

## Consciousness and Collective Consciousness

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### 1. Introduction

The property of consciousness is normally linked to the existence of soul in the Indian philosophies. Etymologically, consciousness implies one's ability to know and perceive. Through consciousness, one can have knowledge of the external world or one's own mental state. The thing, which distinguishes us from innate matter, is consciousness. A proper explanation of consciousness is eluding the western philosophers and scientists. Explaining the nature of consciousness is one of the important and perplexing areas of modern philosophy and science. The term collective consciousness is being used by many contemporary researchers but its meaning is not very clear. Carl Jung had coined the term Collective Unconscious.

Jainism recognizes the existence of the soul and consciousness as its property. There is no direct mention of collective consciousness in Jainism. However, the concepts of Jain philosophy offer solutions to many of the problems facing western philosophers and scientists. We review below these concepts as obtained in Jain philosophy and briefly compare them with western thought.

### 2. Consciousness in Jainism

Soul, *Jiva*, is the generic name of the sentient substance. The *Jiva* is the non-corporeal, living, eternal and permanent, and fixed (constant) substance of the Cosmic Universe, having the attribute of consciousness (*Chetana*). The term *Jiva* connotes that soul is conscious of itself, and consciousness is also invariably the soul. *Jiva* substance is non-physical and is not sense-perceptible; it does not have the properties of color, smell, taste, or touch. Consciousness and *upayoga* (the manifestation of consciousness) are the differential characteristics of the *jiva*. *Upayoga* and consciousness are the two sides of the same entity, *jiva*. Consciousness may be interpreted as both a structure and a function of the *jiva*, but *upayoga* refers to the functional side only. *Upayoga* gives us almost the same meaning as "mentally active." Just as "mental activity" is a fact of mental functioning and "mental capacity" is a fact of mental structure, *upayoga* may be considered a fact of the *jiva*'s function and consciousness or *chetana* may be considered a fact of the *jiva*'s structure.

Consciousness is the generality of the attributes that distinguish the *jiva* from the inanimate. *Upayoga* is the generality of the manifestations of such attributes. Both are comprehensions of the object by the subject. Intelligence (*jnana*) and self-awareness or awareness (*darshana*) are agreed to be the two main manifestations (*upayoga*) of consciousness. This shows that the attributes of intelligence and self-awareness alone cannot be given the status

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of consciousness in the structure of the *jiva*; these alone do not constitute the differentia of the *jiva*.

Consciousness in mundane souls manifests itself in several ways, including intelligence, knowledge, awareness, bliss, perception (cognitive elements), emotions, will, attitude and behavior, and awareness of pleasure and pain. Life and consciousness are coextensive: wherever there is life there is consciousness and vice versa. But there are degrees of explicitness or the manifestation of consciousness in different organisms. In the lowest class of organisms it is very much latent, while in human beings it is very much manifest. *Jiva* is entirely distinct from inanimate existence, which does not possess consciousness.

As the soul is non-corporeal, it cannot be perceived or known by the senses, mind and intellect. Its attribute is consciousness, which too is beyond the reach of perception. Consciousness can be known only through its function; it cannot be directly comprehended through sensory perception. Some people's denial of the existence of the soul may chiefly be attributed to its imperceptibility

### **3. Consciousness in Western Thought**

Explaining the nature of consciousness is one of the most important and perplexing areas of western philosophy. The abstract noun "consciousness" is not frequently used by itself in the contemporary literature, but is originally derived from the Latin *con* (with) and *scire* (to know) Thus "consciousness" has etymological ties to one's ability to know and perceive. Through consciousness, one can have knowledge of the external world or one's own mental states. Perhaps the most commonly used contemporary notion of a conscious mental state is captured by Thomas Nagel's famous "what it is like" sense (1974). When you are in conscious mental state, there is something it is like for you to be in that state from the subjective or first person point of view. But how do you understand this? For instance, how is the conscious mental state related to the body? Can consciousness be explained in terms of brain activity? What makes a mental state be a conscious mental state? The problem of consciousness is arguably the most central issue in current philosophy of mind and is also importantly related to major traditional topics in metaphysics, such as immortality and free will.

According to psychologists, consciousness has three faculties: cognition, affection, and conation. Cognition includes the abilities of perception and knowledge. Affection refers to the emotions such as love, attachment, fear, aversion, and others. Conation includes the ability to make decisions and various tendencies to construct and learn that engage living beings into physical action.

Some philosophers attempt to explain consciousness directly in neurophysiological or physical terms, while others offer cognitive theories of consciousness whereby conscious mental state are reduced to some kind of representational relation between mental states and the world. There are a number of such representational theories of consciousness, including higher order theories which hold that what makes a mental state conscious is that the subject is aware of it in some sense. The relationship between consciousness and science is also central in much current theorizing on this topic: How does the brain "bind together" various sensory inputs to produce a

unified subjective experience? What are the neural correlates of consciousness? What can be learned from abnormal psychology which might help to understand normal consciousness? To what extent are animal minds different from human minds? Could an appropriately programmed machine be conscious?

It might seem that the term "conscious" referred to above is synonymous with say, "awareness" or "experience" or "attention". However it is not generally accepted by philosophies today. For example one might hold that there are unconscious experiences, depending of course on how the term "experience" is defined. More common is the belief that you can be aware of external objects in some unconscious senses, for example, during cases of subliminal perception. It is also not clear that consciousness ought to be restricted to attention. It seems plausible to suppose that one is conscious (in some sense) of objects in one's peripheral visual field even though one is only attending to some narrow (focal) set of objects within that visual field.

#### **4. Collective Consciousness**

The term Collective Consciousness has been used by some social theorists like Durkheim, Althusser, etc. in recent times. It refers to the condition of the subject within the whole of society, and has an individual view himself/herself as a part of any given group. Collective consciousness represents the individual's relationship to a larger group or structure, but marks the sameness among members of that group, which act to make that group a cohesive whole. This cohesiveness is the expression of internal representation of external conditions present in any given society. These are exerted upon the subject in a variety of ways, and then assimilated into the subject's consciousness. Thus collective consciousness is the affect/effect upon and inside of any given public whose thoughts and actions are constantly mediated by outside pressures. The individuals in the society while have individual consciousness, they also have a solidarity with one another. Collective consciousness is the set of shared beliefs, ideas and moral attitudes which operate as a unifying force within society. It exists as something larger than the individuals who make up a society.

Other terms like solidarity attitudes, group-think, herd behavior, group mind, mass mind and social mind have been used by sociologists to describe group behavior and show how an entire community comes together to share similar values like resources, knowledge, etc.

Consciousness in Jainism is the property of the soul. The same consciousness does not extend from one soul to another, although all souls have similar consciousness in the absolute sense. Collective Consciousness to my mind may imply the collective conscious activity of a group of people who collectively engage in a similar activity and have a common aim targeted to some objective. The collective consciousness may thus mean cumulative social expression of the individual consciousness. The collective activity of a group of people placed in similar position can exhibit some characteristic not expressed individually by individual consciousness.

Jainism describes the concept of instincts that are the source of habitual behavior and may have some similarity with the idea of collective consciousness.

#### **5. Instincts (*Samjna*)**

Instinct is irrational knowledge that occurs without the assistance of the sense organs or the mind; it constitutes activity resulting from unlearned habits. This knowledge is gained by the *ksayopashama* of karma. Instincts exist in all kinds of beings, from one-sense organisms to human beings. Organisms without a mind, i.e. that are irrational, experience pain and pleasure through the physical body. Organisms with a mind, i.e. rational, have experiences through both the body and the mind. Some instincts may have a small knowledge component, but they are primarily habit-oriented. Instincts become less effective in the life of a rational being with the development of knowledge. With spiritual advancement and the eradication of karma, activities become more and more knowledge-centered; in the *kevali* state, when all psychical karmas are eliminated, instincts cease to exist.

There are ten main instincts:

1. Food instinct (*Aharasamjna*). This is produced by the rise of feeling-producing and deluding karma. By this instinct, the organism searches for food. Food instinct is aroused by (a) hunger, (b) sight of food, or (c) thought of food.
2. Fear/Defense instinct (*Bhayasamjna*). This is produced by the rise of deluding karma. By this instinct, the organism undertakes defensive or offensive actions. Fear instinct is aroused by (a) the feeling of insecurity, (b) the sight of enemy or predator, or (c) the thought of fear.
3. Sex instinct (*Maithunasamjna*). This is produced by the rise of deluding karma. By this instinct, an organism engages in sexual activities. Sex instinct is aroused by (a) metabolic and chemical activity in body; (b) reading, viewing or listening to sex-related material; or (c) the thought of sex.
4. Possession instinct (*Parigrahasamjna*). This is produced by the rise of deluding karma. By this instinct, the organism is encouraged to store items of need or imaginary need. Possession instinct is aroused by (a) scarcity, (b) knowledge of availability and unavailability of goods, or (c) the thought of possession.
- 5 – 8. Instincts of Anger (*Krodha*), Ego (*Maana*), Deceit (*Maya*), and Greed (*Lobha*). These instincts are also produced by the rise of deluding karma.
9. Sensation instinct (*Oghasamjna*). This is instinctive knowledge attained at the level of special sensation, without the involvement of the senses or mind; it is the knowledge that occurs through subtle vibrations. By this instinct some organisms can pre-sense events, such as earthquakes. In humans this may also appear as intuition.
10. Instinct of popular belief (*Lokasamjna*). This is a kind of instinct through which a specific sensation occurs on the perception of the object by the sense organs. By this instinct, a person follows the popular beliefs prevalent in the community without questioning. In some lower organisms this instinct is clearly seen e.g. behavior of termites, honey bees, etc. The birds flock together by this instinct. In humans this may be called collective consciousness in larger sense.

Three more instincts are also recognized in Jaina texts:

1. *Hetuvadopadesiki*. The instinct of making propositions in which examples, cause and logic are used.
2. *Dirghakaliki*. This instinct consists of the cognitive faculty of mind through which the soul is capable of prolonged (and linked) contemplation of the past, present and future. This may be the cause of pre-cognition by some individuals.
3. *Samyagdristi*. The instinct of having faith in the truth.

The instincts may also manifest collectively. Instincts are more prominent in lower organisms (*asamjni jiva*) that do not have mind. Higher organisms and humans have mind and their activities are mostly guided by *ksayopasama* or raise of psychical karma particularly the deluding karma. The deluding karmas are of two type's passions (*kashaya*) and quasi-passions (*nokashaya*). Passions are four – anger, ego, deceit and greed, and quasi-passions are nine – laughter (including joking, sarcasm, ridicule, criticism, backbiting, satire, irony, humor and wit), indulgence (love and happiness), dissatisfaction (hate, unhappiness), sorrow, fear, disgust, male disposition, female disposition, and hermaphrodite disposition (the last three mean sex desire). The instincts in humans are weak but they do affect our behavior. In the case of collective consciousness the instinct of popular belief and the *hetuvadopadesiki* instinct are particularly important and these may have effective role in deciding the behavior of group members. These instincts in combination with the effect of rise of the deluding karma may produce a variety of behavior in a group. Several kinds of groups having different characteristics may be formed by selective combinations passions and quasi-passions with the two instincts. For example groups may form having a common trait of anger, ego, deceit or greed or their combinations. Such groups may advance some logic for their intended activities, propose a cause and cite examples to justify their actions. In all these examples the actions of a member may be voluntary or involuntary. In the case of voluntary actions the member acts on rise of deluding karma and the instincts but in the case of involuntary action the member may be forced or pressurized to join the group.

### **5.1 Higher Dimension of Collective Consciousness**

The consciousness of human beings is in developed state (as compared to that of animals). The individual consciousness exists at two levels, at lower level it is in the form of competition and race resulting in strife and struggle, and at higher level it transcends race and competition resulting in state of peace. Wise people at higher level of consciousness have a state of equanimity and peace and develop three specific dimensions of behavior.

1. Friendship. Friendship does not have competition and a wish to defeat the partner; it involves only giving without expecting anything in return.
2. Fearlessness. There is no fear between the friends; they live in a fearless environment.
3. Tolerance. One tolerates the other and there is no feeling of retaliation. Tolerance promotes happiness.

When a group of people are engaged collectively in some good, e.g. religious, activity all the above three dimensions are manifested and the group experiences peace and harmony resulting in happiness. These feelings are not confined to that particular group but may reverberate in the surroundings creating similar awareness in other sensitive people in the vicinity. It may motivate them to develop similar characteristics of friendship, fearlessness, and tolerance.

Jainism also provides for soul to soul contact through *aharaka* (migratory) body. A monk can contact Tirthankara in other part of *loka* for seeking answers to Aagam related doubts. For this purpose he projects a subtle (*aharaka*) body that travels to Tirthankara in Videha region, about 50,000 yojana (say, about 50,000 light years) and communicates in a voice less manner. Travel to such large magnitude of distances in real time is not possible according to the laws of modern science. But the *aharaka* body made up of four touch matter (ordinary light is eight touch matter) is supposed to travel at speeds many times the speed of light making the above kind of travel possible in real time. Acharya Kundakunda had contacted Simandhara Swami in Videha region in ancient times and in recent times Acharya Mahaprajna contacted Mahavira Swami, Gautsam Swami, Sudharma Swami, Acharya Kunakunda, etc. in recent times.

The Russian scientists found out that our DNA can cause disturbing patterns in the vacuum, thus producing magnetized wormholes. These are tunnel connections between entirely different areas in the universe through which information can be transmitted outside of space and time. The DNA attracts these bits of information and passes them on to our consciousness. This process of hyper communication is most effective in a state of relaxation. Stress, worries or a hyperactive intellect prevent successful hyper communication or the information will be totally distorted and useless. In nature, hyper communication has been successfully applied for millions of years. The organized flow of life in insect states proves this dramatically. Modern man knows it only on a much more subtle level as "intuition". But we too, can regain full use of it. An example of hyper communication is when a queen ant is spatially separated from her colony, building still continues fervently and according to plan. If the queen is killed, however, all work in the colony stops. No ant knows what to do. Apparently the queen sends the "building plans" also from far away via the group consciousness of her subjects. She can be as far away as she wants, as long as she is alive. Presumably in earlier times humanity had been, just like the animals, very strongly connected to the group consciousness and acted as a group. To develop and experience individuality we humans, however, had to forget hyper communication almost completely. According to Jainism this kind of communication is possible only at short distances; at large distances in space (*loka*) involving thousands of light years the communication is possible only through the *aharaka* body described above.

## 6 Collective Unconsciousness

Carl Jung coined a term Collective Unconscious that refers to structures of the unconscious mind which are shared among beings of the same species. According to Jung,

the human collective unconscious is populated by **instincts** and by **archetypes**. Jung considered the collective unconscious to underpin and surround the **unconscious mind**, distinguishing it from the **personal unconscious** of Freudian **psychoanalysis**. He argued that the collective unconscious had profound influence on the lives of individuals, who lived out its symbols and clothed them in meaning through their experiences.

Psychiatrist and Jungian analyst Lionel Corbett argues that the contemporary terms "autonomous psyche" or "objective psyche" are more commonly used today in the practice of depth psychology rather than the traditional term of the "collective unconscious." Critics of the collective unconscious concept have called it unscientific and fatalistic, or otherwise very difficult to test scientifically (due to the mythical aspect of the collective unconscious) for those faith-based scientists. Jainism does not subscribe to the idea of collective unconscious. The unconscious mind is individual and cannot be shared by others.

## **7. Conclusion**

Consciousness is a fundamental property of the soul in Jainism, it always exists. Collective consciousness is not a fundamental property; it can be called as collective conscious activity of a group and may be regarded as a social expression of the individual consciousness. Tendency of group behavior exists in all organisms as an instinctual consciousness; it is weaker in human beings than in lower organisms. Many human beings tend to follow popular beliefs prevalent in the community and may assign a cause and logic for such behavior. Instincts may show their effects in combination with the effects of the rising passions and quasi-passions in individuals and this may give rise to a variety of group behavior observed in society. Collective consciousness is a temporary phenomenon and may appear in the group for a short duration of time as long as the instincts manifest in the individuals. There is a higher dimension of collective consciousness where in the group engages in a collective activity for the good of the society.

## **Endnote**

The book "Scientific Explorations of Jain Doctrines" by the author gives details of the concepts of consciousness and instincts in Jainism and also consciousness in Western thought. The concepts of collective consciousness as used by the modern scholars and collective unconscious are discussed on net sources like Wikipedia etc.