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“Concept of Human Consciousness in Indian Philosophy”

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Abstract

Consciousness, chetna, prana, energy, these terms are understood one and same. These words can be seen to be used in erroneous manner in different perspectives. This is the fact that where science fails, the philosophies prevail. Consciousness is very difficult to understand and study scientifically. The psychologist's and philosophers try to explain it. This paper attempts to understand consciousness according to different aspects, the Indian, the Western, and the psychological.

Keywords – Consciousness, atma, jivatma, awareness

Introduction

God has created this world in two forms– inanimate and animate. Inanimate are those substances which have movement, growth, appearance etc. Although God, who is the source of consciousness, is omnipresent, nothing remains inert, everything is conscious. Human beings are most developed in self consciousness. Three elements are understood to be eternal, God, soul (atman) and nature (prakriti) .

The word consciousness is made up of two words ‘Con’ and ‘ Scire’ . It means ‘ by which we know ‘ . According to famous scientist, Roger Penrose, “I consider consciousness to be synonym with awareness, although mind and soul also expresses its meaning, but it is not yet clearly defined. “ In psychology the word consciousness is related to that part of mind where one can experience sensation and perception. Consciousness,in fact refers to individual awareness of unique thoughts ,memory ,feeling and changes.

Human existence is most unique in the ocean of universe wide consciousness. The Westerners consider it to be nothing more than the phenomenon originating from brain . In the tradition of Charvak, Darwinism and Marxist thinking propound this opinion. According to Indian philosophies, human consciousness i.e . individual Consciousness is an integral part of the universal consciousness, because the entire universe is considered to be the desired form of the supreme being .

‘ The Consciousness is one, Omnipotent and Omnipresent ’ – Advaita Vedanta

Consciousness in Indian Philosophy

The sages realized supreme being as universal consciousness in their dhyana yoga, it can neither be explained in the form of worldly objects nor as void. The individual Consciousness has been called with different names in Rigveda samhita, ‘gopa’ ‘suparna’ ‘jeeva’ ‘amartya’ ‘ajobhag’.

Human consciousness is integral part of universal consciousness (vyashti–samashti). In Upanishads ,the human consciousness has been referred to as soul . It is very close to parabrahman, although it is not parabrahman itself. The soul has been called the doer and enjoyer. Jivatma is individual self and atma or paramatma is supreme soul. Description of four states of human consciousness is found in upanishads, these are – Waking, dreaming , deep sleep and Turiya .

Taittiriya upanishad describes five layers of body , Annamaya, Pranamaya, Manomaya, Vinjanamaya and Anandmaya. Kathopanishad describes soul as eternal and different from birth–death religion of body .

Buddhism

The buddhists believe in the doctrine of anatmavada (no self) . They accept the doctrine of ksahnikvada (momentariness) , and it is rooted to Chandogya, Katha and other principle upanishads . They believe that just as uninterrupted flow of a river keeps flowing , and the water that is there at one moment is no longer same as next, similarly consciousness flows continuously in human body . Defining human consciousness in a similar way, the eminent Buddhist scholar Mrs. Reese David’s writes – ‘Consciousness is only a discontinuous series of mental vibrations, which is related to a living organization which completes the acquisition of knowledge within a short period of life’.

In Buddhist text ‘ Millinda Panho ’ , human consciousness has been compared to as chariot. As the chariot is created by combination of wheel ,rod etc , same is with soul. Nagasena says, there is no existence of human consciousness but there is existence of different parts of consciousness.

In this world there is nothing permanent and everything is changeable,so is self. The self is made up of ‘panchskandha’ ,

- Roop
- Vedana
- Samgya
- Samskar
- Vigyan

Buddha in analysing anatmavada says that to believe in atman is like thinking of illusion .Self is like the stream of consciousness that is always changing.

Jainism

Jainism called consciousness as the quality of soul. Human consciousness continue to exist in it every moment. It is subject to processes, but by following some means, man becomes free from these processes and experiences the stream of simple reality. This is the developed state of human consciousness, which Lord Buddha has addressed as Nirvana. According to the opinion of Jain philosophers, conscious matter is called a living being. According to Jainism, Mahavira says that “Cetana Lakshano Jivah” i.e. consciousness is the nature of Jiva. The Jiva is emphasized under the doctrine of substance and the Atman is introduced as a Jiva. But both are similar. The Jiva (Atman) is a conscious substance. The Jiva is naturally conscious i.e. consciousness is the basic

nature of it that is always in the active mode. The consciousness is the essential property but not the accidental and Jivatman is not possible without consciousness.

According to Jainism, jiva(consciousness) is infinite by nature i.e. in its original form. Four types of perfections are found in human consciousness, which are called Fourfold Perfection. These are Infinite Knowledge, Infinite Faith, Infinite Power and Infinite Bliss.

Human consciousness is infinite in number and of different types. Mainly there are two types of living beings - (1) Free consciousness, (2) Bound consciousness. While Jiva (Self) comes in the contact of mind, sense, body, and intellect then it attaches with matter. As a result it becomes bound jiva is the individual 'self' which is attached with karma-bondage. Thus baddha-Jiva can be free of all kinds of karma bondage to consider a certain path prescribed by Jainism and Jiva can be transformed into its own real form.

Charvak

The concept of self in the charvak was introduced on the basis of Upanishadic ideologies And its roots go to Chandogya and Kaṭha Upanishads. It is A very ancient thought and it is known as materialism. Its metaphysics and epistemology are emphasized in regard To materialism. According to Charvaka, the real truth is that which internal or external perception (Sensual experience) and perception is the only measurement of truth. On the basis of it, only the bhuta is the final reality because it can be experienced. Charvaka says that the final Knowledge comes through sensual perception and beyond the senses; there is nothing, in the light of the sensual perception-based doctrine of materialism. And the atman is analysed by the Charvaka that is called the concept of 'No-self'. Charvaka says that the Atman and Chetana (Consciousness) both are different things and consciousness is the present property of 'self' and body. And there is no existence of the so-called eternal atman because it has no outer or inner perception. Consciousness is the practical reality that can be perceived via inner experience, and it is not transcendental but it is material.

Therefore, there is no existence of eternal consciousness. The Charvak refused the ultimate existence of atman.

Nyaya- Vaisheshika

Generally, Nyaya-Vaisheshika philosophy is developed independently but it is generally affected by the Upanishads. The very similar concept of Atman was given by Nyaya-Vaisheshika and Mimamsa Philosophy. Regarding human consciousness, Nyaya philosophers believe that consciousness is an intrinsic quality of human beings. Consciousness cannot remain separate from the soul. Just as the flame of fire cannot remain separate from the fire. Thus consciousness is not the nature of the soul, but a quality. The substance that sustains human consciousness is its soul. The flow of consciousness in the Atman occurs in a specific condition while the Atman comes into the contact with the mind, sense and intellect then the Atman becomes conscious. The Atman is found as a conscious mode in only Jagrit(waking mode) and Svapna(Dreaming mode) but there is no consciousness in Sushupti (Deep sleeping mode) or Samadhi (Trans). The 'self', then it appears in its own basic model (Inactive mode) while it inters in the Sushuptavastha or Samadhi. There are three states of human consciousness -

- Gyan
- Samvedana
- Iccha

All these conditions are changeable. These are the intrinsic qualities of human consciousness or soul. Vaisheshika's hypothesis regarding human consciousness is actually in accordance with the hypothesis of Nyaya. The Vaisheshikas too believe that consciousness is the quality of soul. Transmission of consciousness in the soul occurs under a special circumstance. Consciousness arises in the soul only when the soul comes in contact with the mind and the mind comes in contact with the senses. And there is contact with the senses. And the senses have contact with the external world.

Samkhya- yoga

Generally, Samkhya, Yoga, and Jaina philosophy have expressed similar thoughts with reference to Atman but in which Samkhya is based on Upanishads that is a very ancient thought. According to Samkhya, the so-called eternal Atman is known as Purusha in Samkhya philosophy, it both is similar and it is an extreme element out of twenty-four of Samkhya. According to Samkhya philosophers, the basic center of human consciousness is the soul. Jiva is the soul which is recognized as separate from the combination of senses and is limited by the body. According to this belief, transcendental intelligence goes out through the senses. And takes the form of the subject. But after assuming their form, it is not capable of publishing them because it is inanimate. Thus, according to Samkhya Yoga, the soul becomes aware of any external substance only through transformation of buddhi by casting its image on itself. Consciousness in samkhya yoga is denoted by the word Purusha. He is the embodiment of consciousness, ageless, eternally pure, nityamukt, niranjan. He is not the basic substance of consciousness but himself it is a form of consciousness.

Mimamsa

In Mimamsa philosophy, the central element of human existence has been called soul. Mimamsa thinkers have different views regarding the soul.

According to Prabhakara opinion, the basis of human consciousness is the soul, the central element of its existence. Here consciousness is not the nature of the soul, but a quality, the soul is naturally unconscious. Consciousness arises in the soul when the soul comes in contact with the mind, the mind with the senses, and the senses with the objects. In this way, consciousness is an inherent quality of the soul which arises only under special circumstances i.e. when the soul comes in contact with the mind and senses. This coincidence does not happen in the state of deep sleep, hence the soul remains unconscious.⁷ Just like in the state of deep sleep, in the state of salvation too, the soul is devoid of all special qualities. For this reason the soul remains unconscious even in this state. In this way, Prabhakar's ideas regarding human consciousness are very similar to Nyaya Vaisheshika's ideas regarding human consciousness.

Advaita Vedanta

The Advaita Vedantian Acharya Shankar denotes human consciousness as jiva or Jivatman (Individual-self) under the doctrine of Advaita vada in which he considered that Atman and Brahman both are one, pure consciousness is only a single reality, and the rest is so-called reality like the world, God, and individual-self are an appearance (Maya) not the real. Shankara school of Vedanta revealed two approaches in the context of reality- First, Parmarthika Sata is a transcendental reality in which the Atman is Pure Conscious, ultimate, supreme, and single reality in this stratum. Second, Vyavaharika Sata is a practical reality, in which Jivatman is the appearance (Maya), untrue and unreal including Ishwara (God), Jagata (World) in this universe. Human

consciousness is the supreme consciousness present in the body. It has three bodies – gross body, subtle body and causal body. The physical body is made up of five physical elements, sense organs and prana. The subtle body is made up of seventeen elements: five sense organs, five action senses, five vital organs, mind and intellect. Human consciousness is the conscious presiding deity of the human body and is the sustainer of life. It rules over the body and the senses. Due to its essence being supreme consciousness, it is not of the size of a molecule or atom, but is called Vibhu or vast. If it were atomic, it would not be able to experience sensations coming from all parts of the body.

The human consciousness is subject to I- consciousness. Due to avidya (ignorance) one keeps on enjoying the illusory things. Once avidya gets finished the soul comes to its supreme reality.

Consciousness by Westerners

The word consciousness was differently understood by Western philosophers, they too gave their own views on this. American scholar Putnam, considers human consciousness nothing more than the light of mechanical brain. Marxist and Darwinism thinking also says the same. They call the mind or brain as electronic device and its activities as consciousness, but in contrast to this John Eccles accepts the existence of consciousness separate from the brain.

William James accepts the influence of thinking, behaviour and knowledge of mind on the brain. Yuga defines human consciousness as mind.

Anne Besant “Consciousness and life are two aspects of the same fact. Life is not possible without consciousness and consciousness is not possible without life.” Therefore the energy present at the root of activity is consciousness (Chaitanya).

According to eminent scholar James Hastings, consciousness is undefined, like all ultimate truths and it has to be accepted as the principle by which all other facts can be explained but itself remains unexplained. Just as a machine is not just the sum of its parts, but something more than that. Similarly, it cannot be reduced to the sum of its various conditions or levels.

Freud has divided the mind into three parts and has considered the place of consciousness as supreme among them. These have been named conscious, sub-conscious and unconscious. In these, many types of suppressed desires remain prominent in the unconscious mind. Strong knowledge and memory etc. functions are found at the sub-conscious level. Thoughts and actions operate at the level of consciousness. The world of experiences of the mind is broader than that of consciousness. Consciousness generally means subjective and personal experiences. It is only in the state of consciousness that we get the knowledge of sensation. Thoughts come to the mind, objects are created in the mind and we create desires. Modern studies make it clear that consciousness has many dimensions. It can be divided into four parts. Perception, emotion, contemplation, desire etc. Therefore the western scientist and philosophers understood consciousness as awareness, emotion and a part that bring energy to body.

Conclusion

Consciousness is the reality itself. We conclude through different philosophical studies we find the two types of doctrines pertaining to Atman in the different schools of Indian philosophy – firstly doctrine of acceptance of chetna, secondly doctrine of ‘No-self’. On one hand, Samkhya, Yoga, Jainism, Advaitavada, have considered that consciousness is the essential property of ‘self’, on another hand, Nyaya-Vaisheshika and Mimamsa have considered that the consciousness is the accidental property of self. All the Indian schools accepted the existence of consciousness, in some or other way. The Westerners gave brief introduction to consciousness through awareness

,vibration,energy etc. The neuroscience and psychology are still working on unconscious level of mind and the yoga practices ,which include meditation and kriya yoga are considered to be highly beneficial.

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