Consciousness: A Comparative Analysis of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Advaita Vedānta

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ABSTRACT

The nature of consciousness constitutes one of the most fundamental and enduring problems in Indian philosophy. This paper presents an evaluative and comparative study of two influential philosophical traditions, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Advaita Vedānta, focusing on their contrasting conceptions of consciousness, particularly its intentionality and self-luminosity. Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika understands consciousness (jñāna) as an adventitious quality of the self (ātman), arising under appropriate conditions and directed towards objects of knowledge. From this perspective, consciousness is intentional in nature, while the self is not inherently conscious. In contrast, Advaita Vedānta regards consciousness (cit or caitanya) as the eternal, self-luminous, and non-dual reality, which is intrinsically manifest and requires no other cognition to reveal it. The paper critically examines the logical implications of these positions concerning the subject-object relationship, the epistemic status of consciousness, and the possibility of knowing the self. The paper argues that the debate between intentionality and self-luminosity offers significant insights into the philosophical problem of consciousness and the relationship between cognition and reality. The nature of consciousness in dream and deep sleep states presents a significant philosophical problem in Indian philosophy, particularly concerning the continuity of the self, the nature of cognition, and the possibility of self-awareness in the absence of external experience. This paper undertakes an evaluative and comparative study of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Advaita Vedānta with special reference to their interpretations of consciousness in these states.

Keywords: Consciousness, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Advaita Vedānta, intentionality, self-luminosity, ātman, jñāna, epistemology.

Consciousness is the state or capacity of being aware of oneself and one's surroundings. In philosophy, it refers to the principle or faculty through which we become aware of objects, thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Thus, consciousness is that which makes us aware of things and enables us to experience and know them. The following are some definitions of consciousness given by various thinkers, which will help us to explore and understand the true nature of consciousness.

Augustine said, “When one was not talking about it, one knew what it was, but when asked about it he knew no longer.” (Augustine, 1991).

Dennet said, “Human consciousness is just about the last surviving mystery.’’ (Dennet, 1991)

According to the Biologists consciousness is the ability to react to environment.

Sir Charles Symonds, a neurologist, states that consciousness is not an unvarying, independent entity but a changing phenomenon. Our level and experience of consciousness vary from moment to moment. He also questions the idea that consciousness has a single, fixed seat.

William James said, “The stream of consciousness is a river, flowing through a man’s conscious waking hours.’’ (James, 1890). William James uses the metaphor of a stream or river to explain that consciousness is not a collection of separate, disconnected mental states. Rather, it is a continuous, flowing process in which thoughts and experiences change and merge into one another.

These above definitions characterize consciousness as basically awareness of something. In western tradition particularly in Edmund Husserl's philosophy, we find consciousness as intentional that consciousness is consciousness of something. Phenomenology owes its origin to Edmund Husserl. The aim of Husserl was to establish a philosophy which is completely presuppositionless. According to Husserl Phenomenology is a subject which offers descriptive analysis of the subjective phenomena. For Husserl, the clearest fact about human experience is that consciousness is always consciousness of something. The clearest fact about consciousness is that its essence is to be point toward or intend to some object. Thus, Husserl believed that the essence of consciousness is intentionality. Pure consciousness is a continuous stream.

In Indian tradition Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika accepts consciousness as intentional that consciousness is consciousness of something. According to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika cognition (jñāna or buddhi) is directed towards an object.

Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika are the two orthodox system of Indian Philosophy which believe in the authority of Vedas. Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika has a realistic position; which believes in the reality of external world. Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophy adopts a realistic position, affirming that the external world exists independently of the perceiving mind. Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika maintains that external objects, material substances, qualities, actions, and other entities possess objective reality. Nyāya- Vaiśeṣika philosophy accepts the view that the world of nature is a composite of eternal, unalterable, causeless atoms, existing independently of our thoughts. As S. Radhakrishnan says, "Every science is a Nyāya, which means literally going into a subject or analytic investigation. The system of Nyāya, which studies the general plan and method of critical inquiries, may be called the science of sciences." (Radhakrishnan, 1996).For Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika reality is Caitanya or consciousness. According to Nyāya Vaiśeṣika school, the world is composed of real substances such as atoms of earth, water, fire, and air, which combine to form the diverse objects of our experience.

Consciousness in Nyāya Vaiśeṣika Philosophy:

For Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika consciousness is intentional that consciousness is consciousness of something. Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika identified Consciousness with knowledge. Knowledge arises through the valid relationship between Pramana (the source of valid knowledge) and prameya (object of knowledge). According to Nyāya there are four sources of valid knowledge or Pramana: Perception (Pratyakṣa) inference (anumana), verbal testimony (sabda) and comparison (upamana). According to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, the outside world is a real, knowable order regulated by objective laws and causal interactions rather than an illusion or merely a subjective mental picture. As Radhakrishnan argues that for Nyāya, the soul is unconscious on its own and contends that the self's response to organic nature creates consciousness. According to this philosophy, the unity of human awareness can be explained by the existence of a soul essence. For two seconds, our awareness is not the same, and there are times when it frequently fades completely. However, there appears to be an identity that helps us recall things and claim that, we are the same in both childhood and old age. The Nyayika postulates an eternal self-substance that does not change despite the superposition of conscious states in order to explain this occurrence.

Consciousness is the quality of the self. Consciousness the quality of self and that quality is an accidental quality. Nyāya-philosophy views consciousness (jñāna or buddhi) not as the fundamental character of the self (ātman), but as a quality (guṇa) of it. Cognition, desire, aversion, pleasure, pain, and volition are only a few of the attributes of the self, which is an eternal and autonomous substance. Since consciousness is not a permanent or intrinsic part of the self, it is referred to as an incidental or non-essential characteristic (āgantuka guṇa). Under the right circumstances, it emerges when the self-interacts with the mind (manas), sense organs, and outside objects. For instance, visual cognition develops when the ego, mind, eye, and an external object come into appropriate touch. When these conditions are absent, consciousness does not manifest in its ordinary empirical form, as in deep sleep.

Radhakrishnan says about Nyāya's consciousness, "If consciousness is traced to the action of the self on manas, which is material in nature, then the soul must be looked upon as sharing the character of consciousness, for two material bodies, when they come into contact with each other, can only produce a material body…. The Nyāya regards soul and body as not only distinct but as coordinately real. It adopts the theory of a separable soul inhabiting a body which is to be defined in terms of matter." (Radhakrishnan, 1996)

Critics argue that when we wake up, we are still the same person as before. So, if consciousness and mind can come and go, it is very difficult to see how they can be the carriers of our character and individuality.

So, there is any other possibility of defining consciousness and that is self-luminosity of consciousness–that consciousness manifests itself. There are some other definitions of consciousness which entails that consciousness is self-luminous that consciousness manifests itself. Following are some definitions which asserts that consciousness is self-luminous:

"Self is consciousness.''

"Consciousness is a bare awareness.''

"Consciousness is a universal phenomenon present everywhere, from the smallest to the biggest objects in the universe."

Advaita Vedānta and in some other systems accept consciousness as self-luminous.

Advaita Vedānta is an idealistic school of Indian philosophy. It recognizes three fundamental components: Brahman, Jagat, and Jiva. Brahman is the ultimate reality, characterized by *Sat* (Existence), *Chit* (Consciousness), and *Ananda* (Bliss), collectively known as *Saccidananda*. According to Advaita Vedānta, the Jagat (the phenomenal world) is illusory in the ultimate sense. Furthermore, Advaita Vedantins maintains that the Jiva (individual self) is not essentially different from Brahman. In other words, the individual self and the ultimate reality are identical at the highest level of truth.

Consciousness in Advaita Vedānta

According to Advaita Vedānta: -

Consciousness is self-luminous: Consciousness manifests itself and does not require any external agency to reveal its existence.

Consciousness is non-intentional: Consciousness does not necessarily have an object as its content; rather, it is understood as the principle that illuminates or reveals objects.

Consciousness is an essential quality of the self: Consciousness is regarded as an intrinsic and essential attribute of the self.

Consciousness is formless: Consciousness has no particular form of its own because it is the principle through which all forms and objects are manifested and known.

A Comparative analysis of Nyāya Vaiśeṣika and Vedānta

Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika in favour of intentionality while Vedānta in favour of self-luminosity.

As we already mentioned above that according to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika consciousness is generally intentional: it arises as a quality of the self and is directed towards an object. Consciousness is not intrinsically self-luminous; it is known through a subsequent cognition or inference.

For Advaita Vedānta, Consciousness is self-luminous (svayam-prakāśa) and reveals itself as well as other objects. Pure consciousness is intrinsically manifest and does not require another cognition to illuminate it.

Buddhism regard consciousness as partly intentional and partly non intentional. Different Buddhist schools offer different accounts. Some emphasize intentional cognition, while others defend reflexive awareness (svasaṃvedana). Consciousness may be understood as object-directed and, in certain Buddhist theories, as capable of revealing itself simultaneously.

Consciousness in Dream state and deep sleep state

The nature of consciousness in dream and deep sleep states presents a significant philosophical problem in

Indian philosophy, particularly concerning the continuity of the self, the nature of cognition, and the possibility of self-awareness in the absence of external experience.

SYSTEM	DREAM STATE	DEEP SLEEP STATE
Nyāya Vaiśeṣika	There is consciousness	No consciousness
Husserl	There is consciousness	No consciousness
Advaita Vedānta	There is consciousness	There is consciousness

CONCLUSION

From their metaphysical standpoint Nyāya Vaiśeṣika accepts consciousness as consciousness of something.

From their metaphysical standpoint Advaita Vedānta accepts self-luminosity of consciousness

Consciousness according to Advaita Vedānta is one but we realize consciousness as many. According to Advaita Vedānta consciousness pervades all things but is not touched by them. Vedānta consider there is consciousness in all, like stones mountains, rivers, etc. But common sense does not accept it.

Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika stated that there is no consciousness in deep sleep state. Why we sometime wake up and say 'I slept well.'

According to Advaitins there is consciousness in dream state or deep sleep state. If there is no I consciousness in deep sleep state then who will experience it?

The above questions are still unanswered.

The relationship between intentionality and the consciousness experienced (or apparently experienced) in deep sleep can become one of the strongest logical foundations of the comparative study of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Advaita Vedānta. If there is no consciousness in deep sleep then consciousness is intentional. If consciousness is present in deep sleep state, then consciousness is not intentional. Further logical justification is needed for this...

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