Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Meaning of Consciousness

There has been no other phenomenon in philosophy or science for which researchers have produced a lot of excitement and debate as for the nature and function of consciousness. Perhaps, it is not at all an exaggeration to say that there is no other phenomenon besides consciousness that is more familiar and yet more elusive to any theoretical account, which would satisfy scholars of all persuasions. As soon as one tries to give an account of consciousness within the purview of any one theory, one finds there almost insuperable difficulties. So, in order to investigate about the nature and phenomenon of consciousness one intends to know the meaning and definition of consciousness at the very beginning. In other words, to study about the nature of consciousness, it is essential to know how the term has been used by different philosophers and researchers. In order to investigate any phenomenon one has to begin with the meaning or definition of such phenomenon or atleast attempt to give one. In a similar way, to study the nature of consciousness, it is an essential part to know the term as has been used by different philosophers and researchers. It can be used as a phenomenology of everyday conscious experience and also referred to as ‘phenomenal consciousness’. In some writings, ‘consciousness’ is
synonymous with ‘mind’. However, the extensive evidence for nonconscious mental processing shows that the definition in such terms is too broad.

In Western psychology, ‘mind’ typically refers to psychological states and processes that may or may not be ‘conscious’. Again ‘consciousness’ can also be used synonymously with ‘self-consciousness’. But one can be conscious of many other things than oneself, so this definition is too narrow. Here self-consciousness is taken to be a specific form of reflexive consciousness, in which the object of consciousness is the self or some aspect of the self. Another common notion of ‘consciousness’ is to refer to a state of wakefulness. Being awake or asleep or in some other state such as coma, clearly influences what one can be conscious of, but, it is not the same as being conscious in the sense of having ‘phenomenal contents’. When sleeping, for example, one can still have visual and auditory experiences in the form of dreams. Conversely, when awake there are many things at any given moment that one does not experience. So in a variety of contexts, it is necessary to distinguish ‘consciousness’ in the sense of ‘phenomenal consciousness’ from wakefulness and other states of arousal, such as dream, sleep, deep sleep and coma. ‘Consciousness’ is also sometimes used to mean ‘knowledge’; in the sense that if one is conscious of something one also has knowledge of it. However, at any moment, much of the knowledge is nonconscious, or implicit (e.g. the knowledge gained over a lifetime, stored in long-term memory). So, consciousness and knowledge cannot be co-extensive. Even though all these views are widely accepted in the contemporary scientific

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literature\textsuperscript{2}, but various writers, both East and West, adopting different philosophical positions and pre-theoretical assumptions, continue to use the term ‘consciousness’ in very different ways. As the analysis of definition too is a wide area of study, so, keeping aside the general usages of the term consciousness in the present section, the next section deals with the origin of the study of consciousness; and how this phenomenon influenced philosophers and scientists to show their concern and try to formulate a theory about the nature and function of consciousness.

1.2 The Origin of the Study of Consciousness

In order to trace the origin of the study of consciousness, one has to be aware about the philosophical questions raised in metaphysics. The primary questions here are: what is the world made up of? What is the nature of such constituents? How can we know about the constituents? What are we? What is the relationship between physical and mental? All these questions have been raised in Indian philosophical systems and also by Western philosophers. As far as the physical nature of the world is concerned, it is almost admitted by all, that world is composed of matter. But apart from the physical thing the justification for the non-physical thing – also called as ‘mental’ is the real question of concern here. The non-physical is synonymous with the mental – the nature of which is just opposite to that of the matter or physical thing. This non-physical is present in all the living things in different forms, even though many philosophers do not accept the existence of non-physical (mental) thing; for instance the

materialists$^3$. It is termed as ‘consciousness’ in human beings and ‘life-force’ in other living beings. At this point, the question of concern is: how is the matter correlated to something which is non-physical in nature? To provide an answer to this question, there has been a long time effort of both the Indian and Western philosophers, which has now become the most complicated philosophical knot! In modern times, not only philosophy tries to give answer to this question, rather various disciplines have joined hands to provide a concrete answer to this question and also develop a theory to understand the nature of consciousness.

On one hand, it is seen that metaphysicians have tried to explain consciousness by help of what they consider as ultimate reality, whereas natural scientists on the other hand, have found it difficult to accommodate consciousness within certain scientific theories. Being banished from scientific theories and discourse, consciousness has now received a respectable position among scientists and scientific philosophers (cognitive scientists) during the last two decades. This has opened a new horizon in the study and understanding of the nature of consciousness. The new interest in ‘consciousness research’ by brain sciences and analytical thinkers has provided new ideas and dimensions of consciousness, though there is still a want for a holistic theory of consciousness. In light of these modern researches, the contribution of Indian philosophical system would also play an important role for developing a holistic approach to study the nature of consciousness. So, this chapter would briefly outline the Indian philosophical systems on one hand, specifically the transformed Advaita system that was put forward by Sri Aurobindo. On the other hand, understanding

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$^3$ Materialists consider that matter is the sole constituent of the world. Anything present in the world can be expressed in terms of matter.
consciousness from Western perspective will also be discussed here to make a holistic analysis of the nature of consciousness. A brief outline follows from the Indian and Western perspective, to show their standpoints in justifying the nature of consciousness.

1.3 Consciousness in Indian Philosophical Systems

Indian thought from the very beginning shows a deep and continuing concern for the nature and function of consciousness (cit). The idea of consciousness or ‘cit’ has played an important role in the Upanisad, where it was considered as the fundamental concept of Indian thought. It turned to be the inner principle of worship and adoration. The self or consciousness reveals that the Upaniṣadic quest for self is not simply an intellectual analysis; but the goal was to provide an understanding of the meaning and the significance of the world, as well as a satisfactory explanation of the identification of the ātman, the Brahman and the empirical self or individual consciousness. According to this Upaniṣadic thought, consciousness, although the basis of the all-knowing, is different from the object known. Rather it is implied in every act of knowing. So, it is different from the I-consciousness or the empirical individual, who cognizes and enjoys. This self consciousness is then revealed in the different states of mind viz. in dreaming state, in waking state and in dreamless sleep state.

All Indian philosophical systems beginning from the Cārvākas to the Vedāntas, there is an attempt to resolve the metaphysical problem and justify the

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nature of consciousness. To begin with the Cārvāka system, who is the strongest supporter of materialism, claims that the world is comprised of the four earth-elements (bhūta-padārthas) viz. earth (ksiti), air (marut), water (ap) and fire (tejas). All these four elements are objectively perceptible as their metaphysics is completely based on the epistemological grounds, where they have admitted perceptual cognition (pratyakṣa) as the only means of attaining knowledge. Now the question that arises is if the world is composed of these four basic physical elements, then how can consciousness be explained in terms of these earth-elements? To provide an answer to this problem, the Cārvākas claim that consciousness is an epiphenomenon or by-product of the matter, like when betel leaf, lime and nut are chewed together it gives reddish tinge, though none of the individual constituent is red in colour. In the same way, consciousness too, is an epiphenomenon of the human body and thus cannot exist apart from that body. But the theory is not very acceptable, as if any body part gets damaged, one cannot claim that consciousness is also damaged. It is a general observable fact that an individual possesses consciousness even if the person is impaired of any limb or body part. So, consciousness as merely an outcome of the four physical elements could not be a satisfactory explanation.

According to the Jainas, the soul is a conscious substance. Consciousness is the essence of soul (Cetanā-laksamo jivah). It is always present in the soul, though its nature and degree may vary. Souls may be theoretically arranged in a continuous series according to the degrees of consciousness. At the highest end, will be the perfect souls that have overcome

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all *karmas* and attained omniscience, whereas at the lowest end, would stand the most imperfect souls which inhibit bodies of earth, air, water, fire, etc. where consciousness is in dormant form, owing to the overpowering influence of *karma* obstacles. In the mid-way are the souls having two to five sense-organs like worms, ants, bees and men. It is this soul that knows things, performs activities, enjoys pleasure, suffers pain and illumines itself and other objects. The soul is eternal, but it also undergoes change of states. It is different from the body and its existence is directly proved by its consciousness of itself. Jainas conceive the soul, primarily as a living being and so possesses both extension and consciousness. As consciousness is found in every part of the body, and if consciousness be the character of the soul, the soul should be admitted to be present in every part of the body and therefore occupy space. The soul’s ability to pervade space is admitted by other Indian thinkers and was also admitted by Greek philosopher, Plato. But it should be borne in mind that a soul’s occupying space simply means its presence in different parts of space and not filling a part of space like a material body. A material body fills a part of space, in such a way that while it is there, no other matter can occupy it. Whereas a soul’s presence in a particular space does not prevent another soul’s presence there; two souls may be present at the same place. The Jainas point this out, just as two lights can illumine the same area, this theory too could not provide a satisfactory explanation about consciousness. If consciousness is an attribute of the soul, then it is of opposite nature to the material world and thereby no interaction is possible for the consciousness.
In comparison to the Jaina view, Buddhist philosophy upholds a completely opposite view regarding soul. In sync with the Buddhist theories of conditional existence (Pratityasamutpadvāda)\(^7\) and universal change (Kṣanabhangavāda)\(^8\), they deny the existence of such soul. They provide explanation for the continuity of an individual person, either through different births or through different phases of life, like childhood, youth and old-age of a person. These stages are linked by the continuity of the stream of successive mental states that compose an individual’s life. Life is an unbroken series of states; each of these states depends on the condition just preceding it and gives rise to the one just succeeding it. The continuity of the life series is, therefore, based on a causal connection running through the different states. So, the conception of soul is thus replaced here by that of an unbroken stream of consciousness as in the philosophy of William James\(^9\). As the present state of consciousness inherits its characters from the previous ones, the past in a way continues in the present through its effect. Memory thus becomes explicable even without a soul. So, the Buddhist philosophy concludes that man is only a conventional name for a collection of different constituents as: material body (kāyā), the immaterial mind (manas), the formless consciousness (vijñāna) just as a chariot is a collection of wheels, axels, shafts, etc. Thus existence of man

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\(^7\) The existence of everything is conditional, dependent on a cause. Nothing happens fortuitously or by chance.

\(^8\) Whatever exists arises from some causes and conditions and is in every respect impermanent, i.e. exists for one part less moment only.

depends upon this collection and it dissolves when the collection breaks up. The soul or ego depicts nothing more than this collection\(^{10}\).

Apart from all these views \textit{Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika} adopts the realistic view of the self. According to them, the self is a unique substance, to which all cognitions, feelings and conations belong as its attributes; and desires, aversion, volition, pleasure, pain and cognition are all qualities of the soul. These cannot belong to the physical substances since they are not physical qualities perceived by external senses. Hence, one must admit that they are peculiar properties of some substances that are different from all physical substances. There are different selves in different bodies, because their experiences do not overlap and are kept distinct. The self is indestructible and eternal. It is infinite or ubiquitous since it is not limited by time and space. The body or the senses cannot be the self, because consciousness cannot be the attribute of the material body or the senses. It cannot subsist without a certain locus. Hence, the self is not consciousness as such; but a substance having consciousness as its attribute. The self is thus not merely consciousness or knowledge but is a knower, an ego or the ‘I’ and also an enjoyer\(^{11}\). Although knowledge or consciousness belongs to the self as an attribute, yet it is not an essential and inseparable attribute of it. All cognitions or conscious states arise in the self when it is related to \textit{manas} (mind), and the \textit{manas} is related to the senses and the senses come in contact with the external objects, otherwise there will be no consciousness in the self. In its disembodied condition, therefore, the self will have no knowledge or


consciousness. Thus, consciousness is an accidental attribute of the self in respect to the body, where the attributes of cognition, connation and affection are present, all of which are the different functions of consciousness. In short, Nyāya theory of consciousness can be formulated as: Consciousness is a quality of the self, which is intentional and arises only when certain appropriate conditions are present. This consciousness is not eternal; and being formless it needs to be manifested by another consciousness (paraprakāśa). Even though it is a realistic view of consciousness, but still it cannot solve the problem of self being related to the not-self, as it claims consciousness to be merely an accidental property of the self, which implies that sometimes this property may not also be present.

According to the Śāṅkhyā and Yoga system, the self is different from the body and the senses, the manas and the intellect. It is not anything of the world of objects. The self is not the brain, nor the nervous system, nor the aggregate of conscious states. The self is indeed a conscious spirit, which is always the subject of knowledge and can never become the object of any knowledge. It is not a substance with the attribute of consciousness, but it is pure consciousness as such. Consciousness is its very essence and not a mere quality of the self. The self is the transcendent subject, whose essence is pure consciousness. The light of the self’s consciousness remains the same, although the objects of knowledge may change and succeed one another. It is a steady constant consciousness in which there is neither change nor activity. The self is above all change and activity. It is an uncaused, eternal and all-pervading reality which is free from all attachments and unaffected by all objects. All change and
activity, all pleasures and pains belong really to matter and its products like the body, mind and intellect. It is the conscious selves, to whose ends all physical objects are the means; as all the pleasure and pain have meaning only because they are experienced by some conscious experiencer.

Like other realistic and pluralistic schools of Indian system (Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, etc.), Mimāṃsā system too admits the soul as an eternal, infinite substance, which is related to a real body in a real world and it survives death to be able to reap the consequences of its actions performed in the world. Consciousness is not the essence of the soul, but an adventitious quality, which arises when some conditions are present. In dreamless sleep and in state of liberation, the soul has no consciousness, because its conditions such as relation of sense to objects are absent. The Prābhākara Mimāṃsakas maintain that the self is an unconscious substance which may acquire the attribute of consciousness only when there is sense-object contact, followed by sense-manas contact, leading to manas-soul contact. The Bhāṭṭa Mimāṃsakas, on the other hand, think that the self is a conscious entity, which is partially hidden by ignorance, as it appears from the imperfect and partial knowledge that men have of their own selves.

Finally, the Vedāntins hold that the self is pure eternal consciousness which is also a blissful existence (sat-cit-ānanda svarūpa). It is one in all bodies, and is eternally free and self shining consciousness (svaprakāśa caitanya) which is neither a subject nor an object, neither the ‘I’ nor the ‘me’. Thus the consciousness is not intentional and also not egological. The self is viewed apart from the conditions (attributes that we impose on the individual) that
differentiate it from pure consciousness. It is identical with God, viewed apart from the attributes that differentiate Him from pure consciousness. As the consciousness of the self becomes limited by the conditions of the body, the senses and internal organ of knowledge (antahkarana) become the instruments through which limited consciousness of objects take place. But according to Vedāntins, consciousness is not temporal and also does not pertain to limitations of space. Thus in a nutshell, consciousness and being are identical. The Advaitins develop an identity theory, according to which in a perceptual cognition, the subject and the object achieve an identity. They argue that the subject of cognition is the same consciousness as (the consciousness) conditioned by the cognitive mechanisms belonging to the empirical percipient. In the same way, the object of cognition is also the same consciousness as conditioned by what is regarded as the external thing. Within this general framework, the Advaita system introduces the notion of a modification of the inner sense, *vṛtti*, whose function is to remove the veil of ignorance that conceals the thing to be known. Although in all cognition, the object is manifested by consciousness in its role as the witness-consciousness (*Sākṣī Caitanya*), external things are not directly manifested by the witness-consciousness; an appropriate modification of the inner sense intervenes. However, a mental mode being inert cannot by itself illuminate objects. It leads to illumination on account of its association with pure consciousness. The Viśistādvaitins, however, holds that the self is not pure consciousness as such, but a conscious subject called the ego or the ‘I’ (*jñātā ahamārtha evātmā*). But both these views are idealistic in broad

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sense and hence could not provide a satisfactory explanation for the nature of consciousness. This system infact considers the world to be illusory and it is mere apprehension due to limited knowledge or the veil of ignorance. When the self attains highest knowledge then no more it considers the existence of the world and realizes itself to be one with the omniscience – *Brahman*. Thus none of these theories could be admitted universally by all other systems. The following section deals with the theories advocated by the Western philosophers.

### 1.4 Consciousness Study in Western Philosophy

In Western perspective too the problem of consciousness arose from the metaphysical questions of finding a relation between mind and body, more broadly discussing the relation between the physical and the mental. But the problem of consciousness is somewhat different from other versions of mind-body problem, because at very beginning of twenty-first century many people used the term ‘consciousness’ quite unproblematically to refer to their everyday experience or awareness. It is not synonymous with ‘mind’, which has many other meanings and uses. At the same time there is rapid progress in learning how the brain works, effects of brain damage, about neurotransmitters and neuromodulator, and about how changes in firing of brain cells accompany changes in a person’s experience. Philosophers over the millennia have struggled with the different versions of this problem. Their solutions can be roughly divided into two broader categories, i.e. the monist theories, which assert that there is only one kind of stuff in the world, and dualist theories which admit two different kinds of stuff in this world.
Among the monist theories, some emphasize existence of the mental and some others the physical. So, for example, if one doubts that real pencils actually exist out there and decide that only ideas or perceptions of pencil exists – it is like becoming a mentalist or an idealist. This even though does away with the division, but makes it very hard to understand why physical objects seem to have enduring qualities. The British empiricist George Berkeley is one who replaced matter with sensations in mind. Whereas the other extreme are materialists who argue that there is only matter, and that the laws governing the interactions between matter and energy exhaust all the forces of the universe. These theories include identity theory, which makes mental states identical with physical states, and functionalism, which equates mental states with functional states. In these theories there is no mind, or mental force, apart from matter. But whatever it be, materialism seems to be very unattractive as a theory of consciousness, since it takes away the very phenomenon of subjective experience, moreover understanding how thoughts, feelings and mental images are possible as matter when they are so very different from the stuff called matter. To some extent a bit different theory is put forward by the doctrine of epiphenomenalism – which is the idea that mental states are produced by physical events but the former have no causal role to play. Thomas Henry Huxley, the English biologist and palaeontologist, who tried to promote Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection, was one of the best known epiphenomenalists. He did not deny the existence of consciousness or subjective experience but denied them of having any causal efficacy. He referred to animals and human beings as ‘conscious automata’, but did not admit that

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such experiences can cause changes in human behaviour. So, the main problem with epiphenomenalism is: if conscious experiences can have no effect on anything whatsoever, then an individual should never know about (be aware about), or be able to speak about consciousness. Now trying to avoid all the extreme versions of monism, William James referred to ‘neutral monism’ which considers that the world is constructed out of various possible or actual sense-data. This is a way of avoiding the reduction of mind to matter or doing away with matter altogether. He found psychology as an integrating science between mind and brain: ‘a science of the relations of mind and brain must show how the elementary ingredients of the former correspond to the elementary functions of the latter’\textsuperscript{14}. Apart from this, another way of avoiding the problem is panpsychism, the view that mind is fundamental in the universe, and that all matter has associated mental aspects or properties, however primitive. In some versions, it means that everything in the universe is conscious, but in other versions everything is essentially mental but this can include both conscious and unconscious mind. But the major difficulty with this theory is that; why should there simultaneously be physical and mental properties to everything? There was absolutely no explanation for such problem.

The difficulty of uniting the world comprising of both matter and mind was solved popularly by dualism, whose propounder was the French philosopher of seventeenth-century; René Descartes. Descartes’ theory is a form of substance dualism – where the physical body that moves about mechanically takes up space and is extended, whereas the mental is made up of thinking stuff that

\textsuperscript{14} James, W. The Principles of Psychology. 2 vols. London: Macmillan, 1890. p. 28.
possesses consciousness\textsuperscript{15}. This theory can be contrasted with property dualism which claims that the same thing can be described using mental terms or physical terms but, one description cannot be reduced to the other. For example, human beings can be explained in terms of matter for possessing a material body and also in terms of mind for having consciousness, but neither of them is reducible to the other. Thus this theory is also known as the dual-aspect theory. So, for example, if someone is in pain, the fact can be described in mental terms, such as how it feels etc, or also in physical terms as which sort of neurons are firing where in the nervous system. This theory thus avoids reducing mental to physical without the need for two different substances. But dualism does not work because of the insuperable problem, as how mind interacts with the body when they are made of two completely different stuffs.

Apart from the philosophical standpoint, some psychologists too have tried to solve the problem of mental phenomena relating to the physical event. Western psychology began as a study of mind and consciousness. Nineteenth century French psychologists Charcot and Pierre Janet investigated how mind was influenced by ‘ideas’\textsuperscript{16}. They believed that the whole mind is conscious and thoughts have different energy contents; those thoughts which have greater energy can be easily recalled, whereas those thoughts which have less energy cannot be recalled. To this a further study was done by the psychophysicists who dealt with the relationship of the physical stimuli and the reportable sensations. To name them are Ernst Weber and Gustav Fechner who formulated the famous

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 494.
Weber-Fechner law relating sensation to the intensity of stimulus\textsuperscript{17}. Even though, Fechner at that time tried to relate sensations to excitations within the brain, but it was not possible. A step ahead was taken by Hermann von Helmholtz\textsuperscript{18}, who made the first measurement of the speed of conduction of the nerve signals, which was popularly referred to as ‘velocity of thought’. He measured the peripheral processes and reaction times and argued that conscious thought and the interaction of physical and mental processes goes on in the brain. He also posed a new and shocking idea that perceptions are ‘unconscious inferences’. This idea that much of what goes on in the nervous system is unconscious and that our conscious experiences depend upon unconscious processing is quite natural to us today. At the turn of the twentieth century, Sigmund Freud propounded the view that there is a certain area in the mind which is inaccessible to introspection; he called it the *unconscious*. Traumatic experiences, especially of childhood, are pushed into the unconscious by a process called repression which prevented such experiences from being recalled\textsuperscript{19} during normal wakeful consciousness. This unconscious consisted of the impulses of the ‘id’ including the biological desires and needs, the defence mechanisms and the neurotic processes of the ‘ego’, and all the mass of unwanted or unacceptable material that had been repressed by the ‘superego’. The effects of all these unconscious feelings, images or forbidden wishes might then, appear in dreams or cause neurotic symptoms.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 341.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., pp. 397-98.
Other developments in this area included the emergence of existentialism and phenomenalism. The German philosopher Edmund Husserl\textsuperscript{20} argued for going back to ‘the things themselves’, by a systematic enquiry into immediate conscious experience. This was to be done without preconceptions, by suspending or ‘bracketing’ any scientific and logical inferences about the world. This suspension of judgement he called the phenomenological reduction. Husserl’s phenomenology was based on the earlier work of Franz Brentano\textsuperscript{21} (1838-1917), whose theory of consciousness was based on the idea that every subjective experience is an act of reference. Conscious experiences are about objects or events, while physical objects are not about anything. This ‘aboutness’ was called as ‘intentionality’. A separate approach to studying subjective experience was that of introspectionism, initially developed by German physiologist Wilhelm Wundt\textsuperscript{22}. Wundt claimed to find that there were two kinds of ‘psychical elements’: the objective elements, or sensations, such as tones, heat or light; and the subjective elements or simple feelings. Every conscious experience depended on a union of these two types of elements. He hoped to build up a science of consciousness by understanding the units or atoms of experience that made it up. Although psychoanalysis, phenomenology and introspectionism all had the benefit of dealing directly with the inner experiences, they faced apparently the insuperable problems in dealing with the disagreements. When one person claims to observe some private experience quite different from another, how can one decide the distinction between them?


\textsuperscript{22} Wundt, W. M. \textit{Principles of Physiological Psychology}. (trans.) from the German by E. B. Titchener, 1904.
This was just one of the major reasons for the failure of introspectionism when behaviourism made itself popular. In 1913 American psychologist John B. Watson proposed to abolish the methods of introspection and the concept of consciousness and establish psychology as ‘a purely objective branch of natural science’; its theoretical goal being the prediction and control of the behaviour. One major advantage of this theory was that behaviour could be measured more reliably than in comparison to introspection. Behaviourism was enormously successful in explaining some kinds of behaviour, particularly in the areas of learning and memory, but it more or less abolished the study of consciousness from psychology. By 1960’s behaviourism was losing its influence and cognitive psychology with its emphasis on internal representations and information processing was taking over to explain the nature and function of consciousness.

Later in 1970’s Noam Chomsky, Albert Bandura and others sparked the ‘cognitive revolution’ in psychology. They showed that the process of learning and knowing in human beings cannot be explained through behaviour. Knowing is not a matter of stimulus and response, but is an internal processing of information. The mind has inherent cognitive structures and knowing should be understood as a system of internal representations. It is now recognized that consciousness enables man to link the past with the present and the future; and thus make a stable construction of reality. Furthermore, consciousness gives man knowledge of himself, awareness of values and the urge to seek the meaning in life. As a result of the new turn, consciousness in all its aspects, now

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covered by the term ‘cognition’, has come to occupy the centre of psychological studies in recent years. With the inputs from neuroscience and the physical sciences, cognitive psychology has now become an independent branch of science under the name ‘Cognitive Science’. Another school of psychology, which also arose in 1960’s by the efforts of Grof, Maslow and others brought into existence the notion of Transpersonal Psychology. It recognizes the fact that consciousness has several ‘alternate states’ or ‘extended states’; and man can attain the heightened awareness through meditation and other spiritual practices. In recent years, eastern spiritual practices like Yoga, Zen, Vipassana and Tibetan meditation have become immensely popular in the West. With the help of EEG, MRI and other instruments the effects of these spiritual practices are being studied. In recent years it has been shown that meditation regulates the release of certain chemicals such as melatonin, metEnkephalin, serotonin, etc., which directly influence the physical and the mental health.

These experimental studies provide more new aspects about the nature of consciousness. But this approach gets limited by the fact that, always transpersonal state or paranormal states cannot provide an entire concept for understanding the nature of consciousness. These are the special cases of the disrupted conscious functions only. Such experimental studies can be supplemented by taking into consideration a theoretical approach, which together can provide a satisfactory account for consciousness. Among the contemporary Indian philosophical approach, a refined and modified Vedântic version of consciousness has been put forward by Sri Aurobindo. The next

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section reflects briefly Sri Aurobindo’s notion of consciousness from another perspective in comparison to the other Indian systems discussed earlier in this chapter.

1.5 Yogic Approach to Consciousness Study

Contemporary Indian philosophy has primarily been influenced by Advaita Vedānta and continues to develop under this influence. One of the most eminent poet, a philosopher, a nationalist and an ardent yogi, re-developed the Advaita system as Integral Advaitism. He is Sri Aurobindo, who designed a new metaphysical framework, to explain the nature and function of consciousness. According to him, Brahman (sat-cit-ānanda) is both transcendent and immanent in the world. The finite individuals are the self-manifestations of the Brahman, by its own infinite creative energy (also known as cit-śakti). In his metaphysics, he subscribes to the theory of emergent evolution\(^{25}\), which presupposes the prior idea of involution of the Brahman in all the different manifested forms of the world. As Sri Aurobindo claims, that matter develops into life, then to the mind and the levels of consciousness, only by the influence of the spirit. This spirit descends into the matter to bring in the necessary change out of the matter, where the potentiality remains in latent form within the matter. From the logical point of view, prior to evolution, there is involution, whereby the Brahman\(^{26}\) seeks its own manifestation in the multilevel world. In other words, the effect pre-exists in the material cause (matter), which allows the emergence of qualitative changes in matter itself to transform into a newer level. Sri

\(^{25}\) Detailed theory of evolution will be discussed in the next chapter.

\(^{26}\) Sri Aurobindo’s concept of Brahman is discussed thoroughly in the next chapter.
Aurobindo holds that the evolutionary structure of the world process takes place due to the consciousness-force (cit-śakti) inherent in the Brahman. Now the question of concern is: how this force gives rise to consciousness is a problem with which philosophers have been concerned. Sri Aurobindo simply considers the two-fold divisions of consciousness: superficial waking consciousness (with which an individual leads a normal life) and the subliminal consciousness (the hidden consciousness). This subliminal consciousness, as Sri Aurobindo claims has two dimensions: the superconscient and the subconscient. The superconscient is above the mental realm, i.e. it is concerned with unity of all beings and realizes the world beyond any type of divisions and forms of the manifested world. This realm lies beyond the sensory limitations and rational intellect. Whereas, the subconscient lies below the mental realm and it comprises of the physical and the vital mind, which are concerned with the sensory understanding of the world. The ordinary mind which an individual considers to be the highest achievement of rationality and intellect, actually cannot arrive at a true unity of knowledge because of ignorance and delimited understanding of the world via sensations. In other words, Sri Aurobindo’s realistic streak would not allow him to surrender the reality of the world as a deceptive play of māyā (the theory upheld by Śaṅkara). Sri Aurobindo placed the many forms of the world and the becoming in the very heart of consciousness; and made it the essence as well as the source of the many i.e. the presence of cit in all levels – from matter to superconscient. In short, Sri Aurobindo’s consciousness is not only the source of creation but also the final end of realization. Spirits’ involvement in matter, its manifestation in grades of
consciousness is significant about evolution. The theory will be discussed more elaborately in the next chapter.

So by the yogic approach to consciousness study, it is specifically intended to mean Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga in this whole dissertation. The integrated development of the metaphysical theory, along with the psychological aspects of the mind makes this theory a unique philosophical system in itself. At the very outset, the problem of dualism (substance dualism) and that of monism (reductionism) is rejected in this system. Integral yoga accepts consciousness, being present in matter itself in the inconscient state and gets activated with the evolutionary development in the matter. So, neither it falls in the trap of dualism nor in monism. Due to an ascendancy of science and technology there is a general tendency to evaluate any claim of knowledge by the application of standards and criteria of modern science and by its technological utilities. There is a common, although unfounded, feeling that yoga will not be able to stand the scientific scrutiny, and there is thus even a tendency to posit some kind of polarity between science and yoga. It is true that science has proved its claim as a potent means of knowledge and power. And it would seem that in this forward research, it might cross the barriers that divide science and yoga. There was a time when only physical was regarded as real and systematic study of ‘matter’ was alone regarded as science. With the development of psychology, a greater change in situation has arisen which tries to explain psychological phenomena in the mind in terms of physical interpretation. Yoga, however, is scientific to this extent that it proceeds by subjective experiment and bases all its findings on the experiences attained by an individual. Here mental intuitions are admitted only
as first step towards understanding and are not considered as realizations. In other words, this theory provides a unique explanation to the nature of consciousness. As with the evolutionary progression, the mental and cognitive faculties get developed, in the similar way Sri Aurobindo defines yoga to be not merely any set of religious or spiritual ideas or just spiritual experiences; rather it means a change of consciousness\(^{27}\) that improves, develops and enhances all the cognitive activities of human beings. A mere mental activity will not bring a change in consciousness; rather can only bring change in the mind. As yoga is not a mental field, the consciousness which has to be established is not a mental, logical or debating consciousness. It is the higher and deeper consciousness, vision and knowledge that are laid by yoga when the mind, intellect and the logical mind is stilled and diverted from all the external thoughts. This means that mind is the main instrument by whose judgement the consciousness acts. So, mind need not impose its own standards to the greater consciousness; rather allow it to receive illumination from the higher realms. Consciousness is a reality, which is inherent in existence. It is there even when it is not active on surface, but silent and immobile; it is there even when it is invisible on surface, i.e. not reacting on outward things or sensible to them. Consciousness is thus not only a power of awareness of self and things; it is or has also a dynamic creative energy. It can determine its own reactions and also abstain from them if required. So, consciousness is \(Cit\) and also \(Cit-\text{\-sakti}\).

Even though in general, consciousness is identified with the mind, but mental consciousness is only the human range which no more exhausts all the possible ranges of consciousness than human sight exhausts all the gradations of colour or all the gradations of sound. So there are ranges of consciousness above and below the human range, with which the normal human has no contact and they seem to it as unconscious – supramental or overmental and submental ranges. The gradations of consciousness are universal states not dependent on the outlook of the subjective personality; rather the outlook of subjective personality is determined by the grade of consciousness in which it is organised according to its type of nature or its evolutionary stage. With further progression in evolution the changes in cognitive activity takes place, which in other words, marks the development in consciousness and the ranges of cognitive activities that a mind is capable of performing. It will be more evident in further discussions that by consciousness is meant something, which is essentially the same throughout but variable in status, condition and operation or function. These states are due to the fact that the activities exist there either in suppressed or in unorganised or in a differently organised state. If such states are identified with the developments that are observed externally by all, then possibly there can be a new approach to study more about the nature of consciousness. So, on one hand, Sri Aurobindo provides a new outlook to the study of consciousness that includes yogic techniques, where the realization of consciousness is attained experientially. On the other hand, the western researchers have adopted modern experimental techniques of understanding different aspects of consciousness. The main thrust of this thesis is whether these approaches together could provide a better explanation for the study of consciousness and formulate a new unique
and holistic theory for understanding the nature of consciousness. The following chapter tries to present Sri Aurobindo’s understanding of the realms of consciousness in context of his philosophical standpoint.