Self is an absolute upholder of all cognitive and practical acts performed by the empirical being, yet the essential nature of the Self is comprised in its being the pure self-

luminous or self-revealing existence. Since, in the absence of luminosity of the Self the insentient mental states could undergo only unconscious mechanical modification. Accordingly, there will be no knowledge either of the internal or external world.

In the language of Vācaspati Miśra, the very nature of superimposition is that it is an erroneous identification of one thing with another thing (self with not-self) as well as non-apprehension of discrimination between the self and not-self.⁶⁶ This process of illusory imposition of the attributes of the Self like consciousness etc. on the not-self and not-self like body and senses etc. on the Self is so intense that it regulates all our empirical experiences, activities as well as is the cause for the existence of the world. Thus, according to Śaṅkara, there is a ‘coupling of real and the unreal’⁶⁷ in each case of our worldly experience.

Here, it has been objected against the Advaitic position that if the ego like other object transcends the Self and not identical with the Self, why it is considered as the subject or knower to represent the Self rather than admitting it like other external or internal objects (like pot, pain etc.). However, it can be countered following Sureśvara’s *Naiṣkarmya-siddhi* that cognition of an object is conditioned by the operation of internal organ as the internal organ goes out in assuming the form of the object stands outside the conscious experience and accordingly transforms itself into the form of the object. However, it is the ego or *ahankāra* that gives subjectivity to this modification of internal organ, pretends as a conscious knower due to the light of pure consciousness and thus gets connected with the objective experience. The ego thus acts like a conscious knower by bridging the gap between the subject and the object poles, concealing its essential nature of objectivity. For, subjectivity emerges only when there is a reflection of pure consciousness on the transparent ego. Just as the way, the heat of the light cannot be separated from the lamp where it is sited, we fail to realize the distinction of the real Self

from the ego. Sureśvara by explaining this illusory identity between the Self and ego writes,

‘The internal organ is the object of the Self’s witnessing consciousness directly, but the Self goes on to take on the ego as mask (*kañcuka*), thus becoming (apparently) related to external objects by judging them as ‘mine’, etc.’⁶⁸

Moreover, according to the Advaitins, the contrast between the Self and ego or ‘I’ is evident from the state of sleep. According to Vidyāraṇya, the state of deep sleep marks the absence of ‘I’ or ego by showing its essential difference from the one persistent Self. Experience says that in deep sleep one does not get aware of the sense of ‘I’ as one is in the waking and the dream states. One is neither aware of his body nor about the mental states. Even after waking up from deep sleep, the individual expresses his bare ignorance about the surrounding except the bliss of sleep he has felt at that time. Since, in deep sleep the ego seems to dissolve in general nescience as we do not confront any ‘I’ during sleep. What remains therefore, is one persistent consciousness underlying all the three states and cognitions. However, at the very moment of waking when one is in dim awareness the ego restores its own form by bringing about the previous experience into connection. And thus, one goes on to argue, ‘I slept well’, ‘I was not aware of anything’ etc. giving the false impression of one persistent I or ego in all states. Thus, Vidyāraṇya says, ‘what at that time is reflected upon is the Self; but the Ego then is thought and spoken of as implying the Self, to the end of rendering empirical thought and speech more definite; this indeed being the only end of the *ahankāra*.’⁶⁹ Hence, this non-sentient ego though appears in waking and dream states, it would not be identical with the persistent Self as it is not found to be present in deep sleep.

In short, the ego represents the finitude and the individuality the conscious being. However, alienating the Self from the limiting adjuncts one unfolds the essence of the consciousness that is pure, eternal and indivisible. Hence, it can be argued that the Advaitic notion of consciousness is egoless but not selfless, as the Self alone is the only absolute being distinct from all other beings or non-beings. Denying the ordinary understanding, the Advaita therefore confirms the reality of the Self that bears no resemblance to anything known or unknown. The naturalists or materialists and even many modern thinkers regard the body-self identity as the fundamental state of the Self. The Advaita, on the other hand, firmly argues for the existence of a transcendental Self beyond the perception of so-called ego-self or body-consciousness. At the phenomenal level, we confront a self that is contaminated and merged into the opacity of the bodily existence. Since, for any epistemic and pragmatic concern we need to concede the very identity between Self and body (*including the internal organ and senses*) yet in its essential being the Self exceeds all such ambiguous identity.

3.5 Some Observations

The upshot of the above discussion is that according to Advaitic contention, the pure self-luminous consciousness is contentless and formless in nature. Though, being deprived of the ability to differentiate it, our phenomenal perception meshes this purity of consciousness with something which is opposed to it. We thus, tend to define consciousness in terms of the phenomenal qualities of mental states we possess. This association with subtle matter leads to a minimal revelation of pure consciousness as being required for object-cognition. To put in different words, it is through this mutual superimposition of the Self and the not-self, according to Śāṅkara, all empirical activities take place, inclusive of the means of valid knowledge.⁷⁰ Through all our phenomenal perception the one indivisible consciousness splits itself into three distinct forms of

subject-consciousness, object-consciousness and the knowing-consciousness. However, in its pure being consciousness as an autonomous existence transcends all phenomenal plurality as well as epistemic duality entirely. In itself it is neither an object of cognition like a 'pot' nor even a non-existent entity like a sky-flower. It is self-luminous in itself. It is said to be an instance of *kevala-vyatireki anumāṇa* that only consciousness being self-luminous is immediately apprehended, yet it cannot be considered as an object of cognition. Thus, an abridged version of the Advaitic account of reflexivity thesis is given below.

a) Reflexivity of consciousness is a logical presupposition of all our cognitive acts; for unless consciousness is considered to be reflexive, there would be unawareness of the cognition of an object. In other words, the reflexivity thesis in Advaita methodically presupposes one all-pervading consciousness behind these fragmented psychic states. It is one unceasing existence that cannot be disproved. Since for proving the inconsistency it is necessary to admit one absolute and eternal being of consciousness that only can apprehend this irregularity, which ultimately proves its own absolute being.

b) The reflexivity of consciousness in itself undermines the dichotomy between the knowing subject and the object, which is necessarily found in empirical states. For any such correlation limits its persistent being.

c) The proof for reflexivity is evident by immediate experience. For, *anubhava* being distinct from secular knowledge is not an object of any cognitive act.

d) Lastly, by determining reflexivity the Advaitins implicitly though cogently rule out 'object-directedness' from the domain of pure consciousness.

It can be stated that although the Advaitic standpoint is considerably strong in establishing reflexivity of consciousness yet their position would be more certain if any instance of the non-intentional nature of consciousness is proved. Hence, an Advaitic account of the critique of intentionality through a consistent and strong phenomenological approach to re-establish the thesis of reflexivity would be developed in the subsequent chapter, particularly in chapter five.

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