

Consciousness: Scientific and Philosophical Perspectives

Consciousness has remained an enigma after close scientific and philosophical studies. Lack of consensus about the nature, domain and taxonomy of consciousness and need of convincing evidences about the adequacy of the reductionist methodology have directed scholars from different disciplines to study this multidimensional phenomenon from perspectives of their own. This dimension focusing on ontological, epistemological, semantic and methodological debates on consciousness from scientific and philosophical perspectives. The volume comprises of articles highlighting consciousness in relation with Exploring Scientific Perspectives, Representations in Indian Philosophical Systems, Intentionality and Reflexivity - East and West, Phenomenological Perspectives - East and West etc. in English, Sanskrit and Hindi media. Rich content and information of the volume will particularly be useful to students and researchers in science and philosophy of world and consciousness studies.



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FOREWORD

I have been watching with enthusiasm the efforts done by my colleagues in the Department of Vedanta, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady, to take their department to the forefront of activities in the University. As the University has been established in the name of the greatest philosopher of India who stands out unique among the philosophers of the world with his universal philosophy of Advaita, the foremost branch of Vedanta, they have the right and responsibility to make his ideas intelligible to the modern society. The seminars conducted by the Department are mostly directed to fulfill this expectation. The present book, *CONSCIOUSNESS : SCIENTIFIC AND PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES*, is the compilation of research papers presented at such a seminar.

Philosophers and scientists have been engaged for a long period to find out the fundamental reality of the world. The origin of the Universe is still an enigma, though there are different theories put forth by scientists. The nature of the Universe is ever changing with gradual evolution. We observe two kinds of entities in the world - the living and the non-living. The Upaniṣads declared in the prehistoric past that there is only one Reality, which was called Brahman by the Ṛṣis. The schools of Vedānta have retained the name, but interpreted its nature in different ways to suit to their views. The traditional view properly examined points towards the oneness of the living principle in animals including human beings and the plants, but keeping out the non-living separately. The living principle is Life which is characterized by Consciousness. The Upaniṣads and the philosophers following them declare that Brahman is *Sat* (Real), *Cit* (Conscious) and *Ānanda* (bliss). Taking consciousness as the characteristic of Life, it is strongly argued that it is the only reality which transcends all the transient things. This consciousness was considered by some to pervade only the human

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CONSCIOUSNESS- FOUNDATIONAL AS TRANSCENDENTAL

Dr. Unnikrishnan P.

Advaita Vedānta, Knowledge ultimately means the immediate understanding of one's own real nature as *Brahman*. It is the philosophy of *Sat* or Truth or Pure Being. *Brahman* or *Ātman* is the ultimate Reality, which is Pure Consciousness. This Absolute is devoid of all attributes and beyond the empirical reach and intellectual categories. The suffering of *Jīva* in empirical existence is due to ignorance (*avidyā*). So in order to reach the real we have to elevate from the less real.

Philosophers have formulated various theories to locate the concept of Truth and Reality. Thus we have theories of Reality, Knowledge and Error. *Advaita Vedānta*, instead of starting with the nature of Real or *Brahman*, starts with the notion of appearance. According to *Advaita Vedānta* appearance and reality are not disconnected and separate realms. While Reality is the essence or true nature, the appearance is the superficial or apparent nature. In the knowing process we have to pass from appearance to Real.

Appearance of world is explained by the concept of superimposition of lower order on higher order. *Advaita Vedānta* divides reality into three orders namely *Prātibhāsika*, *Vyāvahārika* and *Pāramārthika*. Error is due to the superimposition of one order of reality on another. This superimposition is always of a lower on a higher order and not vice versa. The existence of the object of lower order is coterminous with its perception. This is the case with snake in the rope-snake illusion. Even things appears in *prātibhāsika* cannot be dismissed as unreal. An unreal thing as it is non-existent cannot be perceived by anyone, anywhere at any time. Śāṅkarācārya was a realist to admit that whatever is perceived must be admitted to be so far real. The rope which remains after the illusion of snake belongs to a higher order. It is same to different individuals and same at different times. These belong to empirical order (*vyāvahārika satta*). As most people ends with empirical reality that order is not contradicted by higher order. When *Brahmajñāna* or absolute knowledge occur this order also suffers

contradiction. The unitive knowledge of Brahman contradicts every other order. That is knowledge one with reality-*Satyam, jñānam*.

Error arises when a lower order of reality is superimposed on higher order-*Atasmin tadbuddhi*. The common error of appearance snake where there is only rope that can be easily removed. But the metaphysical error of world-appearance needs much discipline and practice for removal. Śāṅkarācārya explains super-imposition as mistaking something for something else, which is, mistaking subject for object, truth for untruth, *Ātman* for non-*Ātman*. Superimposition is the apparent presentation, in the form of remembrance (*smṛtirūpa*) to consciousness of something previously observed in some other thing. As it is contradicted by subsequent knowledge it is an apparent presentation. It belongs to a lower order of reality. It cannot be dismissed as unreal as it is presented to consciousness. It is therefore apparent, not real, and nor unreal. That is neither *sat* nor *asat*, it is *sadasadvilakṣaṇa* or *durnirūpa*. It cannot be characterised in any way and hence *anirvacanīya* (indefinable). This third category certainly violates the law of excluded middle. It is experience that provides the directive principle for logic and not the other way. It is experience that necessitates this third category for real and unreal are not the two categories that exhaust the entire universe of discourse. Logic cannot legislate for experience but has to conform and accommodate experience.

The description *anirvacanīya* is meant to characterise the world rather than to declare it to be characterless. The *anirvacanīya* stands for an independent category, it is an explanatory principle. *Anirvacanīya* is not incapacity to define the world; it only means that the world is not definable either as real or as unreal. The presentation of false is a fact of experience and the word *anirvacanīya* simply embodies that fact in language. Far from being a negation of a definition the term *anirvacanīya* itself is a definition. Paradoxical as it may appear, the application of the epithet *anirvacanīya* to the phenomenal object is an attempt at its definition or *nirvachana*, even as the ring-finger is sought to be named by the designation *anamika* or the nameless.

While using the term *anirvacanīya* Śāṅkarācārya was careful to add the phrase 'in respect of reality and unreality'. According to him the final word in metaphysics must rest with experience and not with logic. Logic can be acceptable only in so far as it does not

conflict with experience and is dependent on it. As experience is the final arbiter, the world can be rejected as appearance only if it plays false to it. Though the dream-experience may logically convince it is considered as unreal because it is in conflict with the waking-experience. Thus if error signifies that the objects related in it belong to different orders of being, truth by implication should consist in relating objects of the same order. Error is something positive and the material cause of it is *avidyā*.

The empirical world is relatively true. The relation between the ultimately real and the relatively real is similar to the ocean and the waves. The waves are nothing but the ocean itself; they have no reality apart and away from the ocean. So it is true as well as untrue and that is expressed as the mingling of truth and untruth (*satyanṛte mithunīkṛta*). The existence of empirical state in spite of the eternal existence of the absolute reality in man is called *Māyā*. *Māyā* is unmanifest because it cannot be characterised as either real or unreal. This co-existence of the contradictories is a 'mystery'. So *Māyā* has come to mean 'an inexplicable mystery'. *Māyā* is not illusion; it is misconception of the real. In knowledge we understand the real correctly as existing but beyond comprehension. So *Māyā* is *Avidyā* or *Adhyāsa*. According to Śankarācārya *Māyā* is the root of the universe and constitutes the indispensable creative power of God. *Māyā* is really the fact of co-existence of contradictories in the same entity. *Māyā* is conceived as the power of Brahman as it is personified and given the power to create the co-existence of contradictories. Then *Nirguṇa Brahman* becomes *Saguṇa Brahman*, the one God of the popular concept. While God is the master of *Māyā* man is the slave of it. Man with *Māyā*, ignorance or delusion is *Jīva*. Man who is free from *Māyā* is *Ātman* or *Brahman*. Śankarācārya believed that the world is not a chaos but an ordered whole and possesses a definite nature which could be known. What Śankarācārya denies is the desirability of the world, not its possibility of knowledge. The world far from being unintelligible or unknowable is the only thing knowable. The word *Anirvacanīya* means beyond known categories. The world alone is capable of being logically and empirically known as the objects of the world has a fixed or consistent nature.

Knowledge is not something to be achieved but it is the very nature of *Ātman*. Knowledge in the sense of empirical

knowledge presupposes the relative reality of the empirical world. The theories of error by other schools explain error with the presupposition that the empirical world is really real and error as a mistake that happens either by omission or by commission. While other theories of error explain only a particular feature of error, *Anirvacanīyakhyāti* explain the appearance of the world in all its aspects. Thus, the *Advaita* theory of *Anirvacanīyakhyāti* is an explanation of the world. Epistemological concerns are relevant only on the acceptance of this relative reality of the world. As ultimate reality is of the nature of pure consciousness or knowledge there is no difference between knowledge and reality, between epistemology and metaphysics. As *Anirvacanīyakhyāti* is a characterisation of world as a unique ontological category it can be considered as an epistemological theory. Philosophy is the search for the first principles and the investigation of reality so as to offer a coherent and meaningful picture of the world as a whole. It is sometimes considered as a purely rational inquiry that proceeds by way of argument and is founded upon the supposition that human reason can itself conceive the underlying order of things or world. According to *Advaita Vedānta*, Knowledge is not a property of the Soul. There can be no transition from ignorance to knowledge but a development from partial and incomplete knowledge to more complete knowledge. The vague and partial knowledge serves as the ground and incentive for further enquiry. A connection is established between existing knowledge and new one by making necessary changes in the original framework. A total revaluation and remaking of the knowledge system may be required sometimes in the dawn of new knowledge. For example the discovery of the identity of the Brahman and Ātman led to the complete reorientation of the two conceptions. '*Satyam jñanam Anantam Brahma*' and *Kam Brahma Kham Brahma* are other instances where we start with imperfect and partial notions about the nature of reality and reach more perfect ones by successive modification in the light of new ideas. The statement '*Ātmā Ca Brahma*' brings the concepts into relation and therefrom emerges something wholly new. The identity presents both *Ātman* and *Brahman* in a new light. The new discovery was revolutionary in the sense that it transcended all

Advaita view that knowledge is the constitutive of the Self implies that consciousness which lights up and reveals things and which is consequently the most important factor in knowledge is always present with the soul not as its attribute but as its very essence. Thus *Advaita* knowledge finds its gradual expression when the objects of the world are presented to it. The consciousness is the ground or foundation of all knowledge and is the very stuff of the soul. The knowledge is bound to arise as we have the knowing apparatus and consciousness as the ground of it. According to *Advaita* all our worldly knowledge is vitiated by a fundamental error. The *Jīva* is the subject of knowledge, but it is a complex of spirit and matter. All knowledge and all *Śāstras* belong to the realm of *Avidyā*. The criteria of truth is *Abādhitā* (non-contradiction). The knowledge of the world is sublated when *Brahman*-knowledge is realised. *Brahman* is pure Spirit and its knowledge, if it can be called, can never suffer contradiction for we can never imagine the absence of consciousness. At this level Truth and Reality coincide. The scope of means of knowledge is limited to empirical sphere only. The real knowledge is the knowledge that transcends all the distinctions.

The philosophical theories of idealism and realism presuppose a distinction between mind and matter. *Vedānta* puts mind and matter in the same category-both are objects of knowledge. *Advaita Vedānta* does not say that the world is unreal because it exists upon our perception. The unreality of the world can be experienced only by mystical intuition of illumined soul. When illumined soul passes into transcendental consciousness, he or she realises the Self as Pure Bliss and pure intelligence, the one without a second.

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PHILOSOPHY OF CONSCIOUSNESS: CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Dr. Babu M. N.

Philosophers and sages in ancient India and West have been concerned with the problem of mind, consciousness, self, soul, spirit, ego and the like. There is no simple agreed definition for consciousness. Attempted definitions tend to be merely descriptive. Contrary to the problem of definition, the subject of consciousness has a remarkable history. *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* discusses various states of consciousness and states of consciousness as intentional; consciousness is related to the outer object in the waking state. Consciousness is intentional and is related to inner objects in the dream state as well. Consciousness is a unified consciousness *per se* and unrelated to any objects outer or inner in the deep sleep state. In the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, three states of consciousness exist within the Self, which is neither consciousness nor unconsciousness, nor even both. The *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* summarizes the nature of consciousness elegantly in the following mantra.

*Yatra supto na kañcana kāmam kāmāyate na kañcana
svapnam paśyati tat susuptam. susuptasthanamēkībhūtaḥ
prajñānaghana eva ānandamayo hyānandabhuk chetomukhaḥ
prājñas tritīyah pādah*

Śaṅkarācārya's doctrine of consciousness states that there is no difference between the all-pervading consciousness and the individual self (*jīva*). It is the one and the same reality viewed differently from *paramārthika* and from the *vyāvahārika* levels. According to Śaṅkarācārya, the all-pervading consciousness, called *Brahman* has no distinguishing marks. It is described through the negative approach called '*neti....neti*'. It is called *Turīya*, the witness consciousness, the fourth from the perspective of three stages of waking, dreaming and deep sleep. For Śaṅkarācārya, the all-pervading consciousness is the centre and basis of all knowledge and experience.

In the Western philosophy, discussions of consciousness posed by the French philosopher and mathematician René D.