

IS THE SELF EXPERIENTIAL OR ILLUSORY?
A CRITIQUE OF WITNESS CONSCIOUSNESS AND
MINIMAL SELF WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
MIRI ALBAHARI AND DAN ZAHAVI

Munmun Chakraborty*

Abstract

In this paper, I would like to explore and critically analyze the standpoints of two well-known philosophers of this era – the notion of witness consciousness as advocated by Miri Albahari and the concept of minimal self as coined by Dan Zahavi from cross-cultural perspectives. Precisely, the paper intends to evaluate the conflicts between Albahari's concept of witness-consciousness and Zahavi's notion of minimal self. As both these thinkers belong to two strong traditions and uniquely represent their positions in apprehending the nature of the self, subjectivity, and consciousness, there seems an unbridgeable conceptual abyss between them. Whereas Albahari emphasizes theorizing the notion of witness-consciousness repudiating the concept of self, Zahavi promises to provide us a non-traditional account of self which in reverse challenges the claims of many no-self theorists including Albahari too. Hence, the other aim of this paper is to explore the possibility of any justified middle ground in understanding their conflicting positions. In this regard, my effort would be to prepare a framework for cross-cultural dialogue.

Keywords: Self-awareness, Subjectivity, Minimal self, Witness-consciousness, Dan Zahavi, Miri Albahari, and Advaita Vedānta.

Any investigation on the nature of self, subjectivity, and consciousness is not just obscure, and controversial, but emboldening too.

*Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Assam University, Silcher

Philosophers' keenness in this domain is not new but what is remarkable about contemporary philosophers is their effort to frame a common platform for a more comprehensive and cross-cultural discussion. Present work is highly influenced by this revolutionary approach. In the discussion of self both the tasks of denying its existence as well as arguing for its existence are equally challenging and debatable. Since the very object of study is the subject of experience¹ and thus unlike any other philosophical investigation, it has some more acuteness and limitations. Perhaps, the most puzzling question is how can a subjective self-experience have a common, universal character. And if it is admitted at all, what is the means to logically concede it. One underlying reason behind the entire debate between the self and no-self theorists as pointed out by many contemporary philosophers is the absence of the defining characteristics of self. Here, it is appropriate to quote J. Ganeri, who opines, 'It is not obvious whether the aim is to identify and reject a mistaken understanding of the self – one that perpetuates suffering or whether the point is rather to reject and dispel all notions of self' (Ganeri, 2007: 186-187).²

The paradox is that there is a sense of self vivid through all our self-experience, a sense of being someone, one inward, private experience of being the subject of all passing experiences. It is not the content or the ideas of experiences that are shareable and communicable in language like the objects of experience. Rather the one that represents the subject of experience who is unique and not identical with the different fleeting experiences or ideas but not fully distinct from any one of them. It is the very being that cannot be questioned, denied, and doubted rather in all these attempts I firmly presuppose its self-evident being. The problem is denying this fundamental fact of experience is not logical but having any unanimous view about the true nature and structure of this inward entity is even more difficult.

In the following, my first aim is to understand and analyze the phenomenological account of minimal self or experiential self in contrast to the traditional accounts of the self. The significance of minimal self as claimed by Zahavi is its experiential nature as opposed to the elusive nature of the traditional notion of self. And secondly, the purpose is to examine how well does the concept of witness consciousness as advocated by Albahari fits into the canvas of no-self. Since the notion of witness consciousness which is extremely popular in the Advaita system does never support the stand of contemporary no-self theories.

I

A very common attitude prevalent in traditional theories of self is to depict its nature as a conscious entity that is independent, invariant, and distinguishable explicitly within fleeting experiences and ideas. Self is assumed as an entity that is discernable in terms of its properties it is carrying in contrast to the other no-self entities like the body. It has also been considered as the transmitter of consciousness to the material body and thus it is the controller of this physical the body and all its activities. Self maintains the unity of experiences and preserves the identity over time. In brief, most of the traditional theories intend to emphasize a sharp distinction between the subject pole and the object pole that comprises the mental experiences, the body, and the world. Self as the owner and possessor of all different mental states occupies the central place in the human body; it is untouched and unaffected by anything fleeting or mutable.

The most popular advocate of this account is Descartes, who is well-known for revealing the concept of subjectivity in the modern era; the 'thinking thing' who understands, affirms, doubts, imagines and also perceives. The knowledge of which is distinct, self-evident and easily apprehended than any insentient body. However, Descartes even after this radical approach has landed in categorizing the ego as a detached and isolated being. As he went on to write, '.....when a foot, an arm, or any other part is cut off, I am conscious that nothing has been taken from my mind' (Descartes 2008: 120). Unlike the body, the soul is therefore conceded as indivisible, unextended, conscious, and immortal substance, since it survives even when the body perishes or its mental states are changing. In other words, even if Descartes was quite successful to overcome naïve objectivism or naturalism of traditional philosophy, he has advocated a mystical dualism throughout his entire philosophical work which is undeniably one major loophole of the Cartesian project. As stated by Husserl, Descartes has shown the path of the transcendental domain but couldn't do proper justice to the transcendental ego by failing to realize its world-intended attitude. Another widely known substantial model of self which is appropriate and highly relevant for present discussion can be traced in Indian context when Rāmānuja³ asserts, 'The nature of consciousness is to manifest itself by its own being, at the present moment, to its own substrate, the Self, or prove its own objects, at the present moment, by its own being, to the substrate, the Self' (Rāmānuja 2012: 27-28). Contrary to Descartes, Rāmānuja's self is not a world-detached and isolated entity. Being a self-conscious

and self-luminous subject it is always aware of its being as well as being of others. It is the knowing subject, the agent, and also the enjoyer of all its actions. However, the self can manifest its being through its object that is always revealed and presented to it by its consciousness⁴.

On the other hand, the phenomenological account of minimal self that Zahavi advocates does not enjoy an independent, distinct status apart from experiences. It is not an object of introspection nor can it be reducible to the states of experiences rather it is the *for-me-ness* or the *mineness* of experiences. It is not a possessor or owner of experiences but the base of all our experiences that differentiates experiences of one from the experiences of others. The nature of minimal self does not refer to any sharp distinction between the subject pole and the object pole as it lives in and through the experiences. It is the first-personal character that is the common structural essence of all experiences. To put it differently, the experiential core self of Zahavi is not *what* I experience in isolation or independently, it is *how* my experiences are distinctly given to me and thus contributes to making my identity, myself different from others (Zahavi 2013:59).

The phenomenological analysis of our living experiences reveals that the *for-me-ness* of our experiences is not any additional or accidental quality like happiness, pleasure, pain, and desire, etc. It does not even point towards the contents or objects of our experiences as these are all transitory facets of our experiences. It is the constitutive structure of experiences, which endorses that experiences one is going through are given uniquely and solely to her. Even if one can share the content, the quality, and the object of my experience without any change, it is never given the way it is presented to me. It is this first-personal *givenness* of our experience that constitutes the subjectivity of experiences, the minimal self. To put it explicitly, the self is regarded by Zahavi 'as the very subjectivity of experience and is not taken to be something that exists independently of, or in separation from, the experiential flow' (Zahavi 2013: 60).

There are two important points to note. First of all, it is obvious that while referring to the first-personal *givenness* of experience Zahavi does not mean that minimal self has always a reference to the I or the first person pronoun. There is no I or owner self of different states of experience; rather it refers to the *ubiquitous* dimension of the first-personal perspective that is present throughout all fleeting states of experiences which is one and the same. This consequently

leads to the second important character that the experiential core self does not point to any distinct conscious entity, independent of the mental states and the body. Rather it refers to the distinctiveness of experiences, in the sense that experiences are presented to a particular experiential self which is an integral part of that experience and also lives in and through those experiences. In brief, the minimal or the core self enjoys experiential reality (Zahavi, 2016: 18). At this point, an examination of self-awareness or self-consciousness seems necessary for a better understanding of the concept of minimal self. Since, for Zahavi, the minimal self which is the most basic form of selfhood can be conceived well once we apprehend the structure of experience or the ‘self-manifestation of experience’⁵.

Self-awareness or Self-consciousness

The for-me-ness of experience or the first-personal perspective that characterizes the experiential life according to Zahavi refers to the intrinsic and immediate self-awareness or self-consciousness that every experience involves. The peculiarity of conscious experience is not just rooted in transcending its own being but in revealing its own presence along with the revelation of the object. While the revelation of an object is something explicit and relative, self-experience is necessarily implicit, immediate, and autonomous. This self-awareness is unlike an object-awareness since an experience is never an object of any second-order experience, nor it is an act that intends to arrest its own being, rather an essential nature, ‘a constant structural feature of any conscious experience’ we live in. It is interesting to note that even if Husserl’s followers disagree on several conceptual points, they do agree on this reflexive nature of consciousness that is object-directed too. To quote from *Being and Nothingness*, ‘the necessary and the sufficient condition for a knowing consciousness to be knowledge of its object, is that it be conscious of itself’ (Sartre 1957: lii). To state it differently, the consciousness that captures the object out there would be blind in the absence of self-awareness. It is indeed a prerequisite for the former to occur.

To be precise, the very mechanism of self-awareness is importantly different from the object-awareness. The epistemic duality or subject-object correlation on which we rely in every act of encountering the world doesn’t constitute the ground of self-awareness. It is a state where consciousness escapes to be its own object. And what alone reveals is consciousness *per se*, in its primary nature. In other words, the being of consciousness is indistinguishable from its revelation.

It refers to one homogenous presence of experience. Self-awareness is not something specific to a particular perceptual or cognitive state, nor it is one deliberately acquires through introspection or observation. Rather, it is there in all different modes of experience – one is immediately aware or self-aware even when one deliberately performs an action, even when one is watching a movie, writing a story or cooking a dessert or when one is happy or anxious or simply doing nothing. In other words, every state of awareness in moving towards an object also reveals its being too.

It is herein I would like to refer to the Advaitic view on the notion of self-awareness or *sva-prakāśa* that is fundamental to their theory of consciousness. The exposition of the absolute pure consciousness in Advaita simultaneously throws light on the reflexive nature or self-awareness of consciousness. Self-awareness for that reason is not a distinct or separate state of consciousness nor it is something that consciousness acquires through some inner process or act rather it is the intrinsic nature of consciousness that it reveals its being independent of any other means. It is an immediate non-cognitive state of consciousness. In other words, it is the peculiarity of consciousness that it never becomes an object of its own awareness nor can it be categorized as a subject of its own revelation. Since the nature of consciousness is such that it does not permit either any epistemological or any metaphysical dualism within itself. Defining the nature of reflexivity or self-awareness, Citsukha, a noted Advaitin writes, ‘it is the capacity of being called immediately known in empirical usage while not being an object of cognition’ (Citsukha 1931: 9). The crux of their arguments is that while the dualistic epistemic structure qualifies all cognitive episodes, the state of self-awareness is essentially free from this and so any such attempt to interpret this with the standard epistemic feature is an ontological error. Unlike the immediacy of ordinary perception which is secondary and derivative, the immediacy of self-awareness is primary and unconditional. It is, says Śruti, *aparokṣānubhāti*. Advaitic understanding of the nature of self-awareness bears similarity with Zahavi and other phenomenologists as long as they agree on the fact that consciousness is not given to itself as an object, yet I must admit there is a striking difference in their understanding of the nature of the self. Since the minimal self of Zahavi is still qualified as a perspectival subject. On the contrary, to Advaita, this is merely an empirical self or the enworlded⁶ subject entangled in the worldly affairs and so cannot be regarded as the basic or primary form of selfhood; rather it is an extended and constituted self.

Needless to say, this particular standpoint of Advaita results from its peculiar metaphysical orientation and extreme rigidity towards its fundamental tenets. But it is one important aspect to mention here which I would elaborate later while analyzing Albahari's notion of witness consciousness.

What is apparent is that an understanding of the intricacy of self-awareness leads one towards a concept of self that counters the traditional concept which scholars like Albahari, G. Dreyfus, and W. Krueger have criticized and negated. The minimal self Zahavi advocates is neither an object to investigate like a tree or mental mode nor is it reducible to something else, though it has an experiential reality in the sense that it reveals itself in and through self-experience. Zahavi thus seems to prioritize the phenomenology of self over the metaphysics of self. Zahavi reinforces this claim by bringing the stance of Galen Strawson who concedes self-awareness as not only necessary but also a sufficient condition of selfhood. The self-awareness is vivid and necessarily inheres in self-experience, and therefore it is one basic and the essential mark of subjectivity or selfhood. As it is also stated, 'Experience happens for the experiencing subject in an immediate way and as part of this immediacy, it is implicitly marked as *my* experience'⁷. To put it explicitly, the notion of self-awareness essentially confirms that there is a feeling of subjectivity that prevails in all my experiences. It can be stated that Zahavi went a step further than G. Strawson in claiming that it is not just a feature rather 'the most basic form of self is constituted in and through self-experience' (Zahavi 2016: p.18). Thus, in a very thundering voice, Zahavi argues that "the fact that our experiential life is characterized by a basic and pervasive immanent reflexivity, by self-specificity and pre-reflective self-awareness, is sufficient to warrant the use of the term 'self'" (Zahavi 2013:67).

In this sense, it can be noted that the minimal self is not what we need to look for above and beyond experience, it is not a distinct observer of passing experiences that is categorically traceable, nor it is an owner of the different experiential contents. It is exactly the experiencing subject that witnesses everything fleeting in the flow. It follows that Zahavi's understanding of minimal self contradicts and challenges the so-called traditional notion of self but that does not disprove the existence of self or subjectivity. Moreover, it also vehemently opposes the attempt of contemporary no-self theorists to distinguish self from subjectivity.

In contrast, the prime goal of Albahari is to establish a non-self thesis by challenging and repudiating the concept of self that we usually come across in philosophy. Her thesis is centered on two important arguments –

- (a) the distinction between self and subject that follows from the polarity she maintained between personal ownership and perspectival ownership; and
- b) Albahari's claim for an enduring witness consciousness as an inner locus of apprehension.

Albahari's basic move which is to establish illusory nature of the self has contested the traditional notion of self as a unified, happiness-seeking, unbrokenly persisting, ontologically distinct entity, something that is above and beyond experiences yet the owner of all mental states, it is the thinker, the agent and the bounded 'me'. The problem she pointed out in this account of the self is that while many of these features originally belong to consciousness they are mistakenly ascribed to an entity that suffers illusory status. In this regard, Albahari's standpoint is remarkably different from most of the Western philosophers who argue for an illusory account of self by rebutting features such a unity, unbrokenness and invariability.

What is important in this context is to understand the distinction Albahari introduced between personal ownership and perspectival ownership to illustrate how the sense of self mistakenly and mysteriously generates within us. The sense of personal ownership emerges when the subject identifies itself as a personal owner of certain thoughts, experiences, ideas, etc., there is a sense of me (or 'who-I-am-ness') as the subject no longer considers itself an impersonal point of view following which the sense of self appears and draws a line of border between self and other. The self assumes itself as the owner of all that belongs to it and thus distinguishes itself from everything that is not owned by it. It keeps recognizing itself with several characters that the conscious subject performs as an agent, a thinker, controller or observer of thoughts. And, thereby it is portrayed as a unified, bounded and ontologically distinct entity. On the other hand, perspectival ownership refers to the particular point of view that the subject upholds; it is the distinctive manner in which an experience or an object is given to a particular subject, unlike any other subject. According to Albahari, even if there cannot be any thought or experience of an object without a perspective or point of view, there can be experiences, feelings or ideas without any sense of personal ownership. She here gave some examples like a case of epileptic automatism or a hypothetical case of global depersonalization where one is aware of thoughts, feelings, etc. yet

there is no sense of personal ownership or no sense of me or mine (Albahari 2006: 171).

However, Albahari' makes her contention clear that from the distinction between the two senses of ownership, one must not assume that there are two distinct individuals present in our experiential life, rather the personal owner is the perspectival owner. Personal owner is the subject with personalized boundaries who personally and not just perspectively owns all his thoughts, perceptions, etc. (Albahari: 102) On the other hand, perspectival ownership refers to the inner locus of apprehension intrinsically rooted in consciousness, it is the consciously embodied viewpoint of the subject through which the world is known. This 'observational component which is common to all modes of conscious apprehension, perceptual or cognitive' (Albahari, 2013:83) is termed as witness consciousness by Albahari.

Though the notion of witness consciousness is extremely popular in the philosophical tradition of Advaita, Albahari characterizes it with some additional properties which, according to her, are essential to the nature of witnessing such as (a) mode-neutral knowing or awareness and (b) intrinsic phenomenal character (Albahari, 2009:66). The witness being the mode-neutral awareness is implied in all acts of knowing though not identical with any particular sense-modality or qualia. Being the pure subjectivity it is unknown and unknowable as an object of knowledge yet it is immediately aware of its being (self-aware). In terms of its intrinsic phenomenal character this notion of witness consciousness is not a 'pure blank, there is something to be in that state. At this juncture, it is interesting to note that even if the self lacks any appearance independent reality, witness consciousness being the central aspect of the subject is as real as the states of experience it keeps unifying. As the illusory status of the unifying self is realized what remains thereafter is the elusive, unbroken, unified perspectival witness-consciousness that lacks the illusion of personal self and is intrinsically ownerless (Albahari, 2013:82).

III

One genuine difficulty I encounter when Albahari characterizes witness consciousness as a central aspect or *modus operandi* of the subject (Albahari, 2013: 83). As she writes, "the subject's *modus operandi* is simply to observe or *witness* objects....I hence use the term 'witness-consciousness' to describe the purely observational component that is common to all modes of conscious apprehension,

perceptual or cognitive” (Albahari 2013: 83). There could be two reasons for that – one she wants to avoid the question of its ontological existence which she considers as one serious challenge against the notion of self and the other purpose is to reinforce the distinction between self and subject.

However, the witness-consciousness being the one incessant awareness behind every passing state cannot be regarded an essential aspect of the subject; since the notion of witnessing suggests that it must encompass not just the object that is given to experience but also the perspectival dimension of our experiential life referred by the subject. At this point we must consider the difference between for-me-ness and perspectival ownership⁸, while the former suggests a common structural feature shared by all states of experience given to a particular subject, the latter refers to the point of view of the subject or the specific manner in which the object is apprehended or owned by the subject which is unique (inaccessible by any other person) and may also vary. For example, the same blind man who touched the tail of the elephant and defined it as a snake could also touch the leg of it and say that it is like a pillar which suggests that our perspectival awareness does not remain one and identical. It would be a mistake, therefore, to identify witness consciousness with anything that keeps on changing. In fact, the cognitive episodes are subject to terminate. Nor can we attribute ownership either personal or perspectival to witnessing (experiencing) which results from the feeling of attachment. Further, if the witness consciousness is nothing but the same perspectival owner or the subject, then it is not wrong to argue that the subject is qualified to perform all that is ascribed to the witness and so there is hardly any need to endorse a witness in the presence of the subject.

To be very precise, even if Albahari claims some basic similarities between her view and the Advaitic concept of Sākṣin, she has missed the intricacy and profoundness of the latter. As Advaitic notion of witness-consciousness or sākṣin transcends all categories of understanding pervading both the subject and object. It is the mere passive spectator. Of course, the sākṣin of Advaita is the essence of *jiva* or empirical being but it is never involved either voluntarily or involuntarily in any cognitive or behavioral activity. Hence, it is called a subject in a mere symbolic mode. Describing its nature Tara Chatterjea writes, ‘It is a transcendental self-contained principle, which has no reference to any object’ (Chatterjee 2003: 12). However, it being the self-revealing awareness reveals everything including both the object and cognition of an object. Here, again

one must be clear about the distinction between an act of cognition and the state of revelation; the former being the structure of any ordinary empirical experience always points towards an object, the latter is essentially the nature of sākṣin awareness which is detached and disinterested. Elaborating this unique nature of the witness-consciousness Pancadasi says, ‘the light in the dancing hall uniformly reveals the patron, the audience and the dancer. Even when they are absent, the light continues to shine’ (*Pañcadāśī*, x. 11). In other words, the witness-consciousness ‘lights up the ego, the intellect and the sense-objects. Even when ego etc., are absent, it remains self-luminous as ever’ (*Pañcadāśī*, x. 11). The witness in Advaita is neither the knower nor the known rather it is the one that reveals both. The paradox is that while everything can be cognized only as a subject or an object, the sākṣin or witness is beyond all categorizations. In fact, this knowledge of witness-consciousness is a result of an assumption rather than cognition or an ordinary apprehension that works through the subject-object correlation. To put it in the language of S. Radhakrishnan, ‘Though, this witnessing consciousness arises with the experience of objects, it is not due to the experience, but is presupposed by it’ (Radhakrishnana 2011: 560).

Here another interesting point to note is that the Advaitic concept of Sākṣin with which Albahari accepts resemblance of her notion of witness is nothing but the Self or what the Advaitins call ātman that alone is ultimately real. And in that sense, she unintentionally shares the standpoint of a non-substantial self theorist. The only reason why Albahari thinks witness consciousness cannot be regarded as self is because it lacks boundedness, agency, and separateness – some of the central features of the self, according to her. However, what appears from this approach is that Albahari has a rigid notion of self which she seeks to deny whereas there are several other notions of self we do come across in philosophy, social science, psychology and empirical science including the notion of the witness-consciousness in Advaita which necessarily does not refer to these features. Hence, the paper argues that if the intention is to deny and oppose any and every notion of self, it cannot be delineated in terms of some fixed and particular features. And for that reason any attempt to distinguish the self from the subject characterizing the former as the personal owner while latter as the perspectival owner of different states of experience seems unconvincing. On the other hand, if the difficulty for Albahari is to carry the term ‘self’, she is free to replace it with ‘witness-consciousness’, but that doesn’t refer to any separate entity altogether. And therefore, the concept of self is not necessarily to be

assumed as a bounded or ontologically distinct entity to condemn it as illusory rather it can be the experiential consciousness as the witness of all thoughts, perceptions, mental states, etc. To put it differently, the features of self which are contested to establish its illusory status can also be replaced with the features which are evident and given in experience which points towards a viable and sound notion of self and thus the whole strategy to distinguish the self from the subject becomes redundant. In short, the self must not be assumed as an isolated, bounded entity rather it is something of which one is immediately conscious that in the words of Zahavi is none other than experiencing itself. Or else, the question becomes pertinent is – how can the illusory self has the non-illusory components?

It would not be wrong to argue that Albahari's adherence to the concept of witness-consciousness contradicts her basic assumption – the claim for illusoriness of self. Albahari somehow fails to recognize that denial of a particular kind of self is different from holding a no-self position. Since the notion of witnessing definitely cannot be regarded as an ordinary or thin notion of self rather a firm concept of self even if she accuses Zahavi's minimal self as the thin notion of self. Advaita too admits the distinction between self and subjectivity as Albahari proclaims. However, the intention is different. Instead of denying the reality of self Advaita approves the utmost reality of it whereas anything else either the subject or the object does not possess similar status, as they are only empirically real. In short, a no-self theorist who ardently denies the reality of self could not comprehend the essence of witnessing as understood by Advaita. Of course, Advaita too denies the fundamental reality of the empirical self (which is a mere object like any other entity) yet that does not lead them to challenge the reality of the Universal Self.

In contrast, we notice both Zahavi and Advaita share a common view as they affirm the being of self but they differ in stating what they mean by self. The key difference between them is that admitting a minimal self as the most basic form of selfhood Zahavi didn't invalidate its existential status, those dimensions that constitute its individuality; on the contrary, it is something that Advaita only relatively concedes but ultimately discards. Still, both agree that the self in its most basic form signifies a pre-reflective or an immediate self-awareness, 'one autonomous awareness that never ceases to exist' (Upadeśā Sāhasrī); it is the *ubiquitous* dimensions of experiencing that remains the same through the multitude of changing experiences (Zahavi 2013: 60). It is what Zahavi calls the experiential core self which is not a distinct or separately existing

entity, but neither is it simply reducible to a specific experience or (sub-) set of experiences (Zahavi 2013: 59). At this point, Zahavi seems to echo Advaitic vision as Śaṅkara too writes, 'it is the witness of all intellects and their modifications' (Śaṅkara 2012: 102). Again, 'the self, on the other hand, never goes out of existence and is not capable of being produced...' (Śaṅkara 2012: 126). In short, there is notable similarity and unavoidable differences too between them.

For Zahavi, this minimal self is the ground of individuality or the '*mineness*', the reason for distinguishing 'I' from 'You' and 'Other'. In other words, the '*mineness*' or the '*for-me-ness*' is not a mere quality that fleeting states or contents of experience are enjoying. It is not detectable like the 'redness' of the pot. It rather refers to the first-person perspective or *givenness* of the experiential domain that ensures how this particular experiential life is unique and utterly different even from a qualitatively same experiential life. In brief, according to Zahavi, the denial of self is equal to the denial of the first-person perspective. Whereas, for Advaita, this perspectival experience emerges from the sheer limitation of the intellect and senses; and thus, it is to be distinguished from the self or pure consciousness *as such*. There is no doubt that Advaita has its reason, in fact, a strong metaphysical thesis to defend their claim but Zahavi too seems to ground his theory on a sufficiently strong rational basis. The concept of minimal self certifies his commitment towards phenomenology. In everyday life, our sense of self is more extended and more complex. Since we continue to identify it with the fleeting mental states, body, objects around, social and cultural values and also with the world at large. In other words, the concept of self inevitably comprises both inward and outward aspects. Though the essence of subjectivity lies in one's immediate self-awareness, Zahavi does believe in a progressive notion of self. One that does not exist like an isolated entity rather one which is involved in worldly affairs and influenced by its surrounding; furthermore, it grows and transforms with the changing experiences. It is exactly this phenomenological attitude of Zahavi that leads him to advocate a multidimensional account of self; which is not in conflict with his key concept of experiential self or minimal self rather the latter is still considered to be the basis of all different notions of self.

Notes

1. Let me make the point clear here. There is no prior conviction that the 'self exists' or 'the self does not exist'. What I mean here by 'subject of experience' is the inevitable the first person pronoun or the 'I' of every experience.

2. In his paper, 'The Experiential Self' Zahavi too has referred Ganeri in this regard. Further, he adds that there is an important difference between the views that experience is essentially selfless and to say that annihilation of self is an ultimate state one should strive to attain (Zahavi 2013: 65).
3. Rāmānuja, who is one chief advocate of Viśiṣṭādvaita system and the strongest critic of the Advaita school made an extensive study on the nature of self and consciousness. According to J. N. Mohanty, Rāmānuja's view on consciousness has close parallel to the theory of intentionality that Husserl advocates.
4. It is interesting to note that consciousness or jñāna enjoys a peculiar status in Rāmānuja's philosophy. While self is the substratum of consciousness, consciousness is both an attribute of self and also a substratum of the qualities of contraction and expansion. Jñāna constitutes the essence of self and is also an attribute of the later. As a property, it is known as dharma-bhūta-jñāna. Rāmānuja's approach towards knowledge and self follows from his realistic philosophical attitude. Keeping the distinction between self and consciousness, he bridges the gulf between self and object. Since consciousness due to its nature never exists without directing towards some object.
5. Zahavi was highly influenced by Husserl, Sartre and other contemporary phenomenologists like Michel Henry who defines self-awareness as the basic form of selfhood.
6. The phrase 'Enworlded Subjectivity' was introduced by R. Balasubraminam to describe the nature of empirical self or jiva in Advaita philosophy. For more details please see Balasubraminam, R. (2004) Advaita Vedānta on the Problem of Enworlded Subjectivity. In Chattopaddhyaya d. P. Embree L. Mohanty J. N. (Ed.), *Phenomenology and Indian Philosophy* (pp. 77-93). New Delhi: ICPR.
7. Gallagher S. Zahavi Dan, (2012). *The Phenomenological Mind*. New York: Routledge, p. 52.
8. Here, it must be clarified while talking about first-personal perspective, Zahavi didn't ever claim that self is the perspectival owner or possessor of thought or experience. It is neither the perspectival owner nor the personal owner. The minimal self, being the experiential self lives in and through the experience and always present in the first-personal mode. On the other hand, the notion of ownership presupposes a sense of distinction between self and the conscious experiencing making the former an independent spectator of everything.

Work Cited

- Albahari, M. (2006). *Analytical Buddhism: The Two-Tiered Illusion of Self*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Albahari, M. (2009). Witness-Consciousness: Its Definition, Appearance and Reality. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 16/1: 62-84.
- Albahari, M. (2013). Nirvana and Ownerless Consciousness. In Sierits, M. Thompson, E. & Zahavi, D. (ed.), *Self, No Self: Perspectives from Analytical, Phenomenological, & Indian Traditions* (pp. 79-113). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Balasubraminam, R. (2004) Advaita Vedānta on the Problem of Enworlded Subjectivity. In Chattopaddhyaya d. P. Embree L. Mohanty J. N. (Ed.), *Phenomenology and Indian Philosophy* (pp. 77-93). New Delhi: ICPR.

- Chatterjee T. (2002). *Knowledge and Freedom in Indian Philosophy*. Oxford: Lexington Books.
- Citsukha, (1956). *Tattvapradīpikā*, ed. R. K. Sastri. Bombay: Nirnayasagar Press.
- Descartes, R. (2008). *Meditations*, trans. John Veitch. New York: Cosimo classics.
- Gallagher S. Zahavi Dan, (2012). *The Phenomenological Mind*. New York: Routledge.
- Ganeri, J. (2007). *The Concealed Art of the Soul: Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gupta, B. (1998). *The Disinterested Witness: A Fragment of Advaita Vedanta Phenomenology* USA: Northwestern University Press.
- Radhakrishnan, S. (2011). *Indian Philosophy* (Vol. II). New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Rāmānuja, (2012). *Brahma-Sūtras Śrī-Bhāṣya*, (trans. Swami Vireswarananda & Swami Adidevananda). Kolkata: Advaita Ashram.
- Śāṅkara, (2012). *Upadeśa Sāhasrī*, (trans. Swāmī Jagadānanda). Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math Printing Press.
- Sartre, J. P. (1957). *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (translated with an introduction by H. E. Barnes). London: Methuen & Co. Ltd.
- Vidyāraṇya (1967). *Pañcadaśī*, (trans. Swāmī Swāhānanda). Chennai: Ramakrishna Math press.
- Zahavi, D. (2009). Is the Self a Social Construction? *Inquiry* 52/6: 551-573.
- Zahavi, D. (2013). The Experiential Self: Objections and Clarifications. In Sierits, M. Thompson, E. & Zahavi, D. (ed.), *Self, No Self: Perspectives from Analytical, Phenomenological, & Indian Traditions* (pp. 56- 78). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zahavi, D. (2016). *Self & Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame*. UK: Oxford University Press.

Declaration

I acknowledge that the manuscript is my original work and is not a copy of previously published work. It is not under consideration or accepted for publication or in the press or published elsewhere.

Dr. Munmun Chakraborty
 Assistant Professor
 Department of Philosophy
 Assam University, Silchar
 Email: munmunchakraborty58@gmail.com
 Contact No. : 8724092142