

Research Proposal

A study of consciousness in the perspective of Adi Sankara and Anandamurti: A Critical Appreciation

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Introduction:

As a pivotal ontological concern, the notion of consciousness and its nature has been a subject of enthralling interest to theologians, philosophers, and scientists all over the world since the dawn of civilization. Without pondering over this theory any philosophical system can not proceed further. The quest of ultimate reality viz. consciousness is considered as ontological inquiry along with metaphysics, epistemology, and soteriology and regarded as the core discipline of philosophy. Ontology is the main branch of philosophy and is defined as the study of being, the study of becoming, the study of the nature of fundamental entity (Quine,1948). Alongwith philosophers, brain and neuroscientists are puzzled with the confusing nature of consciousness as it is only the byproduct of the nerve impulses of our brains or something else(Robert, 2018). Moreover we have confronted a great deal of perplexing issues concerning the essence of consciousness and its nature(Chalmers, 1996; Baars, 1997; Block, 1997). Despite these we have an alternative approach propounded by philosophers and theologians that consciousness is the essence of the universe as it manifests in the different names, forms, and shapes. Consciousness is the first principle(Chatterjee, 1962). Ajit mukherjee, the eminent Indian philosopher, also throws lights on this point by arguing that like humans, the universe is also an offspring of the highest reality. With the further advancement of ontology of consciousness western thinkers Descartes(1596-1650) and Locke(1632-1704) have rightly pointed out that colour, sound, taste, and smell are not directly associated with material objects; rather they are more subjective existing only in mind(Bhatterjee, 2018). In this regard Vedic and Upanisadic literature which was an earlier endeavour to generate an unified theory of consciousness. Consciousness is a predominantly discussed topic in all the Upanishads and is regarded as the material, efficient, final cause of the universe(Raju, 2006). Brahman is “the infinite source, fabric, core and destiny of all existence, both manifested and unmanifested, the formless infinite substratum and from which the universe has grown”. According to Paul Deussen Brahma in Hinduism signifies as the “creative principle which lies realized in the whole world”. Thus upanishadic revelations teaches us that consciousness is all-encompassing, all-knowing, luminous, transcendental, ultimate reality and by realizing it each and every individual can be freed from the unending cycle of birth and death. The same sound is echoed in indian philosophical system except carvaka. Although, in terms of the essence of ultimate reality, there have been multitudes of advocacy of nihilism, materialism, spiritualism, agnosticism, positivism and so on(Bhatta, 2021). Among all these

varied interpretations the proponent of Vedanta, Adi Sankara(788-820 CE) is credited with a number of influential impacts by advocating absolute monistic preaching and the doctrine of Sankara is regarded as Kevaladvaitavada or absolute monism which derives from the Upanishads(Koller, 2012). Among all orthodox philosophical systems Vedanta is the core philosophical system consisting of Upanisads viz. Sruti-prasthanas, Brahmasutra viz. Tarka-Prasthanas, and Gita viz. Smṛti-prasthanas. Expounding the nature of consciousness Sankara's central preaching is expressed through this famous couplet, which summarizes the whole teachings of Sankara into a half verse, which appears as follows: Brahma Satyam, jagat Mithya, Jiva Brahamaiva Naparah. In this verse, Sankara explicitly states that Brahman is only the ultimate reality; the world is merely a false appearance projected upon it due to maya, the illusory power of Brahman which is neither sat nor asat; and jiva is identical with Brahman. For Sankara, Brahman is also described as Saccidananda, "Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, a threefold epithet that attempts to explain the unitary, indescribable Brahman". As per Advaita Vedanta, everything in the universe is the manifestation of consciousness and therefore consciousness is a fundamental datum of life(Vivekananda, 1983 & 1984; Burke 1984). Each soul is potentially divine and the goal is to realise divinity within it(Eastern H., 1983).

At this very juncture Anandamurti's ontological speculations propose a comprehensive perspective to reconstruct an ontological perspective in a more rational, scientific, universal, psychological and practical way. Delineating the pivotal ontological concern, an eminent Indian philosopher of the 20th century Shrii Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar (P.R. Sarkar, spiritual name Shrii Shrii Anandamurti) in his Anandaṁarga Philosophy advocated a synthetic view with greater logical and practical dimensions to grasp the essence of occidental and oriental speculative cosmo-ontological considerations to envisage Consciousness as the ultimate substratum and final desideratum of all manifested and unmanifested beings of the entire cosmos. Sarkar also showed that Consciousness as the witnessing and controlling entity of the entire process of evolution and involution which is called '*Brahmacakra*' or '*ṣṛṣṭicakra*', the 'cosmic cycle of creation'. Sarkar's spiritual philosophy is concerned with the practical synthesis of Veda and Tantra, and owes its origin to the direct teaching of Tantra (fifth century AD) and Kashmiri Shaivism (after 850 CE). The proponent of Ananda Marga philosophy Anandamurti realized that human beings should progress towards self-realization without neglecting mundane duties and responsibilities. To establish harmony between internal and external aspect of life, Sarkar introduced tri-aspect of philosophy consisting of darshana shastra or philosophical treatise(Ananda Sutram etc.); dharma shastra or spiritual treatise (Subhasita Samgraha, Namah Shivaya Shantaya, Ananda Vanii etc); and samaj shastra or social treatise (Prout in a Nutshell, Work, Service, and Sacrifice, A Few Problems Solved). Anandamurti's spiritual philosophy emphasises supreme consciousness as a singular entity and the manifested phenomenal world as the mental thought projection of that cosmic entity. His most fundamental spiritual discourse, 'Ananda Śūtram' or "aphorisms leading to Ananda or divine bliss" which is the major contributing text of his spiritual philosophy, consists of five chapters and 85 sutras emphasizing ontology, cosmology, ethics, epistemology, psychology and

spiritual cult. In philosophical treatise and spiritual treatise, Sarkar provided a plausible explanation concerning the nature, scope, and significance of the Consciousness in the entire process of creation which is divided into two categories viz. *sañcara*(extroversial movement) and *pratisañcara*(introversial movement).

Here in the present study, endeavours have been made to evaluate the notion and the nature of consciousness through the ontological perspectives of Adi Sankara's and Anandamurtiji. It is our earnest endeavour to explore how far these systems agree and disagree in delineating the nature, scope, and significance of the highest principle viz. consciousness. A critical appreciation regarding the true notion of *Nirguna Brahma*(non-qualified consciousness), *Saguna Brahma*(qualified consciousness), *Purusa*, *Prakrti*, and *Māyā*, is to be attempted.

Background of the study:

It is the inherent characteristic of an inquisitive mind to know the root of their existence, to comprehend the meaning, purpose, and ultimate goal of human life. Due to the excessive propagation of materialistic ideologies, modern society has forced us to experience socio-economic and psycho-spiritual degradation. The inborn hunger for unlimited can not be satisfied rather it redirects to accumulate unfair amounts of wealth, possession, and power. Unfortunately, limitless or boundless desire cannot be satisfied with a limited worldly object. Essentially the mind is the byproduct of Supreme Consciousness and consistently trying to receive something alive. But the material object is non-conscious and immobile. Therefore the mind is not satisfied with that non-conscious and immobile limited worldly object however it wants to achieve limitless, infinite supreme bliss viz. Brahma or Supreme Consciousness which is the ultimate goal of human beings. My study will try to emphasize the scope of higher principle from whom we are coming, with whom we are being guided and controlled, and finally in whom we will dissolve through the process *sañcara*(extroversial movement) and *pratisañcara*(introversial movement) which is termed as sristicakra or brahmacakra or cycle of creation.

Objectives of the study:

The following are the objectives of the study:

- To recognise the true notion of consciousness.
- To critically examine the true nature of consciousness whether it is matter or spirit.
- To comprehend the kinship between spirit and matter whether they are substantially one or two independent realities.
- To analyze ultimate reality as non-qualified(nirguna) or qualified(saguna) in nature.
- To evaluate factors responsible for qualifying or conditioning Consciousness(Brahma) for the sake of creation.

- To recognise Qualified Consciousness(Brahma Saguna) as the material cause as well as the efficient cause of the universe.
- To describe Adi Sanakar's absolute monism.
- To explain Anandamurti's advaitadvaitadvaita(non-dualistic cum dualistic) perspective.

Review of related literature:

Indian philosophy itself is comprehensive by including the ontological, cosmological, and soteriological aspect. Ontological quest plays a vital role in evaluating the individual identity as the reflective image of the cosmic entity. The Past decade has witnessed a paradigm shift with the emergence of the conception of consciousness as it is characterized as the rudimental cause of the phenomenal world(Dhavamony, 2002). In this regard Vedas, Upanishads, Vedanta, Sāṃkhya-Yoga, Nyaya-Vaisheshika philosophy, and Tantra have contributed uniquely and abundantly for understanding of the nature, scope and significance of the ultimate supreme entity in the entire process of evolution. Sāṃkhya's materialistic approach made a magnificent attempt to create the materialistic affinity in devaluating the guidance of higher principle. Challenging Sankhya's dualistic doctrine, Sankara's affirmation of the non-dual nature of Brahman is highly appreciated by intellectual society(Raju, 1992). Sankara's monistic preaching is the prescription of single pure consciousness which is the ultimate reality and the world is unreal. Sankara's monistic preaching has no space for the existing world, as they do not accept all sorts of change and transformation as real (Sharma, 2003). Therefore Sankara was in favour of two ultimate realities: Brahman and universal ignorance(Murty, 1974). In addition with this some interpretations(Betty, 1976, Kalita, 2019Kothari, 1981, Kolstermaier, 1998, Kang, 2003, Murthi, 2009,) have made an attempt to re-examine Sankar's monistic view.

On the other hand the paucity of research work can be found through the intensive literature survey on Shrii Shrii Anandamurtiji's spiritualistic cosmo-ontological preachings. The core texts of the Ananda Marga Philosophy are Ananda Sutram1996 (AS: 'Aphorisms on Bliss') and Idea and Ideology (IAF). Both these texts are entirely based on cosmology, ontology, ethics, psychology, soteriology and social philosophy in a sequential manner. Along with these two texts, several Dharma Shastra or spiritual discourses like Subhasita Samgraha, Namah Shivaya Shantay, Ananda Vanii etc. will be consulted to prepare this study. All these texts are thoroughly examined to prepare this comparative study.

Statement of the research problem:

The inquisitive human mind yearns to understand the origin of the mind, matter, and life and the ultimate source of living and non-living entities from whom they originate, with whom they sustain, and in whom they will dissolve. In terms of the dynamic character of ontological reality, in eastern and western philosophy there are multiple discrepancies concerning the fundamental substance of the universe whether it is matter or spirit. On the other hand, quantitative

differences are also a major problem for philosophers and researchers. Nowadays, we do not face one instead of a multitude of problems dealing with matter-spirit, one-many, transcendental-phenomenal dichotomy. A number of enigmatic cosmo-ontological queries are waiting for an immediate response. All these cosmo-ontological dilemmas are reinvestigated and reviewed in the light of Adi Sankara and modern philosopher Anandamurti. In pursuit of ontological assumptions, philosophers and researchers come across several intrinsic questions; What is the ultimate reality? What is the nature of the ultimate reality? Is it a matter or an idea? Is there any intimate kinship? How one grows out of the other? What are the fundamental characteristics of consciousness? Is consciousness qualified or non-qualified by nature? What is the fundamental difference between Nirguna Brahma and Saguna Brahma? Is Maya an illusion? What is the relationship between Brahma and Maya? Is Prakrti and Māyā synonymous? How is Prakrti differentiated from Māyā? In which context Prakrti is designated as Māyā? How do several aspects of māyā produce the phenomenal world? How can individuals overcome the bondages of maya? What is the goal of absolute monism of Sankara? What is the purpose of advaitadvaitadvaita doctrine of Anandamurti? All these pristine and perennial questions will be attempted from the point of view of Adi Sankara and Anandamurti

Research gap:

Most of the discussion about Sankara's conception of consciousness is derived from both eastern and western thinkers and researchers of philosophy, religion, and modern science which is imbued with a style of thinking based on experiential transformation (Gandhi, 1935) and spiritual interconnectedness with the other (Saravanamuthu, 2006). Therefore, a multitude of interpretations have been made and translated to reframe a new model of Sankara's conception of consciousness, its epistemology, and the process of realisation (Thibaut 1962, Sharma, 1990, Betty, 1994, Klostermaier, 1994, Bradley, 1997, Poonamalle, 2010, Bhattacharjee, 2018, Nicholson, 2007, Juturi, 2020) and scholars are benefited greatly to access and justify all these without being biased. However a small but growing discourse of researchers has emerged to address a new alternative paradigm of consciousness as visualised and systematised by Anandamurtiji (Kang, 2003, Shambhushivananda, 2006, Towsey, 2011, Gauthier, 2020,). However these attempts still remain marginal in this field and demand more empirical studies to reconceptualize the notion of consciousness. Moreover the critical appreciation between Adi Sankara and Anandamurtiji has not been addressed so far in India and abroad. This study aims to explore the agreement and disagreement between Adi Sankara and Anandamurtiji and helps to bridge the conceptual gap of Sankara's theory of consciousness by offering a synthetic and unified theory of Anandamurtiji.

Delimitations of the study:

The present study is delimited to ontological aspect of consciousness in Adi Sankara and Anandamurtij's philosophy

Hypothesis:

Hypothesis is a statement of the tentative solution of the problem. On the basis of these research questions and review of related literature the following hypothesis has been formulated:

1. Adi Sankara's ontological tenets reveal non-dualistic nature of consciousness.
2. For Adi Sankara, consciousness or Brahma is the fundamental principle of the universe which consists of Sat(Existence), Chit(Consciousness), and Ananda(Bliss). Sankara's absolute monistic approach proclaims that instead of insentient Prakrti, non-dual brahman is the material as well as the primary efficient cause.
3. According to Sankara, Non-dual Brahma is the ultimate truth, World is ultimately false and jiva is identical with Brahma.
4. Anandamurti's ontological preaching suggests that Brahma is the combination of shiva(spirit) & Shakti(Matter) and this tenet also reveals non-dualistic cum dualistic nature of Brahma.

Methodology:

Methodology plays a significant role in any research to avoid the tendency of biasness. As the reliability and validity of the findings depend upon the evolution and justification of the true means of methodological approach. The methodology of this paper is purely descriptive and required information is collected from mainly different primary sources of Adi Sankara's & Anandamurti's philosophical discourses. And several books, journals, articles, and periodicals are also used as secondary sources. This study is conducted mainly by drawing upon the works of Adi Sankara and Anandamurti's philosophy by applying analytical cum descriptive methods for preparing this study.

Chapter division:

Introduction

Chapter-1. Philosophical contribution of Adi Sankarara & Anandamurti.

Chapter-2. Consciousness in upanishadic literature

Chapter-3. Adi Sankarara on consciousness

Chapter-4. Anandamurti on consciousness

Chapter-5. A Comparative study of Adi Sankarara's and Anandamurti's theories on consciousness

Conclusion

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