

# Consciousness in Nyāya Metaphysics

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At the outset we may note that knowledge or consciousness can well be dealt with in two different ways, metaphysically and epistemologically. Here, however, we propose to consider consciousness as discussed in the celebrated Nyāya-Vaisheshika metaphysics. Possibly, you all know that the two systems were propounded by two great sages, namely Gautama and Kanāda and that these two are after all allied systems having only minor differences.

We will first refer to the *Nyāyasutra* (1.1.15) where Gautama defines consciousness as ‘*Buddhirupalabdhir-jnānamiti anarthāntaram*’. This aphorism is an attempt to define consciousness by dileneating its certain synonyms—*buddhi*, *upalabdhi*, *jnāna*, *bodha*, *sambit*, *chaitanya*, *chetanā*. These words are only synonyms meaning one and the same thing (*anarthāntaram*).

Now the question is: What is this thing? In the Nyāya-Vaisheshika metaphysics, anything real means a ‘*padārtha*’. Reality of consciousness or knowledge or cognition can hardly be denied. To refuse to accept consciousness as real (*padārtha*) is suicidal because denial of knowledge presupposes knowledge. Thus consciousness or knowledge can never be legitimately discarded. So consciousness or knowledge is something real; consequently it is a *padārtha* in Nyāya-Vaisheshika system.

In connection with the aphorism mentioned above, the concept of *padārtha*

may be discussed briefly. As the etymological meaning suggests, *padārtha* is something (*artha*) that is referred to by a name (*pada*)—‘*Padasya arthah padārtha*’. By the name ‘consciousness’ or ‘knowledge’ we do mean something. The name definitely stands for something. Hence consciousness or knowledge is a *padārtha*.

Now the obvious question is: What is knowledge or consciousness? Here we are certainly reminded of the list of metaphysical categories in the Vaisheshika system. As Jagadisha in his celebrated *Tarkāmrita* points out, the Vaisheshika categories are twofold—positive (*bhāva*) and negative (*abhāva*). Consciousness or knowledge does not mean negation by any means. It must therefore fall under the positive categories. According to the Vaisheshika metaphysics, the six positive categories are substance, quality, movement, generality, particularity and inherence. The Vaisheshika metaphysics holds that knowledge or consciousness is a quality among the twenty-four qualities admitted in the system. Now the qualities must inhere in some substance or substances. Qualities like number and magnitude inhere in all the substances without exception. Qualities like colour (*rūpa*) inhere in specific substances. Consciousness or knowledge, however, is a quality of the second kind. It inheres in self alone. This point needs clarification.

That consciousness is a quality of the self is not admitted by all. Several schools of Buddhism, Sāṃkhya and Advaita Vedānta

equate the self with consciousness. Let us first take into account the Buddhist doctrine of consciousness (*viññāna*). It is a firm conviction of the majority of Buddhist thinkers that whatever is real must be momentary—*Yat sat tat kshanikam*. Hence consciousness is necessarily momentary. It is said to be the very essence of self. Thus the self is momentary.

But this view is not accepted by the Naiyāyikas on several grounds. One important ground is that, had the self been momentary, there would have been neither recognition (*pratyaviññā*) nor memory (*smṛiti*). Recognition as a determinate perception (*savikalpaka pratyakṣa*) takes place when an object already seen elsewhere is seen again at another time and place. Recognition is thus expressed through the judgemental form—‘This is the jar I saw yesterday’ or ‘This is that Devadatta’. If we analyse the judgemental form we can be convinced at once that a person who has already seen the jar is now capable of recognizing the same. Thus self can hardly be momentary. Recognition of an object by a momentary self is an impossibility.

The same point holds good as regards memory also. The person experiencing an object is alone capable of remembering the object in future. This also guarantees permanence of self as the knower of an object. Hence the Naiyāyika refuses to accept the Buddhist theory of momentary self. Presentative cognition (*anubhava*) and representative cognition (*smṛiti*) must occur in the same self. Thus the self is no doubt a permanent entity.

The idea of consciousness being momentary is abandoned on another ground. The Buddhist thinkers by and large believe in the causal relation. Previous consciousness causes subsequent consciousness, as the Buddhist thinks. The

Naiyāyikas point out that in order to produce subsequent consciousness as its effect, previous consciousness must have already been there. Thus it requires at least two moments; at one moment consciousness itself is produced (*utpattikṣhana*), and at another moment it exists (*sthitikṣhana*) before it produces its effect, namely, subsequent consciousness. It is therefore argued by the Naiyāyika that nothing can actually be momentary in the world. Memory and recognition are facts and the same can hardly be explained with the help of the idea that self is of the nature of momentary consciousness.

The Sāmkhya and Advaita Vedānta systems regard the Self as Pure Consciousness. Consciousness, in their opinions, is pure in the sense of being unintentional (*nirviśaya*) and also in the sense of being no state of consciousness. Both the systems hold that the Self is of the nature of eternal Consciousness, eternal by virtue of its being pure. According to both, Consciousness is the essence of the Self which is eternal. Hence consciousness is also said to be eternal, and being so, it falls outside the scope of epistemological studies. Pure Consciousness being the essence of the Self can only be considered from the standpoint of metaphysics.

One point of epistemological importance should also be mentioned here. Both Sāmkhya and Advaita Vedānta as fullfledged systems of thought have their respective epistemology in which ordinary knowledge, instead of Pure Consciousness, is obviously taken into account. To be precise, Sāmkhya and Advaita Vedānta actually draw a difference between Pure Consciousness and knowledge or cognition in the ordinary sense. The Sāmkhya is dualistic and, according to the system, ordinary knowledge or cognition is the

modification (*parināma*) of *buddhi*, the first evolute of *Prakriti* or *Pradhāna*. Advaita ascribes ordinary cognition to *antahkarana* or *manas*. When the Sāmkhya system acknowledges three kinds of ordinary knowledge, the Advaita Vedānta accepts six of its kinds. Obviously, in this connection, while the former accepts three *pramānas*, the latter accepts six *pramānas*. A *pramāna* stands for the specific source from which a veridical cognition (*pramā*) is derived.

Now we are in a position to discuss the Nyāya thought with regard to the dichotomy of knowledge. The Nyāya-Vaisheshika system does not approve such a dichotomy of Pure Consciousness and ordinary cognition. It argues that the idea does not tally with our day-to-day experience. Cognition of cognition is possible in two ways: an indeterminate cognition is inferred and a determinate cognition is cognized by the *manas* directly. This is called *anuvyavasāya*. Cognition of cognition thus convinces us that either it is to be inferred or it is to be perceived by the inner sense. But Pure Consciousness being self-luminous is none of them. Nyāya further argues that nothing is actually self-luminous, everything depends upon something else for its manifestation (*svātiriktaprakāshaka-prakāshya*). Thus Nyāya-Vaisheshika discards the thought of self-luminous Pure Consciousness.

On another serious ground Nyāya does not accept the idea of Pure Consciousness. Consciousness is said to be pure in the sense of its having no object. But knowledge without an object is inconceivable, the Naiyāyika points out. Whenever we talk of knowledge, we talk of knowledge of an object. When one says 'I know', the obvious question is: 'What do you know?' Thus knowledge is necessarily knowledge of some object. The Naiyāyika does not therefore

recognize the idea of pure knowledge.

Nyāya actually upholds the idea of ordinary knowledge or consciousness. We would now conclude our discussion by explaining in short the metaphysical views of Nyāya-Vaisheshika with regard to consciousness or knowledge. We have already mentioned that knowledge or consciousness is a special quality in self alone. All other substances are devoid of consciousness. But this should also be mentioned that when the self is eternal, knowledge or consciousness is a non-eternal quality occurring in the self under suitable occasions. The self is said to be the inherent cause of consciousness and the contact between the self and *manas* is the non-inherent cause of consciousness. But a point has to be considered here seriously. Self and *manas* are two eternal substances and the contact of the self and the *manas* in one body is also there always. So consciousness or knowledge should always be there in one. If so, then how can there be a deep dreamless sleep when no knowledge actually takes place in the self? The thought that there is no knowledge in this state can well be justified by the judgement, 'I was in deep sleep, could not know anything'. When one gets up from a deep dreamless sleep, one at once admits that one was not already aware of things or happenings. Lack of awareness is want of knowledge or consciousness. Had the self and its contact with *manas* been the only cause of consciousness, there would never have been a state like dreamless sleep. But the state can hardly be denied. In their zeal to explain this state, the Naiyāyika has recourse to the inference of an additional cause, namely the contact between *manas* and the sense of touch. There is one vein called 'puritat' in the nervous system. This vein is devoid of the sense of touch

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