CHAPTER - I

CONSCIOUSNESS IN RAMĀNUJA'S PHILOSOPHY
In the history of philosophy, whether of the East or of the West, we find that philosophers, since the beginning of metaphysical enquiry, have faced the question, "What is consciousness?", and that the answers have always been very controversial. Still, most philosophers would perhaps agree in one point, namely, that consciousness is always the consciousness of something, that it refers beyond itself to something else. The term 'consciousness' has been employed in at least two slightly different senses, viz., (i) in the sense in which it serves as a relation between a subject and an object, or (ii) in the sense in which it stands for a certain quality of certain mental facts or occurrences, i.e., the consciousness of certain mental processes or acts. But in either of the meanings of the term, 'consciousness', it involves some object which is distinct from the subject or the cogniser. This would appear to be a common belief about the matter.
Philosophers are divided into two main schools, so far as their view regarding the nature of the object of consciousness is concerned, namely, idealists and realists. The basic concept of the idealists is that the object of consciousness has no reality apart from the knowing subject. It exists only as related with knowledge, either as an idea or as an image or as a concept of the knowing self. The object has no independent existence apart from the knowing subject, it is as the subject cognises it, its nature is determined by the subject.

According to the realist, on the other hand, an object of consciousness exists as an independent reality even apart from its relation with the knowing subject. In consciousness, the object merely comes into a certain relation with the subject which, on account of such relation in no way affects its essential nature. Thus a realist like Alexander says, "... the object is a distinct existence from the mind which contemplates it, and in that sense independent of the mind. ... the distinct existence of my object from my mind is attested by experience itself. This is a truth which a man need only open his eyes to see".1 So to a realist, knowledge is

   "Introduction", pages 15-16.
possible by the peculiar relation of the subject with the object.

Indian philosophers are also greatly interested in the question of consciousness and have investigated it with considerable acumen. Of course, like philosophers, in general, they maintain different positions regarding the nature of consciousness and its relationship with the self. The Advaita School of Śaṅkara conceives consciousness as the only reality that there is, and as identical with the self of a living being (jīva), it is not to be regarded as a substance to which consciousness belongs as a quality or activity. It is just identical with the self ( Caitanya svarūpa ). Such consciousness is pure, differenceless and indeterminate in nature. Advaitism holds that the distinction between the subject and the object in relation to knowledge is only a false appearance and not a real thing; for Advaitism believes that there is only one reality, namely, Brahman, which is pure, i.e., objectless consciousness.

The Nyāya, on the other hand, says that consciousness is an attribute of the self which is a substance; consciousness refers beyond itself to an object and also to a substrate to which it belongs as an attribute. According to the Nyāya,
consciousness arises in the individual self (jīvātman) when it comes in contact with the mind and the mind comes in contact with the objects through the sense-organs. Thus, Nyāya holds that consciousness is not an essential attribute of the self, it does not always characterise the self, nor is there any object-less or pure consciousness as Advaitism believes. But consciousness or knowledge is an accidental or occasional (kādācitka) attribute of the self. The self possesses it only when some object comes in contact with a sense-organ of the self. But in deep dreamless sleep, or in swoon, since the self is not aware of any object, so the self has no consciousness at all.

The Mīmāṃsā thinks consciousness as an activity (kriyā) or process (vyāpāra) of the self. The self is, according to this school, the substance in which knowledge arises as a special act which results from a relation of the subject (jñātr) and the object (jñeya). This activity, of knowledge causes some change or disturbance in the self, which is an ethereal substance. Mīmāṃsā, both of the Bhāṭṭa and of the Prābhākara schools, has a realistic view of knowledge. It takes for granted the existence of two entities, the cogniser and the cognised. And cognition means the illumination of the
object to the subject or the cogniser. The Prabhakara school believes in the svayamprakāśatva or self-illuminating nature of knowledge. This implies that whenever consciousness or knowledge arises in the soul, it manifests the act of knowledge itself, the knower and the known object simultaneously; this is technically called "triputiprakāśa" (i.e., the revelation of a group of three things).

The realistic view of knowledge of the Prabhakara school is similar to some extent to the theory of knowledge propounded by Ramanuja and his school. For Ramanuja also believes in the svayamprakāśatva of knowledge, which implies that so long as knowledge is present in the self, it manifests both itself and the object to the self.² Ramanuja agrees with the Mīmāṃsā in thinking the self as a substance or substrate of knowledge but he differs from this school in not admitting knowledge to be an activity of the self. He maintains that knowledge cannot cause any change in the nature of the self to which it belongs. Consciousness is, on the other hand, an inseparable attribute of the self by which it is differentiated from all non-sentient objects.

² Ramanuja also believes that the self is always conscious of itself as 'I'.
Though Rāmānuja is a Vedāntist, yet he differs greatly from the Advaita school of Śaṅkara regarding the nature of consciousness and its relationship with the self. He does not agree with the Advaita view that consciousness is completely identical with the self or Brahman, he does not also accept the Nyāya view that consciousness is an adventitious attribute of the self. Rather, he holds that consciousness (सम्वित) is a permanent and inseparable attribute of the self. The self is the substrate to which consciousness belongs as an essential attribute, for the self is never devoid of consciousness. Rāmānuja has given several arguments in his Śrībhāṣya in support of this thesis. We shall discuss these, later on. His theory would seem to be a golden mean between the two extremely opposed theories of consciousness held by the Advaita Vedānta and the Nyāya.

Advaitism conceives consciousness as the very essence of, and hence identical with, the self; but the Nyāya thinks that the self is not itself consciousness, nor is consciousness an essential and ever-present attribute of the self - the self, under certain conditions, possesses consciousness as an adventitious attribute of it, although it is only a self and nothing other than a self which can possess this adventitious quality.
In fact, the self can exist without consciousness as in the state of deep dreamless sleep. Rāmānuja steers a middle course, for he says, on the one hand, that the soul is never without consciousness and in this sense, consciousness is an essential nature of it and on the other hand, and at the same time, he holds that consciousness is an attribute (guna) of the self, not the self itself. This is a somewhat unique view of consciousness which one may initially find difficult to understand. But we hope to make it intelligible when we discuss it more thoroughly later on. According to Rāmānuja, consciousness functions in two slightly different ways - first it is the essence of the self and secondly, it is an attribute of it. Consciousness is, on the one hand, the essential nature of the self, and on the other hand, the self possesses it as its attribute. This may give rise to the question, "How does one and the same thing be both the essence of a thing and its attribute?". Rāmānuja replies that this is quite intelligible on the analogy of a luminous substance such as a light-giving gem. A gem of this kind is traditionally considered to be ultimately constituted of particles of fire. The luminosity of fire being

3. The Rāmānujite calls these as - धर्मिस्वरूपाज्ञान and धर्मभूताज्ञान.
4. It may be mentioned, here, that Rāmānuja holds that particles of the other four elements namely, earth, water, air
ever present in it can be said to constitute its very essence (svarūpa) - it is just fire itself. But a gem also radiates light in all directions, and in this aspect of radiance which comes out of and is inseparably connected with the inhere in, the gem, the same light or luminosity is said to be an attribute (dharma) of the gem. Rāmānuja believes that the rela-

4 (Contd)

and ether (ākāśa) are also present in a gem, although fire is its principal constituent. For Rāmānuja is a Vedāntist and Vedānta believes that all the elements are required for giving rise to every gross substance (pañcikarana prakriya: quintuplication).

5. Perhaps, the following considerations will, to a certain extent, further support this rather unusual contention of Rāmānuja. Although luminosity or light, being ever present in a gem, forms its very essence, still a gem is not merely luminous, it is also hard, has a certain size and shape etc., and hence luminosity has also to be regarded as a character of the gem and not the very gem itself. Similarly, the self is never without some consciousness, so consciousness is the very essence (Svarūpa) of the self. But the self is not merely conscious, it also has desire and aversion, pleasure and pain, religious merit and demerit, etc., hence consciousness is not just identical with the self, but is a character (dharma) of it, although it is, unlike these other properties, a constant character.

We have also to notice another aspect of the light or luminosity of a gem. Of course, a gem is all luminosity
tion between the self and consciousness is similar to that of

through and through, on its outer surface and also in the
manifest parts of its interior. But what we have designated
as its radiance (prabhā) spreads all around the gem,
reaching and illuminating various objects which are within
a certain range of the space that immediately surrounds
the gem; and this radiance is just the same thing as its
light which forms the essence of the gem - in this respect,
it would appear to be explicitly just adjectival to the gem.
Similarly, the consciousness which is a constant accompani­
ment of the self is, therefore, called its essence (Svarūpa-
bhūta jñāna); but this consciousness also goes out through
a sense-organ, reaches and illumines an external object
with which the sense-organ is in contact; and in this
respect, consciousness appears explicitly to be adjectival
to the self and is called dharma-bhūta-jñāna or conscious­
ness as a property of the self. While the former aspect
of consciousness reveals the self as 'I' as well as its
states like pleasure, pain, etc., the latter reveals
external objects such as tables and chairs.

Evidently, Rāmānuja, like Śaṅkara, believes in the
eternity of consciousness, though for him, consciousness
is not just identical with the self, as it is for Śaṅkara.
His refutation of the Śaṅkarite view that consciousness
does not originate nor comes to an end has to be under­
stood by reference to his doctrine that consciousness

a shining ball of fire and its light.

The self is always conscious of itself, it knows its own self as 'I' or ego, or more simply we can say that self-knowledge which takes the form, 'I' (aham) is always present in a self. This consciousness is conceived by Rāmānuja and his followers as the essential character of the self and is called by them dharmisvarūpa-jñāna, or essential consciousness. It

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5 (Contd )
goest out of the body to meet an external object and also comes back after revealing the object. This act of going out and the act of returning which consciousness performs as the self knows one external object after another must be considered to have both a beginning and an end, though consciousness, as such, neither originates nor ceases, but is always present.


Śrībhāṣya, Catuḥsūtrī, p. 95
By Rāmānuja
Nirnaya Sagar Edition.
always shines forth in the self and in this sense it is eternal just as the self is. Yet the self possesses another aspect of consciousness which Rāmānuja calls attributive consciousness (dharmabhūta-jñāna). We know that one has not only consciousness of one's own self but also has consciousness of objects. The attributive consciousness, says Rāmānuja, reveals objects which become connected with it, as well as itself to the self of which it is an attribute. Consciousness both of the self as 'I' and of objects such as tables and chairs is self-luminous (svaprakāsa). It is self-luminous in the sense that as long as it persists, it is revealed to the self without requiring any other act of consciousness. Ultimately, for Rāmānuja, the consciousness which forms the essence of the self is the same as the consciousness which is an attribute of the self. The dharmisvarūpa-jñāna is so called because it reveals the self or the knower to the self, and also because it being that without which the self cannot be a self (or an intelligent entity, - cetanadravya) at all, is the very essence (svarūpa) of the self. But that which is the svarūpa or the essence of the self is not identical with the self, but only a character (albeit an essential character) of it. That is why consciousness is also a quality (dharma) of the self. Moreover, in order to become aware of an object other than the self, the self has to employ this
consciousness, sending it out through the opening of a sense-organ to meet the object and thus as the initiator of the movement of consciousness towards the object, the self becomes the active agent of the movement of consciousness (jñana-kriyā-kartṛ), so that consciousness in this respect appears explicitly as an attribute of the self. Rāmānuja has compared consciousness with the flame of a lamp which reveals the presence of an object and also its own existence to the self to which it belongs. In revealing itself to the self, consciousness does not require the help of any other consciousness. In this sense, Rāmānuja holds, consciousness is self-luminous. But this does not imply that consciousness reveals itself to itself. On the contrary, it reveals itself as well as its objects to the knower. So in the primary sense of svaprakāṣa, this term, according to Rāmānuja, applies to consciousness. As Prof. Hiriyanna aptly says, "It can only show but cannot know"7. This consciousness, while it belongs to the individual self, also streams out through one or other of the senses and comes in contact with objects presented to it and reveals them to the knowing self. According to Advaitism, consciousness has no motion from one place to another like a non-intelligent or material thing. Antabkaraṇa is conceived

7. "Outlines of Indian Philosophy"
   Chap. on Viśiṣṭādvaita Phil. By M. Hiriyanna.
by an advaitist as a non-spiritual or material psyche which has movements, it is this which goes out through the senses to the object and takes the form of the object. But in Rāmānuja's view, consciousness itself has movements, it moves towards the external objects through one of the senses and reveals the object to the self. In this respect, consciousness functions like the antahkarana (the non-spiritual psyche) of the Advaita. However, it cannot, according to Rāmānuja, function in this way, if there is no sensory contact with an object. In deep dreamless sleep, there is no sensory contact with any object; so what Rāmānuja calls attributive consciousness does not function and consequently there is no consciousness of an object. The attributive consciousness (dharmabhūta jñāna) then can be considered to merge in the essential consciousness (dharmisvarūpa-jñāna) of the soul. The attributive consciousness is subject to limitation which is incidental to the limitations of the finite self (jīva) due to its past actions (karma). So the author of Śrutapraśikā remarks that while the illumination of the consciousness as essence is eternal, (i.e., it always reveals the self to the same self as 'I'), the illumination of the attributive consciousness is conditional, or depends, upon sensory contact with the object and through such contact upon its relationship

* Śrutapraśikā is a scholium by Sudarsāna Vyāśabhaṭṭa on Śrībhāṣya of Rāmānuja.
with the object\(^8\). We can express this point more simply by saying that the essential consciousness shines always as the consciousness of the self or the eternal spiritual being, and that it becomes conscious of the objective world through its subsidiary function - which may be specifically called attributional consciousness.

Rāmānuja defines consciousness as that the nature of which is such that, so long it is present, it shines forth or manifests itself by means of merely its own being to its own substrate, or that which by means of its own being alone evidences the existence of its object\(^9\). This definition would seem to imply both the self-luminous nature and also the intentionality of consciousness. Consciousness, so long as it is present,

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8. Dharmisvarūpabhūtajñānasya sphuraṇaṃnityaṁ, tacca bhāsamātasyavahārāṇugunyaṁ dharmabhūtajñānasya sphuraṇaṁ viśayasaṁbaṇdhajanyeyām tadānīmeva, na tvanyadā.

Śrutapraśākṣikā in Śrībhāṣya p 88.
Nirnaya Sagar Edition.

9. Anubhūtītvam nāma vartamāna-daśāyāṁ svasattayaiva svāśrayaṁ prati prakāśamānātvaṁ, svasattayaiva svaviśayasaḍhanatvaṁ vā.

Śrībhāṣya, Catuḥśūtrī, p. 84
By Rāmānuja.
Nirnaya Sagar Edition.
reveals its object and also itself to the self which is its substrate. Thus Rāmānuja, like most Indian Philosophers, insists on the intentionality of consciousness which is denied by Śaṅkara.

Rāmānuja says that consciousness is always of an object\(^\text{10}\), even essential consciousness (\textit{dharmisvarūpa-jnāna}) is not an exception to this rule; for the self as the ego is revealed to itself by it; and, in this instance, consciousness is determined by the ego, or the self, as in other instances it is determined by objects such as tables and chairs. The ego, for Rāmānuja, is not an illusory thing, as the Advaita holds.

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\textit{\textbf{(9. Contd.)}}

I have translated the definition of consciousness of Rāmānuja by mostly following the translation of G. Thēibaut on \textit{Vedānta Sūtras} of Rāmānuja. p 48.

Max Muller Edition.

10. \textit{Na ca nirviṣaya kācid saṁvidasti anupalabdheḥ.}

\textit{Śrībhāṣya, Catuḥsūtras,} p. 87

Nirmaya Sagar Edition.

This view of Rāmānuja that consciousness is always of some object or other is analogous to the theory of consciousness as propounded by Husserl, the renowned phenomenologist of the West.
Rāmānuja insists on another point which is denied by a Śaṅkarite and holds that in spite of its being self-luminous in the sense explained above, it is not true that consciousness cannot be itself an object. For, he argues, that it is a common experience that we often remember our own past experiences. Moreover, we have to and can certainly, infer the states of consciousness of another person by observing his behaviour and expressions. Rāmānuja further argues that if it be denied that consciousness can be the object of some other consciousness, then, the knowledge of other conscious minds depending on speech and such other expressions becomes impossible.

Again Rāmānuja strongly repudiates the Advaita notion that if consciousness were to become the object of another consciousness, it would not be consciousness at all but a material thing like a pot or a rock, since consciousness is self-luminous (svayamprakāśa). By the word self-luminosity, Rāmānuja understands that which can reveal itself or its object, by itself, without the help of any other knowledge. In this sense, consciousness is self-luminous — it is like a lamp which illuminates the objects before it and also itself
to the knower without the help of another lamp. Jars, etc. are not consciousness, says Rāmānuja, not because they are objects of consciousness but because they lack the characteristics of consciousness mentioned above. He argues that there is no opposition between 'becoming an object' and 'self-luminosity'.

Rāmānuja has examined, in some detail, the Advaita view that consciousness is eternal (nitya) and changeless. The Advaita maintains that consciousness has neither prior non-existence (prāgabhāva) nor posterior non-existence (dhvamābhāva) as there is no means by which such non-existence of consciousness could be apprehended. For only consciousness could apprehend something or its non-existence; and if it is itself present, it cannot possibly apprehend its own non-existence whether prior or posterior, as that would involve a self-contradiction. Rāmānuja refutes this contention by saying that consciousness can certainly apprehend the non-existence of consciousness, if the non-existence that is apprehended is not contemporaneous with the apprehending consciousness. And there is no such rule that consciousness and its object must always exist at the same time; were it so, neither things of the past nor things of the future could be the object of present consciousness. So, says Rāmānuja, that as there is no such rule that knowledge and

11. Yaḥ prakāśasvabhāvaḥ saananyādhiaprakāśa dīpavat. Śrībhāṣya, Catuḥsūtrī, p 94
Nirnaya Sagar Edition.
its object must be contemporaneous, there is no contradiction in supposing that the past or future non-existence of consciousness can be apprehended by a present act of consciousness.

Rāmānuja gives another argument against the supposed eternity of consciousness. He says that if consciousness were eternal, its objects such as jars, etc. would also be eternal. And if consciousness which is, according to the Advaitist, self-manifesting were eternal, it would be immediately recognised as eternal by any person who is conscious; but this is not true. This is because consciousness as the revelation of an external or internal object along with its object is limited in time. Rāmānuja, however, grants that consciousness, as the essence of the self, i.e., self-consciousness is eternal in the sense that it eternally belongs to the soul so long as the finite soul exists, (and Vedānta holds that it exists at all times) it is conscious of itself as the subject of consciousness i.e. as the knowing ego or I (aham).

An Advaitist would vehemently oppose this concept of the self as knower, i.e., as the subject of consciousness, which Rāmānuja identifies with the entity indicated by the word 'I'. Consciousness, according to Śāṃkara, is pure which has neither any object (nirvisaya) nor any subject (nirāgraya) and
the self is just consciousness as such, and not anything which can be said to possess it. For consciousness is the only reality that there is and there is no other real existence.

Rāmānuja attempts to show the absurdity of such a concept of consciousness. He repudiates, by sound arguments, the Śaṅkarite concept of objectless consciousness, as well as the concept of subjectless consciousness. Rāmānuja says that the judgment, "There is consciousness" implies that a person is conscious of something, this person is the subject and the something is the object of consciousness. So consciousness presupposes the dual existence of the subject and the object, the cogniser and the cognised. Otherwise, the concept of consciousness would be unintelligible. Moreover, the self is never known by any one in the form, "I am consciousness", on the contrary, the knowledge of the self assumes the form, "I am conscious of something". Consciousness belongs to the self as its attribute, so that the self is the substrate (āśraya) of consciousness. The subject or the knowing self is that entity which is expressed by the word 'I'. But Śaṅkara denies that the self is identical with the ego or the finite 'I'; for he argues that the ego is an unreal product of Maya or avidyā and is jāda or a material something. It can be the object of consciousness but can never be the subject, for the subject is consciousness
(cetana) in nature. Consciousness cannot be conscious of itself. The Advaita argues that what is ordinarily known as self-consciousness, is really the consciousness of a not-self, namely, the 'I' which is ātman or non-intelligent in nature.

Rāmānuja rejects this notion. He believes in the reality and truth of self-consciousness which is expressed in the judgment, "I know myself". One always cognises one's own self as the ego or the entity indicated by the word 'I'. This ego is identical with the inner self or an individual being and it is on this basis that experiences of different individuals are demarcated. It is the consciousness of the 'I' or the ego which essentially and eternally belongs to the self and the self becomes the knower of all knowledge. If consciousness is real, the subject of consciousness or the cogniser (jñātṛ) cannot be unreal. Rāmānuja means, by the subject of knowledge, the substrate of knowledge which is an attribute. He contends that though the ego or the entity referred to by the word 'I' is an object of consciousness, yet it is known as knower (jñātṛ) and is also self-luminous in nature. For the very meaning of self-luminosity is, according to Rāmānuja, that which by its own being reveals itself without the help of anything other than itself, as for example, a lamp. The lamp may be the object of consciousness.

yet it does not require the help of another lamp for its revelation, and in this sense, it is self-luminous. Rāmānuja further argues that it is not true that whatever is revealed as long as it is present is consciousness. For in that case, pleasure, pain, desire, etc. which remain revealed as long as they are in existence, would also be regarded as of the same category as knowledge. Moreover, knowledge manifests itself only to its own substrate and not to others. Thus the self-luminosity of knowledge is limited to, and is not independent of, the knower.

As we have already mentioned, another thing which Rāmānuja says about consciousness is that the self is always conscious of itself as 'I', so that this 'I-consciousness', eternally belongs to the self - it is an inseparable quality of the self. Nyāya or even Advaita Vedānta would urge against this position that if I-consciousness be an inseparable and essential quality of the self, then there would be no state of deep dreamless sleep when there is no consciousness either of an object or of the self as I. According to Nyāya, in the state of deep dreamless sleep, there is no sensory contact with any object, inner or outer, so the self cannot then be conscious of any object and so there can also be no consciousness of 'I', at that time, for in the opinion
of Nyāya, consciousness of 'I' is not possible without some consciousness of some object, whether inner or outer. And according to Advaita, in deep dreamless sleep, there is only pure consciousness or witnessing consciousness (Sākṣī­caitanya) which apprehends only ignorance or avidyā which is a sort of cognitive darkness, and there is no consciousness of the ego, since the notion of ego is due to the presence of antahkarana which, however, lapses into avidyā, during the period of deep dreamless sleep.

Rāmānuja rejects both of these views. He tries to show that self-consciousness is present even in deep dreamless sleep. Even then, one is aware of oneself as 'I'; for on waking from deep sleep, one says, 'I have slept happily'. This experience shows that during deep sleep the 'I' enjoyed the state of deep sleep, as a state of some joy. If we were not aware of ourselves as enjoying the state of sleep, we could not possibly remember on waking that during sleep we had a happy time. This clearly goes against the Nyāya contention that during dreamless sleep there is no consciousness at all. Again, we do not remember that at that time, there was no awareness of 'I' and there was only pure consciousness; and this goes against the Advaitist's contention that during deep sleep, the 'I' ceases to exist. Moreover, it is to be admitted that there is a continuity between the self-consci-
ousness one has before deep sleep, and the self-consciousness after it; for on waking we can recollect our experiences which we had before the sleep and we feel continuity and identity in our self-consciousness and experience. This implies that even during dreamless sleep the consciousness of 'I' persists.

The Buddhists who deny the existence of one persistent ego, have to meet the objection that such denial fails to explain the continuity and consistency of experience of an individual. The facts of memory and recollection also cannot be explained without the acceptance of one persisting self-conscious ego. Rāmānuja insists on this point saying that if the consciousness of the ego is totally negated in deep dreamless sleep, there would be no continuity and consistency in the experiences which a person had before sleep and those which he has after getting up from sleep. Memory would also be impossible.

Advaita try to support their own view by saying that during deep dreamless sleep there is only ignorance and its modes, that experience of the ego is a function of antabkarana which emerges during our waking period although during the time of sleep antabkarana exists in avidyā in a latent form, and although the traces or impressions of the experi-
ences which the self had before sleep exist there in the latent 'I' or antahkarana and that the latent form of the 'I' or antahkarana functions as the mediating link between the two sets of experiences, so that there is no gap and inconsistency in the experiences of a person before sleep and after sleep.

Ramanuja rejects this explanation by pointing out that although a person recollects this past state of sleep in the form, 'So long I was not conscious of anything', still this does not prove that he had no knowledge of himself at all - it only proves that during that time he had no knowledge of particular objects like tables and chairs. As the attributive consciousness (dharmabhuta-jñana) then merges in the essential self-consciousness (dharmisvarupa-jñana) and there is no sensory contact with any object, so then there is no consciousness of an object; but it does not imply that then there is absolute cognitive void in the self. Ramanuja says further that an Advaitist himself admits that during deep dreamless sleep the self exists as the witnessing consciousness (sāksī-caitanya) which has a direct intuitive perception of ignorance. But how is it possible, asks Ramanuja, to have such a perception, if
there be no knower knowing himself as 'I'? Knowership presupposes the existence of the self which is expressed by the term 'I'. Thus, concludes Rāmānuja, it is to be admitted that even during deep sleep the consciousness of the self in the form 'I' is present, and this self experiences the joy of the restful state of sleep during that time. Of course, the consciousness of the self as 'I' is not so explicit, then, as it is in the state of wakefulness, because in deep sleep there is no consciousness of any external object in contrast with which alone the consciousness of the self becomes explicit.\(^13\)

Rāmānuja tries, with the help of an illustration, to justify this view that consciousness of the self is always there in the self, either explicitly or implicitly. He points out that the virile power (purusatva) of a man, though not manifested in a male child, is yet present in it in a latent state and it is manifested later on in the adolescent period of a person; similarly, consciousness of 'I' is always there in the self even in deep sleep and it only manifests

\(^13\) Svāpādaśayāṁ ya saṃvittvayā nityataye abhyupetā sā prasaraṇābhāvena viṣayāvaccheda virāhāttadānim Kevalā mūriṣeṣāḥ asmaduktaiva syāditi bhāvaḥ. Šrutaprakāṣikā, p. 88 in Šrībhāṣya

Nirnaya Sagar Edition.
itself on waking when it is related to some external object. It is thus shown that the capacity of being the knowing subject is an essential nature of the self.

But the Advaita denies that the self is really a knower (jñātr.). The ground for such denial which the Advaita offers is that the idea of the self’s being an ego, and a knower is false because it is cancelled by the true knowledge of the self. With the attainment of absolute knowledge which results in liberation, the idea that the self is an ego is negated; then there is neither subject nor object but only pure undifferenciated consciousness, which is, in the view of an advaitist, the true nature of the self.

Rāmānuja, however, tries to establish the thesis that the knowership of the self is a real character of the self and it is present all along in the self, even in liberation.


Vedānta Sūtra, (2.3.31)
Śrībhāṣya, p 250,251

In the commentary of this sūtra the above argument has been given by Rāmānuja in Śrībhāṣya.
This is proved by such experiences as "I know", "I have knowledge ", "I am conscious about myself ", etc. All these judgments prove that the 'I' which is the subject of knowledge is real, for without this subject, what will certify that there is knowledge? The concept of 'I' does not stand for a non-intelligent something; for the existence of the 'I' is certified by its own consciousness. When the self is said to be essentially intelligent (cidrūpa), it is meant that the self is the substrate of consciousness. Consciousness is to be compared with the flame of a lamp or a candle. As the flame belongs to a lamp or a candle as its substrate, so does consciousness belong to its substrate which is the self. Such scriptural texts as the following also prove that the self-luminous self is the knower or the knowing subject and not mere consciousness. As Rāmānuja says, "Ataḥ ahamartha-jñātaiva pratyagātmeti miścitām " (Śrībhāṣya, Catuḥsūtrī, p. 94) i.e. hence it is certain that what is meant by the word 'I', i.e. the knowing subject is itself the inward self.

Rāmānuja shows that even in liberation the knowledge of the ego or of the 'I' is present. If the conscious subject

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were absent in the state of release, then who will enjoy the bliss of release? Or who is to attain the final knowledge? Moreover, only a man who is suffering from bondage and pain, desires to attain final beatitude, so that he may escape from the misery of worldly life and attain perennial peace. But if liberation means the complete cessation of the ego or the subject none would have desire for liberation. Ramanuja argues that in liberation what man realises is the essential nature of the self. This enables him to shake off ahamkāra (egoity), under the influence of which man identifies himself with his body which really is a not-self and non-intelligent matter. By ignorance, man thinks himself as identical with the senses, the manas and the body. That is why a person says that he is tall, has black complexion or is poor or rich, etc. Such egoity causes the feeling of pride or arrogance or the feeling of inferiority, etc. But with the attainment of true knowledge of the self, all such false ideas vanish. But even then, the 'I' which is the subject of all knowledge constitutes, the essential nature of the self.

Thus according to Ramanuja, in final knowledge, too, consciousness of the self shines forth as the consciousness of 'I', the individual eternal spiritual being.
It may be observed that Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja differ in their views about the individual self (jīva) and consciousness, because their metaphysical positions are different. As Śaṅkara admits no differences or kinds in consciousness and thinks of consciousness as pure and identical with Brahman which is the only reality, he holds that such consciousness is eternal, that it has neither any beginning nor any end and is beyond any limitation. And consciousness which is determined by any distinctive aspect such as object or subject, is mere appearance and not real consciousness. So Śaṅkara has no room for any non-eternal consciousness within the ambit of reality. But Rāmānuja, as he admits difference and kinds in consciousness, and grants the reality of the external world, and of the ego or the subject to which consciousness belongs, he maintains that consciousness is both eternal and non-eternal in its different aspects. The consciousness of the self which always shines forth as 'I' is eternal, while that aspect of consciousness which illumines external objects, expands and contracts according to the merits and demerits of the perceiving subject is non-eternal in nature. But both are aspects of the one and the same consciousness.

While Śaṅkara clearly states that consciousness is pure (i.e. subjectless and objectless) and eternal without any
distinction or aspects in it, Rāmānuja holds that although consciousness essentially is one and eternal, still it has different modes which are determined by different conditions, and these modes of consciousness are non-eternal. Even so, these are not unreal appearances, as Saṅkara thinks.

It would appear, however, that both Saṅkara and Rāmānuja as Vedāntins agree in maintaining the eternity of consciousness.