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Idea of Consciousness in the Light of Jain and Western Philosophy

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Prof. Narayan Lal Kachhara*

Abstract

Much current research is done on consciousness both western philosophy and science regard life in the form of body and do not accept soul. Many says it similar to brain or mind. Scientists try to explain and find the source of subjective behavior of beings in body processes. Christianity and Islam believe in soul but the soul is considered to originate in this life only and that there is no rebirth. 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. The purpose of this article is to describe the concept of soul and consciousness in Jain system, western philosophy of consciousness and mind, the materialistic approach to consciousness and then explains the issues on consciousness raised in western philosophy and materialistic approach in the Jain context.

Key Words

Jiva, Free will, Upayoga, Pudgala-Skandhas, Siddha.

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Introduction

Consciousness is the subject of much current research in western philosophy and science. Consciousness is supposed to be a quality of mind generally regarded to comprise qualities such as subjectivity, self-awareness, sentience, sapience, and the ability to perceive the relationship between oneself and one's environment. Both western philosophy and science regard existence of a being in the form of body and do not accept soul as the life force. Scientists try to explain and find the source of subjective behavior of beings in body processes. It is sometimes held that consciousness emerges from the complexity of brain processing. Many psychologists maintain that behavior can be explained by conscious processes akin to artificial intelligence, and might consider consciousness to be epiphenomenal or only weakly related to functions.

Christianity and Islam believe in soul but the soul is considered to originate in this life only and that there is no rebirth. Some philosophers like Plato and St. Thomas Aquinas believed in incorporeal soul that could continually reborn in subsequent bodies but they did not connect consciousness to soul.

The materialistic approach to consciousness gives rise to many questions. For example how physical processes in the brain can possibly give rise to subjective experience? How can brain support thought, rationality, intelligence, and creativity? How do we cognize? How are feelings and emotions explained? If we are entirely physical things, then must not all the brain activity and behavior in question be determined by the laws of nature? If everything is determined what is free will?

Jainism explains consciousness without encountering such questions. In Jain system the soul (*jiva*) is one of the constituent substances of the cosmic universe. The soul substance is sentient and is identified by the property of consciousness. Consciousness manifests in many ways like intelligence, knowledge, awareness, perception, bliss, emotions and behavior, awareness of pleasure and pain in the living beings. Life and consciousness are coextensive. Soul (*jiva*) is incorporeal and is entirely distinct from inanimate existence. Jain philosophy provides a perfect system that does not face the questions raised in western philosophy and science regarding consciousness.

This article describes the concept of soul and consciousness in Jain system, western philosophy of consciousness and mind, the materialistic approach to consciousness and then explains the issues on consciousness raised in western philosophy and materialistic approach in the Jain context.

Soul, Consciousness and Mind in Jain Philosophy

Soul (*Jiva*) is the generic name of sentient substance. *Jiva* substance is non physical and is not sense - perceptible; it does not have the properties of colour, smell, taste and touch. The *Jiva* is non-corporeal, living, eternal and permanent, and fixed (constant)

substance of the Cosmic Universe, having the attributes of consciousness (*Cetanā*). Consciousness and *upayoga* are the differentia of the *jiva*. *Upayoga* and consciousness are the two sides of the same entity *jiva*. Consciousness may be interpreted both as a structure and a function of the *jiva* but *upayoga* refers to the functional side only. Consciousness is the generality of the attributes (if not of all the attributes of the *jiva*), which distinguish the *jiva* from the inanimate. *Upayoga* is the generality of the manifestations of such attributes. *Jñāna*, intelligence, and *darśana*, perception, are agreed to be the two main manifestations (*upayoga*) of consciousness. Both of them are comprehensions of the object by the subject. Knowledge is the manifestation of intelligence of the *jiva* with respect to its comprehending capacity. The cognition function of *jiva* is determined by its intelligence attribute. It is a comprehension of the objects with their details.

Ways of Manifestation

Consciousness in mundane soul manifests itself in several ways: intelligence, knowledge, awareness, intuition, bliss, perception (cognitive elements), emotions, will, attitude and behaviour, 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 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.

Life-essentials of worldly soul are represented by five senses, mental, vocal and bodily activities, duration of life and respiration. Whatever things and behaviors it makes, such as forces (*samskāras*), etc. are reflected in it, one fine material body, called karma body, containing an impression of these forces is being formed by it, and that body exists and accompanies it at the time of taking up another new body.

Association with *Karma*

Jīva and special type of *pudgala-skandhas*, which are called *karma*, are mutually associated. Because of various activities and actions of *jīva*, an association is established between *karma-pudgalas* and *jīva* and according to these actions/activities; *karma pudgalas* affect *jīva* in a peculiar way. All the souls in this universe undergo effects such as sorrow, happiness, birth, death etc. so long as they are afflicted by *karma-pudgalas*. Only those souls who get emancipated from these effects of *karma-pudgalas* are designated as ‘*Paramātma*’ or ‘*Siddha*’.

Etymological Definition

We can define consciousness for etymological purpose. Consciousness is the power, and also function (of the soul), that manifests as *jñāna*, intelligence or ability

to know, and *darśana*, awareness or ability to perceive, and ability to experience pain and pleasure, and bliss, unaided. Consciousness (soul), is supposed to have infinite intelligence, infinite awareness power, infinite bliss power, and infinite power to experience these attributes to the fullest extent without the assistance of any other substance. The soul is complete by self and does not depend on anything else for its functioning and manifestation. The *karmas* impair the manifestation of powers of the soul temporarily but the soul is capable of removing the karma by self without the grace of any other power. Every soul is independent and maintains its existence in all conditions, mundane or liberated.

Difference Between Soul and Mind

Jaina distinguishes between soul and mind. The mind does not possess consciousness which is the exclusive property of the soul. Mind unlike soul is not a permanent entity, it exists only when consciousness manifests as thoughts, beliefs, desires, emotions and feelings. Mind is influenced by rising *karma* in its working.

Jainism recognizes two types of minds: (1) psychical mind (*bhāvamāna*) and (2) physical mind (*dravyamāna*).

Psychical Mind: This part of the mind that thinks, imagines, plans, discriminates and takes decisions is part of the soul.

Physical Mind: This is the physical counterpart of the psychical mind and is composed of *manovargaṇā*, a subtle class of matter. This part of the mind interacts with the brain and the nervous system.

The psychical and physical parts of the mind are intimately correlated. The physical mind cannot function without the psychical mind. Together they perform mental activities. The physical mind interacts with the environment and influences the soul. Thus the mind establishes a connection between the soul and its environment.

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. The thing, which distinguishes us from innate matter, is consciousness. Consciousness is closely related to our thoughts and emotions and ultimately to our personality and social interaction. A proper explanation of consciousness is eluding the philosophers and scientists.

One use of "conscious" is applied to a person's total state. A person is conscious, in the sense, if he or she is in a generalized condition of alertness or arousal: being awake rather than asleep or in a coma. "Awareness" is just an approximate synonym

of “conscious”, and so is “phenomenal”. Attempts at definition might try to define consciousness (semi) operationally, by reference to the sort of behavior that would provide public or external evidence for consciousness.

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?

Through consciousness, one can have knowledge of the external world or one's own mental states. 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.

Soul in Western Thought

Plato, drawing on the words of his teacher Socrates, considered the soul as the essence of a person, being that which decides how we behave. He considered this essence to be an incorporeal, eternal occupant of our being. As bodies die the soul is continually reborn in subsequent bodies.

Aristotle defined the soul or psyche as the essence or definition of a living being, but argued against its having a separate existence from the physical body. In Aristotle's view, the primary activity of a living thing constitutes its soul; for example, the soul of an eye, if it were an independent organism, would be seeing (its purpose or final cause).

St Thomas Aquinas understood the soul to be the first principle, or act, of the body. His epistemological theory required that, since the intellectual soul is capable of knowing all material things, and since in order to know a material thing there must be no material thing within it, the soul was definitely not corporeal. Therefore, the soul had an operation separate from the body and therefore could subsist without the body.

Immanuel Kant identified the soul as the “I” in the strictest sense. “We cannot prove a priori the immateriality of the soul, but rather only so much; that all properties and actions of the soul cannot be cognized from materiality.” It is from the “I” or soul that Kant proposes transcendental rationalization, but cautions that such rationalization can only determine the limits of knowledge if it is to remain practical.

Most Christians understand the soul as an ontological reality distinct from, yet integrally connected with, the body. Its characteristics are described in moral, spiritual, and philosophical terms. When people die, their souls will be judged by God and determined to spend an eternity in heaven or in hell.

The origin of soul has provided a nixing question in Christianity; the major theories put forward include soul creationism, traducianism and pre-existence. According to creationism, each individual soul is created directly by God, either at the moment of conception or some later time. According to traducianism, the soul comes from the parents by natural generation. According to the pre-existence theory, the soul exists before the moment of conception.

Western Philosophies of Mind

The mind in western philosophy is conceived as something that thinks, perceives, knows, experiences, holds beliefs and memories, desires, and interacts with the external world and so on. To explain such phenomena views have been presented by thinkers and philosophers who differ in their approach. Some philosophers think that mind is different from body, some are of the view that such functions are performed by brain and there are those who hold that both mind and body have a common origin.

The major stumbling block in solving the brain mind problem had been how the brain-mind binds together millions of disparate neuron activities into an experience of a perceptual whole. How does the perceived wholeness of our world emerge from a system consisting of so many parts, billions of neurons. What creates feelings, free will and creativity?

There are, however, a number of much discussed and important objections to materialism most of which question the notion that materialism can adequately explain conscious experience. Joseph Levine coined the expression “the explanatory gap” to express the difficulty for any materialistic attempt to explain consciousness. David Chalmers similarly points to “the hard problem of consciousness”, which

basically refers to the difficulty of explaining just how physical processes in the brain give rise to subjective conscious experiences, or experience an emotion. Chalmers usefully distinguishes the hard problem of consciousness from what he calls the “easy problem” of consciousness, such as ability to discriminate and categorize stimuli, the ability of a cognitive system to access its own internal states, and the difference between wakefulness and sleep. The easy problems generally have more to do with the functions of consciousness, solving them does not touch the hard problem of phenomenal consciousness.

Beliefs of Mysterians

Some philosophers argue that we are simply not capable of solving the problem of consciousness. The “mysterians” believe that the hard problem can never be solved because of human cognitive limitations; the explanatory gap can never be filled. Some argue that we are “cognitively closed” with respect to this problem much like a rat or dog is cognitively incapable of solving, or even understanding, calculus problems. McGinn claims that we are cognitively closed as to how brain produces conscious awareness. He concedes that some brain property produces conscious experience, but we cannot understand how this is so or even know what that brain property is. Our concept forming mechanism simply will not allow us to grasp the physical and causal basis of consciousness. We are not conceptually suited to be able to do so. McGinn observes that we do not have a mental faculty that can access both consciousness and the brain. We access consciousness through introspection or the first-person perspective, but our access to the brain is through the use of outer spatial senses (e.g., vision) or more third-person perspective. Thus we have no way to access both the brain and consciousness together, and therefore any explanatory link between them is forever beyond our reach.

We find that in western philosophies there is no clear distinction between soul and mind. While it is true that the term "soul" (or "spirit") is often used instead of mind, the problem in philosophy is that it is unclear just how the soul is supposed to differ from mind. The terms are often used interchangeably by many philosophers because it is unclear to them what else the soul could be other than "the mental substance". One might wonder "even if the mind is physical, what about the soul", May be it is the soul, not the mind, which is non-physical.

Objections to Materialistic Approach

Scientists try to explain and find the source of subjective behavior of beings in body processes. Consciousness, according to Jainism and most other philosophies, is a property of the soul. Consciousness, and hence intelligence, in no case can be a property of matter. The concepts, classical or quantum, of emergent property, or epiphenomenon, that consciousness emerges from matter (or brain) is fundamentally

misplaced. This is however true that matter of the body is different from ordinary matter in the sense that it, being the substratum of manifestation of consciousness of the soul, participates in formation of body structure. The body matter in that sense has some emergent property that exhibits consciousness like characteristics but this does not imply that consciousness emerges from matter, the matter possess this property because of the soul. The interpretation of brain processes in terms of consciousness must be taken as an attempt by science to justify the power of science to explain all phenomena in nature including the living systems. Beck (2001) states explicitly that “science cannot, by its very nature, present any answer to [...] questions related to mind”.

Sir Karl Popper (1977) describes the mind and brain exists in two separate realities. The brain is a functioning material organ of the body, and the mind or consciousness is the immaterial symptom of the living entity or soul which motivates the body.

No theory of brain can explain why and how consciousness is a fundamental property of matter? Existence of consciousness is separate from the physical properties of matter. The main problem is the lack of an empirical test for consciousness. We cannot know whether a being is conscious or not. We cannot “measure” consciousness. There is not, up to the moment, any satisfactory explanations for the mechanism of formation of a conscious experience, typified by individuality, subjectivity; the self.

The materialistic approach stems from the thinking that every truth is empirically verifiable, According to Jainism universe consists of two kinds of substances physical and non-physical; the non-physical substances can be verified by inference only and cannot be measured empirically. It is obvious that to understand consciousness the science has first to recognize the existence of soul, which would require transcending the traditional approach of studying nature, adopting a new way of comprehending reality and discovering new laws that merge science and spirituality.

The contemporary approach does not so much attack the existence of an independent soul as render the concept less relevant. The notion of soul has less explanatory power in a western world-view which prefers the empirical explanations involving observable and locatable elements of the brain. Materialists hold that the mind is the brain and the conscious mental activity is identical to neural activity. When the brain activity ceases, so do all conscious experiences and there is no immortality. However, if we are entirely physical beings, then must not all the brain activity and behavior in question be determined by the laws of nature? Although materialists may not logically rule out immortality or free will, they will likely often reply that such traditional, perhaps even outdated or pre-scientific beliefs simply ought to be rejected to the extent that they conflict with materialism.

Jainism on Issues on Consciousness

I now examine the issues on consciousness in Jain perspective. Experience is made by the body in western philosophy and by the soul in Jain philosophy, and this makes significant difference in explaining experience. In Jain philosophy also senses and mind are involved in experiencing but their role is limited to some kinds of experiences, experience can take place without them too.

In the Jain system the soul is doer of acts and he also experiences the consequences of these acts in this life or future lives. The soul binds *karma* due to acts of mind, speech and body when these are performed with passions of anger, ego, deceit, and greed. These karmas when rise or get fruition on maturity make the soul experience the consequences of these *karmas* (*karmaphala*). When the *karmas* are eliminated by austerity measures the soul experiences the natural qualities of infinite intelligence, infinite perception, perfect bliss and infinite spiritual energy without involving senses and mind.

The doubt that how physical processes in the brain give rise to subjective experience is right, it cannot happen. When senses and mind are involved in the experience the brain which is linked to senses and mind shall have processes taking place, but the experience is made by the soul and not by the brain. The experiences of the soul are subjective under the influence of *karma* but the experiences are objective when psychological *karmas* have been eliminated in the omniscient state.

Thought, rationality, intelligence and creativity are the attributes of the soul and not the brain. When soul is engaged in these functions there is fruition of associated *karma* and activity in the brain. It should be clear that the brain is not the source of these activities, the source is the soul. The brain supports and regulates the activities of mind speech and body on physical plane when the soul performs these functions.

A correlation between the activities of the mind and brain is a requirement of the system. The brain is the physical structure for the activity of the mind. The brain is the hardware, and the mind provides the application software. Neuron firing and other neuro-physiological activities in the brain are synchronized with the mental activity of the mind. This is possible only when the brain is properly developed and functioning. It would be wrong to assign mental capabilities to neural events as the materialists do; the driving force behind the neural activity is the mind, which is manifested with the powers of the soul – the ultimate source of all activities, both conscious and autonomic, in the body.

The feelings and emotions are also found in the soul having psychological *karma*. Such experiences are absent in the omniscient state when the psychological *karmas* have been eliminated.

Cognition is made by the soul. The soul having the natural qualities of *jñāna* and *darśana* is at once the cognizer. During cognition involving mind and senses there are neural processes in the brain, but it is emphasized that mind is not the cognizer. The soul can also have direct cognition without mind and senses and in this case the processes in the brain are only to regulate the body functions and are not for cognition activity.

The Process of Receiving Information

In Jain system the soul binds the bits of sense-data that are recorded on millions of neurons. The information from the brain is transmitted to the physical mind and then to the psychical mind, the *bhāva karma* part of the soul now integrates the information in a perceptual whole. So the soul experiences the event in a holistic way.

It should be clear now that the physical processes in the brain and body are also dependent on the mind and therefore these cannot be determined solely by the laws of science. Although these laws are operative in the physical part of the system such laws are inadequate to determine the state of the system as the soul is the principal source of activity and the laws of nature applicable to the physical world do not apply to non-physical soul. It is clear now that we are not entirely physical things, we are souls. The events in the life of an individual are determined by both the laws of nature, as far as the body is concerned, and the powers of the soul. Our behavior and disorders in the body are known to depend heavily on mind.

Free will can be understood in respect of the soul. It is true that in the physical world events are determined by prior events and in Jain philosophy the events in the life of a being are also determined by *karma*. But the soul has the power to override the effects of *karma* and make a choice irrespective of consequences of *karma*. It is due to this power that a soul has free will and makes spiritual progress and liberates him from the cycle of birth and death.

No machine howsoever intelligently designed and programmed can possess consciousness. In no case the basic properties of a substance can change during its transformation, matter not having the property of consciousness can never possess it in its any modifications. A machine can perform the designed functions, which may appear to be intelligent like human but it does not mean that it is a source of intelligence. Matter does not have intelligence and it shall never have it in all its modifications.

In the Jain system a soul can have any form, the soul can take birth as any of the species like human being, animal, or as an infernal and a celestial being. The human beings and five sense animals (also infernal and celestial beings) have mind. The human beings have more developed mind than animals. The soul of a human being is also in more developed state than the soul of an animal, but the basic potentialities of souls of all beings are the same.

The personality of a person is dependent on the psychical *karmas* that are rising, or are in suppression or are in the state of suppression-cum-destruction. As different psychical *karma* rise at different times the behavior and personality of the individual also varies. From this point of view the same soul appears in different forms at different times. An advanced spiritual person is different from an ordinary person in the sense that the former has reduced his psychical *karma* and so his soul powers manifest in a greater measure. In such a condition a spiritually advanced person has no attachment to worldly attractions and he is engaged in the pursuits of spiritual advancement.

Conclusion

In Jain philosophy *jiva*, soul is identified by the property of consciousness. Consciousness manifests in many ways like intelligence, knowledge, awareness, perception, emotions and behavior, expression of pleasure and pain, etc. Mind in the Jain system is different from the soul, and is the instrument for carrying out functions like thinking, conation, emotions, feelings, memories, cognizing, making experiences, etc.

Western philosophy and science has made materialistic approach to understand consciousness and regards it as an emergent property or an epiphenomenon. In this approach consciousness is explained in neurophysiological or physical terms or with the help of some kind of cognitive theory. This approach raises several questions requiring resolution. Some philosophers, however, oppose this approach and hold that mind and brain exists in two separate realities. Western philosophy makes no clear distinctions between soul and mind, or between mind and brain.

Jainism is very clear in its propositions making distinction between soul, mind and brain. Denying the theory of emergent property of consciousness explains all the functions and behavior of human beings in terms of performance of the soul having the property of consciousness.

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