

CHAPTER IV

Contemporary Perspectives on Intentionality of Consciousness

4.1 Introduction

Continental philosophy formally came to light with the advent of phenomenological movement initiated by Edmund Husserl in twentieth century. Though there are other popular philosophical trends which come within the purview of continental philosophy, phenomenology of Husserl is the epoch-making discipline among all. It is because ‘the influence of Husserl has revolutionized continental philosophies’.¹ According to J.N. Mohanty, the reason that makes phenomenology grand and popular among the scholars is its attempt to explore the essence of reality or phenomena. Here, one must be clear about the subtle line of distinction between transcendental and existential phenomenology. Whereas the transcendental phenomenology seeks to describe the nature and essence of ‘Consciousness’, ‘Transcendental Subjectivity’ ‘Intentionality’; the subject matter of the latter is more ontological, that is the problem of ‘Existence’, ‘Being-towards-the-world’ and so on. While the former is called essentialism, the latter is popular as existentialism. Accordingly, it is obvious that the present research work is an inquiry into transcendental phenomenology.

Right from the beginning, the notion of intentionality has turned out as one of the most significant concepts in Husserl’s phenomenology. Besides it is quite known to us that intentionality plays an important role in analytic philosophy, philosophy of mind and cognitive science. However, the present study is concerned only about phenomenological perspective. In fact, this chapter would look into the notion of intentionality specifically focusing on the works of four major phenomenologists, namely, Edmund Husserl, Jean Paul Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and J.N.Mohanty. The reason why I have decided to concentrate only on these thinkers is that their analyses immensely address the problematic that I have introduced at the outset.

Hence, it is to be noted that the purpose of present chapter is not to describe the development of the intentionality theory in the phenomenological movement rather the aim is to examine how these phenomenologists have tried to trace the nature of consciousness in terms of intentionality. The aim of the present chapter is therefore, not in any way centred in expounding the theory of intentionality as viewed by Husserl and his fellow successors. In fact, it is a critical evaluation of the nature of consciousness which is characterized as intentional or what the phenomenologists claim as ‘directing towards something’.

In general, Husserl is credited for propounding the notion of intentionality despite of the fact that it is his master Franz Brentano, who has considered it in his descriptive psychology before Husserl. Even Brentano in the true sense could not be regarded as the pioneer since a reference of intentionality is also found in Aristotle and medieval Scholastic philosophy. Nevertheless, the importance of Brentano lies in further restoring this notion, which Husserl has advocated and examined thoroughly to look into the nature of consciousness as well as for the development of his transcendental phenomenology. Recognising Brentano’s contribution Dale Jacquette says,

“What Brentano does in *Psychology* is partly to remind philosophers of the historical background of the intentionality thesis, while signaling his participation as the latest in a progression of intentionalists from ancient through medieval to modern times in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”²

For Brentano, the core interest was to explain the nature of psychic phenomenon in a more precise way instead of developing any thesis on intentionality. In order to bring a reformation in the domain of philosophy and to reinvestigate the metaphysical issues in proper scientific way, Brentano strongly felt the necessity of a new beginning that is

completely free from all kinds of traditional thoughts and presumptions. He believed that psychology could be the proper basis for a new beginning. By stressing the distinction between genetic psychology and descriptive psychology Brentano argues that for him the goal is not to describe the causes of mental states or consciousness from a third-person perspective as it is done in scientific experimental studies. Rather the intention is to characterize and to classify the nature and types of mental phenomenon from the first-person perspective as it is performed in the descriptive psychology.

Brentano maintained that the most essential criterion of a mental state that distinguishes it from other physical states is the conditional nature or relatedness of thought that every mental state is always intended to or directed towards an object. All our thought or mental act includes an intentional object within it. That is in the state of perception something is perceived, in the act of wish something is wished, in the case of judgement something is judged and so on. Thus, the famous dictum in Brentano's language is that intentionality is the '*mark of the mental*'. However, Brentano did prefer to use the term 'intentional inexistence' instead of 'intentionality'.

Thus, the most well-known citation, which has brought about a lot of controversies and through which Brentano has first explicated the thesis of intentionality, is on his essay *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*

"Every mental phenomena is characterised by what the scholastics of the Middle Age called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and which we, although not with an entirely unambiguous expression, will call the relation to a content, the direction toward an object (by which here a reality is not understood), or an immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presenting something is presented, in judgement

something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on.”³

Thus, according to Brentano, this ‘intentional in-existence’ is characteristic exclusively of mental phenomena⁴. Here, the phrase ‘intentional in-existence’ implies immanent existence of intentional object. The object of thought, according to Brentano, has an inner existence or ‘in-exist’ in the mode of thought or what he calls the act of thought. If, for example, I have a thought of a ‘golden kite’, it follows that the intended object, namely, the ‘golden kite’ is immanently contained in my mental act towards which it is directed irrespective of the fact that the ‘golden kite’ has no such existence in reality. In the similar way, in case of my fear for ghost or a desire for a toffee or in any other mental states like, love, anger, wish etc., the conscious intentional act is directed towards an object that has immanent existence. Thus, by the term ‘in’ in the expression ‘in-existence’ Brentano does not mean to deny the existence of the object of thought nor does he claim that the object has any extra-psychical or extra-mental existence. Rather intentional relation, according to him, is a necessary immanent relation between the act of mental state and the immanent object that is contained in mental state.

However, the notion of ‘immanent objectivity’ or ‘intentional in-existence’ in Brentano’s doctrine of intentionality has stirred many of his followers and critics to react against it, which brought out both constructive and disparaging impact. As a result, Brentano in his later period has reformed the thesis of intentionality by withdrawing the concept of ‘immanence’ or ‘in-existence’ from intentionality. Since, for most of the later thinkers, the expression ‘immanent objectivity’ is a serious obstacle in the exposition of the doctrine of intentionality, which prompts one to question the ontological status of intended object.

Here, another problem that draws our attention is that whether Brentano distinguishes mental acts from consciousness or not. In other words, did Brentano by the term mental phenomena intend to mean all conscious acts? Is there any mental state that is unconscious in nature? So far as it has been analysed, it is found that in Brentano's account of psychological phenomena all mental acts are conscious mental acts. Brentano did never make any such distinction between conscious mental states and unconscious mental states. As he says, 'we use the term 'consciousness' to refer to any mental phenomena, insofar as it has a content.'⁵ Thus, for Brentano there is no distinction between the two, all mental phenomena are conscious intentional phenomena. Mental state and consciousness are quite synonymous to him. Though, for Mohanty, there are intentional mental states that are neither conscious nor transparent; intentionality is much broader notion that incorporates all mental acts irrespective of any quality that they possess⁶. It follows that for Mohanty mental states include both conscious and unconscious states. However, the Advaitins are quite unique in this position, as for them, mental states are always external to consciousness. Though, it must be noted that the Advaitins do not form their views about the distinction between consciousness and mental state on the basis of any arbitrary assumption rather they have extended sufficient justification to ensure their claim, which we would take up in the subsequent chapter. For this moment we proceed to figure out how Husserl conceptualizes the notion of consciousness and intentionality.

4.2 Husserl on the Nature of Consciousness and Intentionality

It is around in the middle of 20th century, Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology has motivated and challenged sternly the ideologies of his predecessors, fellow thinkers and even the successors on the ground of scientific understanding. Husserl was dissatisfied with the dogmatic attitude and unscientific mode of doing

philosophy. His firm belief in the genuineness of phenomenology and intense concern to unveil the nature of reality and being in its entirety has moulded his approach into a rigorous and scientific method. Husserl insists on the openness of philosophical inquiry that can make all investigations free from dogmatism and irrationalism. Instead of ample approval of any ideology he stresses on the detailed verification of our all preconceived ideas in any enquiry.

4.2.1.I An Endeavour to Attain Presuppositionless Philosophy and *Epochē*

In *Philosophy as a Rigorous Science*, one of the major works of Husserl, he claims that it is imperative to accept

“nothing given in advance, allow nothing traditional to pass for a beginning, nor let ourselves be dazzled by any names however great, but rather seek to attain the beginning in a free dedication to the problems themselves and to the demands stemming from them.”⁷

For Husserl the scientific spirit of any philosophical inquiry seeks to analyse the objects as they are given in our experience, i.e., the first-person experience of the reality. We must reform the theories of truth from our own experience without allowing any preconceived and unverified theories to direct our investigation. Gradually, in the later period, Husserl’s ideal of realizing presuppositionless scientific philosophy has led him to the discovery of *epochē* that asks for suspension of all natural attitudes, dogmatic, commonsensical beliefs and metaphysical and epistemological assumptions which have concealed our understandings so far. In brief, it is an act of withdrawing all our beliefs from any judgement formulated uncritically or to refrain from presuming anything that takes the world and its object unscientifically. Hence, the aim behind introducing this *epochē* or what is also known as the method of ‘bracketing the world’ is to alter our

perspective radically to apprehend the reality of the object in a completely new light. Thus, stating the role of *epochē* in *Ideas* Husserl writes,

“With regard to any positing we can quite feely exercise this peculiar *epochē*, a certain refraining from judgement which is compatible with the unshaken conviction of truth, even with the unshakable conviction of evident truth. The positing is ‘put out of action,’ parenthesized, converted into the modification, ‘parenthesized positing,’ the judgement simpliciter is converted into the ‘parenthesized judgement.’”⁸

Husserl confirms that the task of phenomenology is to examine the ‘givenness or appearance’ of reality and not to admit any prejudice or preconceived idea to govern our thought. Thus, by the phenomenological method, Husserl has suspended the natural world to get access to the essential structure of ‘pure consciousness’. The aim is to make our vision free from all kinds of presuppositions in order to discover the fundamental ‘phenomenological data’, which is the basis of every contingent object. In other words, for Husserl, *epochē* is a means through which one proceeds by suspending the psychological subjectivity to the realm of transcendental subjectivity.

4.2.1.II The Methodological Difference with Brentano

It must be mentioned that following Brentano initially Husserl used the terms phenomenology and descriptive psychology interchangeably but very soon he has realized the distinction of phenomenology as a transcendental philosophy from the latter. According to Husserl, the aim of phenomenology is not like psychology is to describe or to find out the causes of mental phenomena rather to study the essence and structure of consciousness. As a result, gradually after the publication of *Logical Investigations*, Husserl has stopped characterizing phenomenology as a descriptive psychology. Phenomenology for him, is not an empirical science or ‘science of facts’ like psychology

rather what he calls it an eidetic science. Psychology like naturalism seeks to describe consciousness as they are understood naturally. However, the method of studying consciousness, according to Husserl, must be something transcendental as consciousness being the fundamental basis for 'all science, all knowledge and all acts' cannot be studied simply as a part of nature. Phenomenology as a priori science thus, studies fundamental structure of consciousness and not mere psycho-physical structure of human mind. It is the study of the subjective experience as it is immediately intuited.

4.2.2 Subject-Object Distinction and Significance for an Inquiry into Subjectivity

Phenomenology, for Husserl, is not only a study of the object as it is given in our conscious experience but also entails a study of the 'givenness' of consciousness. Drawing our attention to the significant difference between the appearance of an object and the appearance of consciousness to itself, Husserl has laid emphasis on the necessity of undertaking an inquiry into the nature of conscious subject. Since, a meaningful understanding of the object is dependent on the knowledge of the correlation between the subject and object. It is to be realized how objects are known and revealed by the act of consciousness. To be precise, the demand of phenomenological study is to shift the course of our investigation from the object to 'the conscious acts in which it is given'. However, Husserl makes his intention very clear by stating that this study of consciousness is not the psychological study of consciousness nor the neuro-scientific investigation. Indeed, it is a first-person experience of the nature and constituents of consciousness to map the essential conditions for the possibility of knowledge unlike any other empirical study.

4.2.3 The Notion of Intentionality

It is in the Fifth and Sixth *Logical Investigations* Husserl has developed an extensive account of the nature of conscious experience along with the theory of intentionality. Husserl though has been influenced by Brentano's descriptive psychology as well as the notion of intentionality of psychic phenomenon, has given a new meaning to the intentionality thesis. According to Husserl, intentionality is the fundamental attribute of certain kinds of conscious experiences, which are always directed towards something beyond it. Husserl says,

“Intentionality is what characterizes consciousness in the pregnant sense and which, at the same time, justifies designating the whole stream of mental processes as the stream of consciousness and as the unity of one consciousness....Under intentionality we understand the own peculiarity of mental processes ‘to be the consciousness of something.’”⁹

It is the nature of conscious experience that it intends a transcendent object in spite of the absence of the intended object in the world. In other words, the intended object of consciousness may exist or may not exist in reality yet it cannot overthrow the intentional character of conscious experience. Thus, Husserl argues that not only the conscious experiences like perception, judgement, doubt and so on regarding actual objects but also consciousness of our imaginations, hallucinations, misconceptions and all about non-existent objects are in the same way intentional in nature. It is because consciousness becomes intentional not due to any external force or object rather it is the very essence of consciousness that it always transcends itself. Thus, intentionality does not entail that there are two different things like A and B that are causally related to each other nor does it imply that existence of one is depended on the other where one influences the other.

The only thing that is required for any intentional experience is the existence of the conscious experience itself along with its internal peculiarity of self-transcendence. As Husserl made the remark,

“That a presentation refers to a certain object in a certain manner, is not due to its acting on some external, independent object, ‘directing’ itself to it in some literal sense, or doing something to it or with it, as a hand writes with a pen. It is due to nothing that stays outside of the presentation, but to its own inner peculiarity alone.”¹⁰

Thus, it is evident that Husserl’s account of intentionality is influenced neither by objectivistic approach nor by any subjectivistic interpretation. Since, for Husserl, the intended object of conscious experience is not immanent or within the conscious act. The intended object, by its very nature, is transcendent to the conscious experience even though it does not exist in real world. Even if the intended object is an object of dream or illusion or hallucination, it does not have immanent existence in conscious act. However, what he claims to be immanent is the content or idea and not the intended object which is extra-mental always. So, even the ‘unreal’ object which is non-spatial like ‘sky-flower’, ‘golden mountain’ etc., if it is intended by the conscious being, can never be the immanent object of conscious act. In other words, intended object is nothing but the object of intention, which is not a creation of mind that exists within it. In each case of conscious experience, our consciousness is always directed towards the object that transcends it, the only difference is that in some cases like in perceptions the referent has real existence, whereas it does not exist in cases of dream, hallucination etc.¹¹

In contrast to Brentano, Husserl has made his view very clear by drawing the distinction among intentional conscious-act, its meaning and the intentional object. Husserl affirms that what is immanent to the conscious act is not the intended object rather the immanent

content of the act whereas the object is always beyond and independent of mental states. By emphasizing Husserl's contention Zahavi writes, 'That which is contained in the act is not that which we intend, and that which we intend is not contained in the act.'¹²

Every intentional conscious experience has two integral aspects — the *intentional quality* and the *intentional matter* which together form the ground of all our intentional experiences. The *intentional quality* of a conscious experience implies the type or nature of a conscious experience, for instance, it may be an experience of desire or doubt or judgement or belief and so on. On the other hand, *intentional matter* of an experience is something through which the experience turns in to an intentional act. Needless to say, it is this *intentional matter* or *meaning* or *sense* of the conscious-act, which indeed, is the cause of its intentionality or object-directedness. Explaining the point in his well-known work *Husserl's Phenomenology* Zahavi says,

“One is not simply conscious of an object, one is always conscious of an object in a particular way, that is, to be intentionally directed at something is to intend something as something.”¹³

Thus, Husserl's version of intentionality is characterized by 'conception-dependence' and 'existence-independence'. These are two conditions of intentionality that make it free from objectivistic and subjectivistic interpretations, which wrongly define it a result of causal influence or a type of quasi-relation.

Every conscious act, be it a perception or judgement or fear, the object towards which the act is directed, apprehends the object from a particular perspective or account that is for Husserl the act-matter or *meaning* of a conscious-act. One can continuously refer to the same object under different act-matters whereas different objects cannot be intended by the same act-matter. For instance, the planet 'Venus' while it is perceived in the morning,

it is conceived as a 'morning-star', whereas, when it is perceived in the evening, it is conceived as an 'evening-star'. Here, in both the cases the object is the same 'Venus', though it is conceived under two different 'act-matters' or 'senses'. It is this *meaning* or *sense* of a particular act by means of which the act refers to the object. However, this *meaning* is distinct from both the object and the conscious-act or the conscious experience. It is neither the part of the object nor identical with object yet always stands for a particular object. In other words, the act is not directed towards the *meaning* nor it is about the *meaning* rather it is always intentional about the intentional object by means of some *meaning*.

In this regard, Husserl again has drawn our attention into an important distinction between intentional content and immanent content. The intentional content denotes the ideal meaning of an act that can be one in two conscious experiences and can also be conceived by more than one person whereas the immanent content is exclusively private to each conscious act. It is being a component of conscious-act truly contained in the act and thus, is not sharable even by the same intentional being in two subsequent acts about the same intended object. According to Husserl, sensations or sensory elements as well as the immanent content together constitute the conscious act. However, these sensations themselves are non-intentional but by interpreting the sensations the act goes toward an intentional object. Nevertheless, whatever the case may be the conscious experience is directed neither to the intentional content nor to the immanent content rather only to the intentional object.

4.2.4 Pure or Transcendental Consciousness

Gradually, in the subsequent works, Husserl became more radical in his attempt to grasp the essence of '*pure consciousnesses*' or what he calls 'Transcendental Subjectivity'. One

immediate outcome of his phenomenological reduction is the discovery of the essential distinction between consciousness and object, as it becomes clear that while the object is always partly presented to experience, consciousness is entirely presented to itself. But more than it, the fact that dictates the priority of consciousness over object is the very existence of the latter that necessarily presupposes an intentional subject or consciousness which itself is an autonomous, self-manifesting being. This absolute conscious being is called by Husserl 'Transcendental Subjectivity' who is not constituted or absorbed like an empirical subject in the objective world rather possesses the conditions for the appearance of all things including the empirical subject. The transcendental subjectivity in that sense is not unrelated to the empirical subject but a dimension of the subject that cannot be bracketed through the performance of *epochē* as it alone can survive all suspensions. To put it differently, the ego is a *residuum* that reduction leaves behind¹⁴. These are the two different self-manifestations of the same subject, one is primary and other is secondary. Explaining Husserl's intention Zahavi writes,

"The transcendental subject is the subject in its primary constitutive function. The empirical subject is the same subject, but now apprehended and interpreted as an object in the world, that is, as a constituted and mundanized entity."¹⁵

However, in his turn towards this transcendental ego Husserl does not intend to disapprove the world rather for him, the ego provides the conditions for the manifestation of the world. In *Ideas I*, Husserl repeatedly stresses that the entire world, all objective entities are contingent and dependent on the transcendental subjectivity. The very existence of the intentional object presupposes the presence of an intentional being or pure consciousness that in other way composes the ground of the entire objective world. According to Husserl, it is the transcendental consciousness through its intentional acts

constitutes the object of the world. Since the mere existence of the thing in itself does not assure its being rather it is affirmed and manifested by the transcendental subject.

It is not constitution in the sense that the object is materially produced rather it is constitution in terms of attributing meaning and sense to the object. In other words, the constitution of the object signifies, above all, the revelation of the object. In different acts of consciousness, namely, in seeing, remembering, liking, disliking, wishing, denying and judging, consciousness is spontaneously positing values to the objects. Though, all these values in themselves along with objectivity are accidental and dependent on consciousness. Like Husserl, Heidegger too in his work *History of the Concept of Time Lectures* regards 'constitution' as the method of manifestation of the object through the conscious intentional being. Indeed, for Husserl, consciousness itself along with the objective world derives its meaning from 'transcendental being'. And the process through which each subject constitutes the meaning of itself as well as the meaning of other Husserl calls intersubjective constitution. Interpreting Husserl's account of constitution D. Moran writes,

"Constitution expresses the manner in which objects of consciousness come to have the kinds of 'sense and being' that they do, the manner in which subjectivity carries out its function of giving sense."¹⁶

Consequently Husserl characterizes 'Transcendental subjectivity' as the only 'Absolute Being' among all other beings in the realm of transcendental phenomenology. However, subjectivity for Husserl is not absolute in metaphysical sense that indicates an omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent being. Rather it is absolute in respect of its freedom from any constitutive principle apart from itself. To quote Husserl from *Ideas I*,

“Consciousness considered in its ‘purity’ must be held to be a self-contained complex of being, a complex of absolute being into which nothing can penetrate and out of which nothing can slip, to which nothing is spatiotemporally external and which cannot be within any spatiotemporally complex, which cannot be affected by any physical thing.”¹⁷

Husserl writes, ‘Consciousness has, in itself, a being of its own which in its own absolute essence is not touched by the phenomenological exclusion.’¹⁸ In other words, it is the transcendental being that remains untouched regardless of whether or not the world exists¹⁹. Husserl continues to argue that the objective world requires consciousness to depend upon but it is not vice-versa. ‘No real thing, no being which is presented and legitimated in consciousness by its appearances, is necessary to the being of consciousness itself.’²⁰ It seems that while the existence of worldly things are relative and conditional but this is not so in case of the ‘Transcendental Subjectivity’ which is self-manifesting or self-aware. The transcendent is profoundly determined by the transcendental, which is the basis for the existence of all beings. As he states, ‘Subjectivity is for-itself, it is self-manifesting or self-constituting, whereas this determination is something that all objects per definition lack.’²¹ Consciousness does not depend on anything outside it to appear, whereas, the appearance of transcendent beings always depend on consciousness beyond their own beings. Precisely, it can be argued that the absolute being, for Husserl, is independent, self-contained and self-revealing principle opposed to the transcendent beings. So, even the disappearance of the objective world would not cause any harm to the absolute essence of transcendental being.

To Husserl, this transcendental subjectivity is nothing but what he says as ‘*transcendental ego*’, which ‘is a necessary condition not just for the possibility of experience, but for the possibility of world.’²² The Ego is the eternal inhabitant of consciousness which gives rise to all experiences and also ties them into one enduring

unity. It is the identical subject that persists and unites all experiences that one may have. According to D. Moran, the ego is more than a mere unity; it is the living self that has its own 'values, history and beliefs'. Moreover, the dynamism of the ego lies in its self-constitution and constitution of the world. Since 'transcendancy in every form is an immanent existential characteristic, constituted within the ego. In other words, everything either immanent or transcendent falls within the domain of transcendental subjectivity, as the subjectivity that constitutes sense and being'²³. In *Cartesian Meditation* Husserl writes,

“The Objective world, the world that exist for me, that always has and always will exist for me, the only world that ever can exist for me – this world, with all its objects, I said, derives its whole sense and its existential status, which it has for me, from me myself, from me as the transcendental Ego, the Ego who comes to the fore only with transcendental-phenomenological *epochē*.”²⁴

The existence of the natural being is thus, derivative which presupposes the prior transcendental being and its cogitations. Transcendental ego is foundational as it grants the ultimate base for all our cognitive processes. Whereas the experiences are constantly flowing, the ego stands behind all acts as the one and same subject. This is not the mere empirical 'I' or psychological 'I' but the transcendental 'I' or 'Ego' that is realized after the transcendental reduction, 'which is not a piece of the world, so conversely, neither the world nor any worldly object is a piece of the Ego.'²⁵ The empirical ego or 'I' can be excluded through reduction as it is nothing more than a mere transcendent object and thereby, transcends consciousness. The pure or transcendental ego, on the other hand, is unreducible through reduction. In *Cartesian Meditation*, Husserl remarks,

“The *epochē* can also be said to be the radical and universal method by which I apprehend myself purely: as Ego and with my own pure conscious life, in and by which the entire Objective world exists for me and is precisely as it is for me. Anything belonging to the world, any spatiotemporal being, exists for me – that is to say, is accepted by me --- in that I experience it, perceive it, remember it, think of it somehow, judge about it, value it, desire it, or the like.”²⁶

It is explicit that Husserl’s initial thinking does not permit the reality of any ego or ‘I’. In the first edition of *Logical Investigation* Husserl by following his master Brentano and Hume has denied the possibility of recognizing any such selfhood or ‘I’ and has condemned Natrop for affirming the ego as the subject in the stream of consciousness. Though, the revised edition of *Logical Investigation* affirms the existence of a ‘pure ego’. The realm of consciousness for Husserl, is not like an empty vessel that is lacking something for the transcendent to accomplish. Rather, the ego is something essential for the transcendent to dwell in the world. If it is assumed that there is no transcendent thing, no empirical ego, no world around us yet it is impossible to prove the non-existence of absolute consciousness. In the manner of Descartes, Husserl states that even though we doubt the world as a mere illusion, it is certain that transcendental subjectivity is real and indubitable.

However, it can be summed up from the above discussion that Husserl’s understanding of the nature of consciousness is rooted into the thesis of intentionality. Intentionality is understood as the very force by means of which consciousness reveals in the world as well as enables the world to appear. It is through intentionality the transcendent is given to and correlated to consciousness. However, consciousness is not just conscious of something but always has a perspective about the intentional object. In other words, intentionality does not only stand as an essential structure of consciousness but also as a

‘meaning-giving’ principle of consciousness which confers value to the objects of our perception. The relation between consciousness and intentionality is such that both are complementary to each other in the process of cognition. Since consciousness in the absence of intentionality would not be consciousness at all. This consciousness is not the mere empirical consciousness rather the transcendental consciousness, which is apprehended by means of *epochē*. More importantly, the ‘Transcendental Ego’ that persists behind all intentional conscious acts is the ultimate inhabitant of consciousness. In this sense, it can be argued that Husserl’s notion of transcendental consciousness is intentional and egological in nature.

Husserl’s account of transcendental subjectivity often makes one aware about the Kantian notion of transcendental subject and Cartesian ego. Indeed, Descartes’ distinction between the notion of subjectivity (Cogito) and the extended being has enormously affected Husserl in formulating his own version of pure or transcendental subjectivity in the sphere of phenomenology. It is the Cartesian Cogito or the notion of thinking being that has provided Husserl with a new vision and has transformed his approach towards subjectivity. He has admitted that Descartes’ discovery of ego is the gateway for the transcendental philosophy.

Nevertheless, there is a crucial ground that makes Husserl different from his predecessors and made him one promising contemporary of twentieth century. It is obvious that phenomenology for Husserl, starts by means of phenomenal description of the given and accordingly by bracketing all *a priori* abstraction²⁷, however, it also explicates the subject’s relation to the given that it develops in terms of its intentional character. To put it differently, neither Kant nor Descartes has traced this intentional feature of consciousness, which indeed, has turned out as one of the most significant achievements of Husserl. In fact, even after conceding the being of cogito, according to Husserl,

Descartes too was reluctant to do proper justice with ego in terms of its import in transcendental realm and has misinterpreted by naturalizing consciousness as just another region of the world.²⁸ Since the ego is incomplete and inaccessible without the *cogitatum* or intentional objects with which it is always related through *cogitations* or intentional acts. And thus, he has tried to overcome Cartesian solipsism not by deducing the existence of God but by correlating the ego with *cogitatum* as well as by affirming the being of ‘other ego’. It seems that to Husserl, the objective world is not just a piece of scientific investigation rather it has meaning, status and value conferred by the subject. It is by referring to the object of outside subjectivity manifests itself as well as manifests the nature of physical phenomena. Since, consciousness, for Husserl, is the underlying principle of everything that exists.

4.3 Sartre on the Nature of Consciousness and Intentionality

A phenomenological study into the intentional nature of consciousness seems incomplete without Jean-Paul Sartre, the successor of Husserl, who is well recognized for his radical contribution in the field of phenomenology. Sartre was immensely impressed by Husserl’s version of intentionality, which becomes apparent in his short essay *Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl’s Phenomenology*. Nevertheless, his attempt is also substantial in further expanding and amending the intentionality thesis of Husserl.

By virtue of being more rigorous than anyone Sartre characterizes consciousness solely through its intentional or object-directed nature. For Sartre, intentionality or self-transcendence of consciousness is not a mere feature of consciousness rather it is the very essence of consciousness. Consciousness, to Sartre, is defined by intentionality²⁹. He

describes consciousness as ‘a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being implies a being other than itself.’³⁰

It is the essence of consciousness that it always escapes itself in order to grasp the object of outside. Consciousness or for-itself is not complete in itself, it is not ‘self-contained’ and thereby, requires something other than itself to fulfil its emptiness. The conscious experience either of a perception or imagination or anything else composes itself by continuously moving towards the object of it. It is indeed the very necessity of consciousness to be conscious of something, thus, writes Sartre, ‘This necessity for consciousness to exist as consciousness of something other than itself Husserl calls ‘intentionality’.’³¹

However, despite of being directed towards the object, consciousness is neither identical with its object nor the object of consciousness may form a part of it, ‘for it is not of the same nature as consciousness.’³² In other words, the ‘red apple’ of my perception is not the part of perceptual consciousness nor does it penetrate into the conscious experience. The ‘apple’ in its totality is outside, on the table, distinct from the conscious experience. In other words, for Sartre, it is this dichotomy between the nature of consciousness and object that causes consciousness to become intentional. ‘Consciousness’ being absolutely clear and translucent is nothing but only “a movement of fleeing itself, a sliding beyond itself”³³. Sartre says,

“All at once consciousness is purified, it is clear as a strong wind....It is just this being beyond itself, this absolute flight, this refusal to be a substance which makes it a consciousness”³⁴.

Briefly, it is in this process of flowing towards its object consciousness constitutes itself. Thus, the famous assertion of Sartre as has been put forth in his renowned essay *Being*

and Nothingness, is 'Transcendence is the constitutive structure of consciousness.'³⁵

Consciousness is not a substance that exists excluding the object rather consciousness proves its very presence by intending the object of the world. The necessary condition for the existence of consciousness is the existence of the object of consciousness. In this regard, Sartre differs from Husserl in holding that it is nothing else but the object that constitutes the being of consciousness and not just vice-versa. Thus, this self-transcending nature of consciousness is also inconsistent with Cartesian notion of mental substance, which is independent of physical substance. Since, for Sartre, consciousness to exist is to exist by means of the object of it. A very cogent assertion as has been articulated in *Being and Nothingness* is given below,

“consciousness derives for itself its meaning as consciousness from this being. This being comes into the world along with consciousness, at once in its heart and outside it; it is absolute transcendence in absolute immanence.....Of course, this being could not exist without the for-itself, but neither could the for-itself exist without it.”³⁶

Thus, denying the idealistic inclination that claims for the independent existence of consciousness without the objective world, Sartre concedes for the being of consciousness that posits an object to express itself in the world and that as well is the basis for the latter to manifest. The transcendent being or the object of consciousness is not different from the object as such since consciousness has nothing hidden inside, it is 'translucent'. To put it in another way, the object that appears to the conscious experience is the sole reality and there is nothing concealed within consciousness. However, Sartre was least worried in finding whether objects have real existence or not rather being a phenomenologist for him the main task was to describe the objects as they emerge to our experience.

4.3.1 Self-awareness of Consciousness: Pre-reflective and Reflective States

At this juncture it must be emphasized that phenomenology being a study of the nature of consciousness is not exhausted in examining only the self-transcending nature of consciousness since any satisfactory analysis into the nature of consciousness along with the notion of intentionality must refer to the problem of self-awareness. While our study in the previous chapters has marked an extensive account of self-awareness or self-luminosity in the domain of Vedānta; the problem has also been addressed and examined in phenomenology. Though it cannot be overlooked under any circumstances phenomenologists unlike Advaitins are more concerned in their investigation about the ‘self-transcending’ nature of consciousness than its self-awareness.

Needless to say, Sartre is known for offering us the most popular account of self-awareness in the field of phenomenology. To say that consciousness is intrinsically self-transcending or always aims at something beyond it does not mean that consciousness is not conscious of its own being. Consciousness in terms of moving towards an object outside it is also self-conscious. Since to exist for consciousness is to be self-conscious or self-aware which indeed, is a fundamental pre-requisite for the consciousness of object. Thus writes Sartre, ‘the necessary and sufficient condition for a knowing consciousness to be knowledge of its object, is that it be consciousness of itself...’³⁷ In other words, according to Sartre, a consciousness of object without self-consciousness is ignorant of itself and thus, absurd. This self-awareness of consciousness is not revealed through reflection rather it is the pre-reflective self-awareness which makes reflection possible. In fact, for Sartre, there is a pre-reflective cogito that is the condition for Cartesian cogito. This pre-reflective cogito like Cartesian cogito does not say ‘I am conscious of this ball’ rather it is simply ‘consciousness of ball’. To quote again, ‘every positional consciousness of an object is at the same time a non-positional consciousness of itself.’³⁸

This self-awareness is not to be considered, says Sartre, 'as a new consciousness, but as the only mode of existence which is possible for a consciousness of something.'³⁹ To be precise, self-awareness of pre-reflective state is not a new act of knowing consciousness as the way an object is known and revealed. For, consciousness is not present to itself as an object is given to it rather 'consciousness knows itself only as absolute inwardness'⁴⁰ and thus, reveals its being without being an object to itself or other. In brief, self-awareness is not a process of reflecting attentively into one's own past or present conscious state nor it is any attitude that one deliberately adopts to explain a particular case of perception since admitting any such duality is to invite an infinite regress. It is not any cognitive relation of consciousness to itself. It is an implicit and first-order awareness distinct from an explicit reflective or higher-order form of self-consciousness⁴¹. In fact, it is this implicit pre-reflective self-awareness that forms the basis and gives rise to an explicit reflective self-awareness.

Hence, what constitutes the possibility of self-consciousness is simply the being of consciousness. It is the state of consciousness that it acquires by virtue of being conscious in spite of its coalition with cognitive states and thoughts. It is immediate without any mediator and the fundamental basis in all cases of perception and cognition. Indeed, in *Transcendence of Ego* Sartre argues that consciousness is absolute because it is aware of itself. So, the very base for the explicit reflective consciousness is structured by the implicit pre-reflective conscious state, which itself is autonomous. Admitting the priority of pre-reflective state over the other, Sartre writes,

“The unreflected has the ontological priority over the reflected because the unreflected consciousness does not need to be reflected in order to exist and because reflection presupposes the intervention of a second-degree consciousness.”⁴²

Here, it must be stated that for Sartre, this pre-reflective self-awareness even if is the basis for reflective consciousness, it is not non-intentional. In other words, this self-awareness is not without a consciousness of an object. As has been referred by Sartre, 'In order to be non-thetic self-consciousness, consciousness must be a thetic consciousness of something.'⁴³ Since, consciousness is self-aware 'in so far as it is consciousness of a transcendent object',⁴⁴ because to intend an object is to get aware of one's own being. Clarifying Sartre's position writes Hazel E. Barnes, 'Every intending act is positionally aware of the object it posits and nonpositionally aware of itself as awareness'.⁴⁵

It appears that in Sartre there is an attempt throughout to keep both self-awareness and intentionality as two inevitable aspects of consciousness. Regarding intentionality Sartre is always stick to his earlier view. Sartre confirms that self-transcending is the ultimate necessity for consciousness to exist. But even though all consciousness is self-transcending and referential not all conscious experience is non-reflexive. Like Advaita, Sartre too defines self-consciousness as an immediate realization of consciousness of its being without cognizing itself as an object. Though unlike Advaita, Sartre correlates this pre-reflective self-consciousness with its object-directedness. Though, there is no attempt to reduce one into another.

However, not only Sartre, Husserl too recognizes pre-reflective self-awareness as a necessary aspect of consciousness though his account on self-consciousness is not as explicit and extensive as that of intentionality. According to Husserl, experience is not only conscious of an object but there is also consciousness of itself which is not another act to posit itself as an object. Consciousness is not conscious of itself in the sense of grasping itself as something else nor it is an act towards itself. Self-consciousness is rather what he calls immanently perceived.⁴⁶ But what Husserl means here by the term 'perception' needs to be clarified. More importantly, it is necessary to examine whether

Husserl truly seeks to reduce self-awareness into intentionality as held by Mohanty. These issues would be taken up again in the following chapter as for now our focus is on-going chapter.

4.3.2 Refutation of Ego

Undoubtedly Sartre's firm belief in the self-transcending and reflexive nature of consciousness results from his revolt against the 'Transcendental Ego' in the realm of consciousness. There is strictly no inhabitant of consciousness. Since for Sartre to allow any 'Ego' behind or inside consciousness as a co-ordinator of conscious acts stands against the doctrine of intentionality. To be precise, the 'Ego' is a hindrance in the spontaneous flow of conscious experiences which are moving outside. Indeed, what we perceive is the mere 'consciousness of the Ego' like consciousness of an apple or painting, instead of any 'Ego-consciousness'. Denying the existence of ego, Sartre writes,

“If it existed, it would violently separate consciousness from itself, it would divide it, slicing through each consciousness like an opaque blade. The transcendental I is the death of consciousness.”⁴⁷

Sartre thus, affirms the being of consciousness that is non-egological and contentless. Consciousness does not require any regulating head in the form of ego within itself in order to be aware of its object or to identify one. In other words, the ego must not be regarded as one constituting the contents of consciousness for the very reason that consciousness is devoid of content. Nor the 'Ego' can be regarded as the *cause* of conscious experiences, for there is 'nothing except consciousness can be the source of consciousness.'⁴⁸ Consciousness is an uncaused cause of all ordinary experiences. It is simply a spontaneity, a sheer activity transcending toward objects.⁴⁹

Hence, the ego, like objects, is external to consciousness. It is outside, in the world. There is no 'I' as the owner of different conscious states rather there is only consciousness of object and consciousness of the 'I'. When I am listening to music or watching a movie, for instance, there is just 'the consciousness of the movie or music' that I am enjoying in leisure. No one experiences that 'Now, I am watching the movie or listening this music'. There is no 'I' to regulate but only the unreflective consciousness that is persistently pointing to the object. It is pre-personal consciousness though not unaware of itself. Sartre writes,

“When I run after a streetcar, when I look at the time, when I am absorbed in looking at a portrait, no I is present, there is consciousness of the streetcar-having-to-be-caught, etc., and non-positional consciousness of that consciousness.”⁵⁰

Against Husserl, Sartre thinks that the presence of Descartes' Cogito in conscious experience seems unnecessary and inconsistent with the doctrine of intentionality. The 'I' or the 'Ego', according to him, is the '*psychic and psycho-physical me*' that arises at the reflective conscious state, which is a second-order awareness. In other words, the 'I' or 'Ego' is the derivative of reflective consciousness, which in other way is solely based on the pre-reflective consciousness that is also known as 'consciousness of the first order'. As long as there is no reflection upon the previous conscious state the 'Ego' does not emerge into consciousness. In a more explicit way, to say that the 'I' or the 'Ego' has consciousness of an object implies that the 'Ego' is aware of the pre-reflective consciousness that is insistently directed towards the object. Without any dubiety Sartre therefore, concedes that ego is not a discovery rather the creation in the reflective state of consciousness which we cannot locate in the primary non-reflective phase. Since, this personal being emerges in the latter phase only when consciousness reflects back on itself. The problem arises because Husserl, like Descartes has mistaken the 'Ego' as a

permanent entity in consciousness and failed to determine the true essence of consciousness. Consciousness in its originality is always consciousness of something.

However, Sartre's account of pre-reflective and reflective states of consciousness should not be mistaken as two kinds of consciousness which are attached to each other. Rather, consciousness exists as circular; consciousness is referring to the object by being aware of its own self. Both the pre-reflective and reflective phases of consciousness are in fact, one whole and not two different kinds of consciousness.

To elucidate the point, Sartre brings out the famous example of the 'cigarette-counting'. While one is counting the cigarette, one does not know himself as the 'ego' that is performing the act of counting. Rather one is non-reflectively aware of the act of counting, which is certainly self-conscious. There is no 'Ego' as the subject or regulating principal in pre-reflective consciousness because there is only consciousness of the object, like 'consciousness of counting'. But the 'I' arises when one is inclined to reflect on the consciousness ceaselessly passing and state that 'I am counting cigarette'. The immediate consciousness cannot look back on itself nor can it posit itself as its own object; it is just escaping itself for the object of outside. In contrast, the reflective consciousness has the positional consciousness of performing the act, which involves a non-positional consciousness within itself.

It is explicit thereby, that Sartre reduces the 'Ego' from the subjective level to the objective level and has tried to interpret the nature of consciousness completely in terms of intentionality. Sartre is very meticulous in maintaining the egoless and contentless notion of consciousness. Drawing the distinction between the reflective and pre-reflective states of consciousness, he tried to justify that self-transcendence as the very nature of consciousness is opposed to Ego-consciousness. Nevertheless, how far he has succeeded

in his attempt to eliminate the ego is uncertain and very controversial. Since it has been noticed in the preceding discussion and even for many of his critics, Sartre could not remove the ego entirely from the domain of consciousness even if he had apparently refuted it from the primary level. In fact, it appears that Sartre has fallen into a kind of dualism of consciousness while trying to take out the ego from the pre-reflective phase. However, it can be argued by defending Sartre that both these pre-reflective and reflective states are the aspects of one and same consciousness. These are not two different kinds of consciousness but two consecutive phases where one presupposes the other.

4.3.3 Embodied Experience

Here, it is worth to mention that consciousness to Sartre is always embodied consciousness. The 'Being-for-itself' in terms of which Sartre characterizes the nature of consciousness is not a mere awareness devoid of a body. Consciousness exists in body though not in the way that body is a mere possession of consciousness to make use of it. Body is more than an object of consciousness that holds the possibility for the being of consciousness. Consciousness continues to persist by means of the body. In the words of Sartre, the body is, 'the instrument which I am and which cannot be utilized by any instrument.'⁵¹ The body, according to Sartre, is inevitable to consciousness to subsist just as the way an object is for the manifestation of consciousness. Describing the role of body Sartre further adds, 'It is evident that consciousness can exist its body only as consciousness. Therefore, my body is a conscious structure of my consciousness.'⁵² It is not a transcendent object towards which consciousness is moving, because there is no consciousness of body on the level of unreflective consciousness. The body is the point of view with which consciousness has existential relation. Hence, according to Sartre, the best way is to say – '*consciousness exists its body*'. Emphasizing Sartre's view again

Kathleen Wider states, 'The relationship between consciousness and the body is not an objective but an existential one.'⁵³ Sartre thus, interprets consciousness as subjectivity that incorporates the body to arise. The body is the base of all intentional acts that are pointing to the objects. Along with consciousness, the body too is the condition for all actions performed in the world.

However, Sartre's analysis on the body-subject has influenced Merleau-Ponty immensely. It is true that Sartre has recognised the role of body in the act of conscious experience but it is Merleau-Ponty, who has brought out the actual significance of body in the intentional act of consciousness, which Sartre somehow eluded. Since, according to Moran, Sartre has failed to connect properly 'consciousness with physical body'. Nevertheless, Sartre's account of body-consciousness and the distinction between the two states of consciousness have thrown a new light in understanding the nature of consciousness and intentionality. His radical attempt to eliminate the ego from the region of consciousness has proved his extreme adherence not only to the notion of intentionality as well as to the original tenet of phenomenology, i. e., 'to study the objects as they are given to experience'. However, in the following section, we would analyse another influential version of intentionality thesis as proposed by Merleau-Ponty, which is indeed, one of the most important segments of present chapter.

4.4 Merleau-Ponty on the Nature of Consciousness and Intentionality

Consciousness and the notion of intentionality have received an effective and distinctive treatment in the hand of French thinker Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty's deep phenomenological conviction is clearly visible in his philosophic thought and in most of the major works. To him, phenomenology is not just a study of 'essence', it is an attempt to 'put back essence into existence'. He argues that phenomenology is a discipline or a

mode of philosophy which ‘existed as a movement before arriving at complete awareness of itself as a philosophy.’⁵⁴ As an advocate of existential phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty is also concerned with Husserl’s notion of *Lebenswelt* or ‘the life experiencing the world’, which Husserl developed in the later period of his philosophical career.

4.4.1 Affirmation and Extension of Phenomenological Method of Reduction

In particular, Merleau-Ponty assigns more weight to phenomenological method of reduction. In the words of Merleau-Ponty, ‘Phenomenology is accessible only through a phenomenological method.’⁵⁵ In his view, the aim of phenomenological method of reduction is not to suspend the reality of the world rather to describe the world in a more comprehensive way. Therefore, suspension should not be conceived in the absolute sense of denying the world rather he holds along with Husserl’s assistant Eugen Fink’s that ‘the most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction.’⁵⁶ Since, the world as the *cogitations* or ‘permanent horizon’ of all experiences is inherent in the ‘being-in-the-world’. The truth that phenomenological reduction seeks to bring out is the indispensable relationship between our ‘existence’ and the ‘world’ and thereby ascertains the concrete bonding between essence and existence. Thus, it is wrong to assume that reduction strives to obtain the essence rather than existence. Since, for Merleau-Ponty, the essence is not the end in itself but only the means to reveal the existence that is firmly embedded in the world. By admitting the irreducibility of the real existing world he insists that phenomenological method should overcome the idealistic inclination of Husserl. As he believes that ‘the real is to be described not constructed or constituted.’⁵⁷ The phenomenological method is not meant to abstract the world from our life, in contrast, it enables us to grasp the close proximity between the world and its being. Through which we can examine and comprehend the object explicitly. It is very apparent therefore, that Merleau-Ponty has not stopped himself only by recognizing the

significance of Husserl's phenomenological method but also has extended the meaning and application of this method.

4.4.2 Operative Intentionality

The notion of intentionality, which is one of the essential notions of phenomenology, has been considered widely by Merleau-Ponty. He did not offer any particular account of consciousness and intentionality, besides, he too has taken insight from Husserl's version. As does Sartre, Merleau-Ponty himself along with Husserl maintains that intentionality is the very nature of consciousness. Conscious experience is always 'conscious of something'. Consciousness is persistently confronting the object of the intentional act. Since without pointing something that transcends it, consciousness fails to exist. To quote Merleau-Ponty from his essay *Phenomenology of Perception*,

“as soon as there is consciousness, and in order that there may be consciousness, there must be something to be conscious of, an intentional object...”⁵⁸

Again, by describing the intentional nature of consciousness Merleau-Ponty writes,

“The whole life of consciousness is characterized by the tendency to posit objects, since it is consciousness, that is to say self-knowledge, only in so far as it takes hold of itself and draws itself together in an identifiable object...”⁵⁹

However, one important contribution of Husserl in the field of phenomenology as regarded by Merleau-Ponty is his later formulation of 'operative intentionality'. It is the intentionality of lived world, which is already there and towards which consciousness is perpetually directing. This operative intentionality, according to Merleau-Ponty is

“that which produces the natural and antepredicative unity of the world and of our life, being apparent in our desires, our evaluations and in the landscape we see, more clearly

than in objective knowledge, and furnishing the text which our knowledge tries to translate into precise language.”⁶⁰

The difference between these two thinkers is that whereas Husserl regards feelings, emotions, desires and the like as acts; for Merleau-Ponty, these experiences are not acts though they are intentional in a broader sense. Merleau-Ponty believes that uniqueness of Husserl lies not in the discovery of intentionality but in the elaboration of the notion of intentionality or in the formulation of deeper intentionality. However, being influenced by the notion of ‘operative intentionality’, Merleau-Ponty formulates his own version of bodily intentionality or intentionality of body-subject which is definitely one of his major contributions in phenomenology.

4.4.3 Intentionality of the Body-Subject

The philosophical insight of Merleau-Ponty about the doctrine of intentionality tends to oppose the traditional subject-object dichotomy. Though, he never denied the importance of his predecessors in the phenomenological movement, yet unhesitatingly he repudiates the dualism they admit. Declining all sorts of contradiction Merleau-Ponty regards that intentionality is not something unique to consciousness rather it belongs to the body-subject, which corresponds to the world. In his essay, *Sense and Non-sense*, Merleau-Ponty explains the relationship between subject and object in the following way,

“the relationship between subject and object is no longer that relationship of knowing postulated by classical idealism, wherein the object always seems the construction of the subject, but a relationship of being in which, paradoxically, the subject is his body, his world and his situation, by a sort of exchange.”⁶¹

The subject is not the absolute disembodied consciousness for it incorporates the body too. The body is not just a bare physical object to consciousness. The body too is the

subject, a 'work of art' without which it is impossible for consciousness to express and to communicate with the surrounding world. Just as the way a piece of picture or music is inexplicable without colour and sound respectively; in the same way, consciousness is incomprehensible without the body. Intentional being is not the absolute thinker but the body-subject possessing the intentional movement that directs it towards the world. In other words, intentionality, for Merleau-Ponty is not peculiar to consciousness alone but also belongs to the body-subject. Unlike Cartesianism, which comprehends body as an extended unconscious entity, Merleau-Ponty identifies the body with consciousness. The status of the body is not like the external object which we approach in the empirical world. Since the body is not a mere objective body rather the conscious body that is moving towards the object to grasp and to perceive it by intentional thread. Mortality or intentionality, thus says Merleau-Ponty, 'is not, as it were, a handmaid of consciousness, transporting the body to that point in space of which we have formed a representation beforehand.'⁶² This intentionality of the body-subject confers meaning to the objects and the world, 'which thought subsequently conceptualizes by a process of idealization'⁶³. Interpreting Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of intentionality J. N. Mohanty writes,

"As one's hand moves to grasp a tumbler of water, it is not that there is first a thought about raising and stretching one's arm and then this thought causes a mechanical bodily motion. It is the bodily movement that directs itself toward the object, and this movement has its own **sui generis** intentionality."⁶⁴

Intentionality thus, is not restricted to consciousness for it inheres in the body-subject permitting the conscious acts to operate. Since the body is the conscious body. In short, Merleau-Ponty characterizes the very nature of being as an intentional being. Against Sartre, he refutes any dichotomy between *for-itself* and *in-itself* and regards consciousness as an embodied consciousness. Body is not the tool that the subject utilises

nor it is constructed instead the body itself grants meaning to the objects and makes them significant along with the entire world of its existence. Merleau-Ponty writes,

“our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism; it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly and with it forms a system”⁶⁵.

The body is the ‘point of view’ for us to experience and to perceive the world; it is the mediator by means of which consciousness is directing towards the object of the world. The body is not completely spiritual nor it is just an extended material thing as we generally conceive. The body of a human being is a synthesis of both consciousness and matter, an integration of two characters, which are usually claimed as conflicting.

4.4.4 Self-awareness through Self-transcendence

Along with both Sartre and Husserl, Merleau-Ponty holds that consciousness is self-transcending and at the same time self-conscious of itself. Consciousness of an object inevitably implies consciousness or awareness of itself in the absence of which it would fail to grasp itself and its object too. In other words, consciousness while transcending towards the object of outside becomes aware of its own act of transcending. It is the immediate apprehension of one’s own being through the knowledge of other beings. Again, to quote from *Phenomenology of Perception*,

“All thought of something is at the same time self-consciousness, failing which it could have no object. At the root of all our experiences and all our reflections, we find, then, a being which immediately recognizes itself, because it is its knowledge both of itself and of all things, and which knows its own existence, not by observation and as a given fact, nor by inference from any idea of itself, but through direct contact with that existence.”⁶⁶

However, it should be mentioned at this point that even though Merleau-Ponty admits self-consciousness or reflexivity in all conscious acts, he undermines the possibility of absolute transparency. According to critics, Merleau-Ponty's rigidity towards absolute transparency of consciousness is because of his metaphysical adherence, as he regards consciousness as an embodied consciousness⁶⁷. As an embodied being the conscious subject lives in a shared world along with other bodies from which it derives meaning for itself. Therefore, we never experience any pure transparent conscious being. As the very notion of purity is just an elusive creation of mind, which can be eliminated by accepting the embodied consciousness or body-subject that constitutes our being, our existence and space in the world. In fact, neither consciousness is the pure subject nor the body should be conceived as pure object.

Moreover, along with the transparency of the conscious subject even intentionality for Merleau-Ponty, is not pure or absolute but a matter of degree. The intentional being for him, cannot grasp the object completely. Therefore, intentionality of consciousness is also partial in nature as consciousness is not pure disembodied consciousness but an embodied one. Moreover, total possession of the object entails the 'death of consciousness'. Merleau-Ponty therefore, writes,

“The whole life of consciousness is characterized by the tendency to posit objects.....yet the absolute positing of a single object is the death of consciousness, since it congeals the whole of existence, as a crystal placed in a solution suddenly crystallizes it.”⁶⁸

According to Mohanty, the position of Merleau-Ponty is quite similar to Advaita, as like the latter Merleau-Ponty too has expressed discomfort to admit compatibility between full transparency and full intentionality. Though, Advaita has different reason to deny the compatibility view. Rejecting Sartre's dualism between consciousness that is fully

transparent and the in-itself that is fully opaque, he admits the body-subject as the one who meditates between these two extremes; it is for-itself and in-itself in one⁶⁹.

However, the body alone cannot constitute our being, the world is equally essential. The essence of subjectivity is rooted both in the body and in the world since the existence of the self as a subject is aptly connected with the existence of the body and the world. The concrete form of subjectivity is conjoined with both the body and the world. In this sense, consciousness is not a 'pure being-for-itself' as it has been conceived by other phenomenologists rather it is the 'being-in-the-world or existence'. This conscious being is immersed in a dialectical relationship with its object and the world. Furthermore, in his analysis of the notion of consciousness Merleau-Ponty goes on to ascertain that consciousness is not basically cognitive in nature nor it is what Descartes expresses as 'I think' rather it is what he says as 'I can'.

In brief, being a phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty has made an altogether distinct and consequential revision in understanding the notions of intentionality and subjectivity. Although, there is no one denying the fact that he has borrowed ideology and has followed the trend of his predecessors, yet his individuality and critical observation deserve deep appreciation. As a true phenomenologist he made a genuine effort to break the traditional notion of pure subjectivity and pure objectivity and reconsidered the notion of subjectivity in terms of its identity with the body and the objective world. Subjectivity as we know in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is the incarnate being that undercuts all such conflicts between consciousness and body. By means of the notion of bodily intentionality, Merleau-Ponty seeks to overcome the trap of dualism in which his predecessors are bound. However, it must be stated at the same time that the phenomenological perception of Merleau-Ponty yields close resemblance with Advaitic account of empirical cognition, which I am going to bring up in later discussion. Now, in

the final section of this chapter it is crucial to turn towards the philosophical outlook of J.N. Mohanty, who is known for his influential contribution in the field of phenomenology in contemporary era.

4.5 J. N. Mohanty on the Nature of Consciousness and Intentionality

Among the contemporary thinkers, J.N. Mohanty, has done extensive work on phenomenological issues like, intentionality and nature of consciousness, meaning, time, transcendental phenomenology and so on. Like many other phenomenologists, he has procured motivation from Husserl, the father of phenomenology. For Mohanty, the main concern was to understand and to interpret the central themes of Husserlian phenomenology, which he has accomplished successfully. His aspiration to develop the transcendental phenomenology is marked among all. His essays like – *Husserl and Frege*, *Edmund Husserl's Theory of Meaning*, *The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl*, *The Possibility of Transcendental Philosophy* and all prove his authority on Husserl. However, Mohanty's contribution to Indian philosophy is also noteworthy, especially in the field of Buddhism, Nyāya and Vedānta philosophy his works are widely acknowledged. Indeed, he has been striving all the time to compare and assimilate two prominent traditions of east and west in his philosophical writings, which very few philosophers either from east or from west have ever made.

4.5.1 Object-directedness of Consciousness

Mohanty's account of consciousness and intentionality is highly influenced by his predecessors though he also has retained his own philosophical insight. Along with Husserl, Mohanty designates consciousness with intentionality. It is the key essence of every conscious act that is object-directed. The notion of intentionality, according to Mohanty, has two major implications – primarily, it maintains that all conscious acts are

about something, i. e., directed towards an object of consciousness. Even if the object is not real or a result of hallucination, consciousness is pointing towards it since conscious act cannot exist devoid of any object. Secondly, intentionality also represents a correlation between *noesis* and *noema* through which consciousness posits meaning to the object. By intentionality consciousness interprets the objects and the *hylectic* components and gives them sense. It depends on the intentional act that how an object is to be conceived by consciousness. Mohanty writes, “Intentionality confers meaning upon the given datum. To confer meaning is to interpret. Intentionality interprets the given datum.”⁷⁰ Thus, consciousness is not only directing towards the object but also confers meaning to them. Intentionality is the ‘meaning-giving’ and ‘world-constituting’ mechanism of consciousness in the sense that the world itself along with all objects including both real and unreal, derives its meaning from intentionality of consciousness. In concrete terms, consciousness does not simply receive the empirical data through bare mechanism but also conceptualizes them by granting sense and meaning to them. Consciousness therefore, should not be assumed as something like contentless torchlight that illumines all that comes in front of it. Consciousness is not an empty something.⁷¹

Consciousness as ‘an unceasing background’ is always present, wherein all events and acts occur. It is the permanent scene for all that appears and disappears as this flow of consciousness does not require any other flow to exist. Consciousness is the ever-flowing indestructible entity which continues to exist even if it gets interrupted by deep sleep.⁷² After waking up from deep sleep, we observe that consciousness continues to move with its previous conscious states. Thus, there is no such state where consciousness can be proved to be absent. No one can deny the presence of conscious movements. Since ‘to doubt or to deny that consciousness exists is analogous to doubting or denying that I

am⁷³. No thought therefore, can testify the absence of consciousness as thought itself is the mode of consciousness.

This particular claim of Mohanty indicates his adherence to Descartes' notion of consciousness. However, in later works, Mohanty himself by refusing Cartesianism has declared that consciousness to him is neither the soul nor the substance that is distinct from the body. Rather consciousness is the sensory bodily consciousness. The body is not the material entity as the object of consciousness rather the body is the mode of experiencing one's own conscious self. The body of other no doubt is an object to consciousness but not one's own body. To quote Mohanty from his essay *Lectures on Consciousness and Interpretation*,

“I am not talking about the soul or about consciousness as a property of a soul-substance different from the body. I am talking about a sensory consciousness, visual consciousness, a tactile consciousness. In fact, I would introduce something like a kinaesthetic consciousness, which is the consciousness of bodily movement or muscular movement”⁷⁴.

To be precise, consciousness is not a '*disembodied, pure spirit*' as it is said by Descartes and many other. It is the embodied consciousness as it is situated in the lived body⁷⁵. The sensory components, *hyletic*, living body, motility and all signify the transcendental of consciousness. It is for this reason Mohanty never made any such distinction between empirical and transcendental levels of consciousness. Both of these levels are same though from different perspectives it appears as two. Any attempt to reduce one into another is therefore erroneous. The empirical or the mundane consciousness belongs to the natural world providing our access to the world while the transcendental consciousness comprises the very basis for the being of the world. Supporting the

Buddhist view, Mohanty argues that the transcendental consciousness that interprets the sensory data by conferring meaning into them is not just the bare consciousness but corporeal in nature. Commenting on Mohanty's concepts of mundane and transcendental consciousness, Tara Chatterjea writes,

“As mundane, consciousness is a stratum within nature. As transcendental, it is not anything which is beyond the world, but is rather that which grounds the possibility of the world.”⁷⁶

4.5.2 An Effort to Correlate Intentionality and Reflexivity

Regarding the relation between intentionality and reflexivity Mohanty's standpoint seems much liberal and noticeable. While intentionality is the integral part of consciousness, reflexivity too is inevitable. As consciousness is not just directed towards its object it also manifests the object. This power of manifestation or illumination is something peculiar to consciousness. Nevertheless, consciousness does not just illuminate its object; it also illuminates its own being, its own presence. To illustrate this point, Mohanty writes, ‘if S is the consciousness of an object O, S is also aware that it is conscious.’⁷⁷ That every act of consciousness is both directed towards the object as well as aware of its own awareness, which is not another act or second order intentionality. In fact, Mohanty along with Advaita defines reflexivity as the immediate self-awareness of consciousness ‘without being an object of any cognition.’⁷⁸ Mohanty opines,

“Consciousness in this sense may be said to be self-evidencing; it intimates to itself its own presence, and it needs, for this purpose alone, no other evidence than its bare existence.”⁷⁹

4.5.3 Degree of Reflexivity and Degree of Intentionality

At this point it needs to be clarified that Mohanty though has accepted reflexivity of consciousness like many other phenomenologists, he has suspended the possibility of complete reflexivity or full transparency. In accordance with Merleau-Ponty, Mohanty too insists that if consciousness is fully reflexive as well as fully intentional, it would be a sheer nothingness. In his essay, *The Possibility of Transcendental Philosophy* Mohanty expresses this view with the following words,

“although I have said that consciousness is transparent, I do not hold the view that consciousness is fully transparent.....If consciousness were fully transparent and also fully intentional, then it would have been the sort of nothingness which Sartre says it is. However, it seems to me that human consciousness is not like that. It is transparent but ambiguously so; it is intentional, but also contains nonintentional, unformed stuff....”⁸⁰

Here, to avoid obscurity Mohanty has advocated the degree of reflexivity and degree of intentionality. He writes, ‘I am thus led to the notion of consciousness as having degrees of transparency but never being quite devoid of it.’⁸¹ It implies that there may be consciousness that has high degree of transparency or low degree of transparency but there cannot be consciousness that is completely devoid of any transparency. While in case of high degree of transparency one may have clear awareness of one’s state of being, but in case of low degree of transparency one suffers from ambiguity or unawareness about the object of knowledge and one’s own being. Appreciating Mohanty’s view Bina Gupta writes,

“With this proposal, Mohanty not only wishes to make room for a great variety of consciousness that we all experience as well as for the Freudian unconscious, but also to

expand the scope of consciousness to include affective states such as pleasure and pain and volitional states such as wanting and willing.”⁸²

4.5.4 An Implicit Attempt to Reduce Reflexivity into Intentional Act and the Denial of Advaitic Notion of ‘Pure Consciousness’

It must be noted here that Mohanty is not firm to his initial view about reduction, as like Rāmānuja he has made reflexivity contingent on the object-directedness of consciousness. Consciousness, according to him, becomes reflexive or self-luminous only when it is intentional or directed towards the object. If the conscious state is not object-directed, it cannot coincide with itself too. To put in different words, only the intentional consciousness is reflexive in nature. In fact, the higher the degree of intentionality is, the more it appears to be reflexive. Though it does not imply that all states of intentionality are equally reflexive or self-luminous, there are unconscious states which are intentional yet not reflexive. Thus, in the long run Mohanty tries to derive reflexivity from intentionality of consciousness as to him intentionality is a much broader concept than reflexivity. There are in fact, mental states that are intentional but not transparent. In the words of Mohanty,

“Intentionality is a more inclusive concept. Its extension is larger than that of transparency. All transparent states are intentional, no non-intentional state is transparent.”⁸³

Going a step further he again states, ‘intentionality is a necessary, but not sufficient condition of transparency.’⁸⁴ He strictly holds that every act of experience is intentional and that presupposes consciousness. Therefore, consciousness is always and everywhere intentional.

Mohanty, in this way, has made an endeavour to overcome the apparent conflict between intentionality and reflexivity. He is impressed by Rāmānuja's perception of correlating intentionality and reflexivity, which in his view even Śāṅkara could not manage to do. Since, to Śāṅkara, there is alleged opposition between consciousness and object due to which intentionality cannot be associated with consciousness. Mohanty, on the other hand, insists that the logical contradiction between the nature of consciousness and the nature of object is due to our initial definition about them and not because of their inherent nature. Moreover, Mohanty though has accepted reflexivity as one of the features of consciousness he has never admitted the existence of 'pure consciousness'. Since, it is quite illicit for him to hold that our ordinary intentional consciousness leads to some non-intentional pure consciousness. He argues,

“It is one thing to say that all experience presupposes consciousness, but this does not entail that the consciousness that is so presupposed must be pure. To argue that experience is intentional and what it presupposes must be non-intentional is begging the issue.”⁸⁵

In his later writings, nevertheless, Mohanty reveals that he does not intend to deny totally the possibility of pure consciousness which is free from all objective relations and contents. For, not only the Indian tradition of Advaita but even many mystic traditions of west and Taoist tradition of China testify the existence of pure consciousness that does not contain any object or content. However, the problem with him is that he faces the difficulty to theorize this notion of pure consciousness in philosophy. Since, to establish this one has to keep faith either on the validity of scripture or a kind of mystical experience that philosophy does not allow. In fact, this is one genuine difficulty for any hard-core modern philosopher. However, even after showing utmost rigidity to accept the existence of pure consciousness, Mohanty made a passionate appeal to his reader that any

discussion regarding the problem of consciousness must keep open the possibility to explain the notion of 'pure consciousness', which is definitely one important and serious issue in the study of consciousness.

4.6 Some Observations

It is transparent from the above discourse that the phenomenological account of intentionality has undergone significant modification in the hands of these eminent thinkers particularly in the case of later phenomenologist, which has some important impact. Here, I would like to make some remarks that would be helpful in highlighting the essence of the present chapter as well as in preparing the subsequent chapters of this research work.

It is very evident that the concept of intentionality even after being a key concept is not uniform all through. While for Husserl, intentionality is related to pure or transcendental consciousness the idea is reverse in case of subsequent thinkers. Since, to both Merleau-Ponty and Mohanty, intentionality is not exclusive to consciousness rather it is more essential to the body-subject. According to Merleau-Ponty, intentionality cannot be assumed apart from the body as the body is intertwined with consciousness. Though, how far Husserl is faithful to keep the purity of consciousness is debatable as he went on to characterize transcendental consciousness by a permanent ego.

There are two phases of interpretation. Firstly, intentionality is said to be an essential nature of transcendental consciousness though consciousness is not transcendental in the sense of disowning the ego. And, secondly, intentionality though is essential to subject, the subject is not a pure consciousness rather the embodied intentional being that is indulged in an endless interaction with the world around. In case of Husserl, it is obviously the first idea that looks more appropriate whereas for Merleau-Ponty and

Mohanty the second one seems more prominent. Since Merleau-Ponty is radical in his attempt to reduce the intentional character from the level of pure consciousness to the level of body-subject. This is one crucial point where Merleau-Ponty differs from both Husserl and Sartre and comes close to Advaitic understanding of cognitive awareness. Though, like Merleau-Ponty, Advaita never doubts the purity of consciousness since it is the association with objects and mental states that makes consciousness intentional.

There is no doubt that Mohanty too along with Merleau-Ponty has challenged and indeed, renounced the very notion of pure or transcendental consciousness. More importantly, he aims to reconcile the two opposing characters of consciousness. The intentional and the self-luminous nature of consciousness, according to Mohanty, are able to exist together without any contradiction. However, in this process of reconciliation, he has derived reflexivity of consciousness from intentionality. Here, the question comes: how could intentionality that is no longer essential to consciousness rather to the body-subject give rise to reflexivity that is solely private to consciousness? As, Merleau-Ponty himself has shown strong discomfort in attributing intentionality to consciousness alone.

Again, it has been noticed that like Śāṅkara, both Husserl and Sartre have maintained a kind of dualism between the nature of consciousness and object. For both Husserl and Sartre, there is polarity between the nature of consciousness and the nature of object which makes consciousness to transcend itself. But, like Advaita, the pure consciousness of Husserl is not contentless awareness; since to him conscious act is not simply intentional, it is intentional of something as something. In other words, consciousness to Husserl always contains a meaning or sense or a content that directs it towards an object.

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