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The soul-substance theory: in Indian and Western Philosophy
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Abstract

Soul or Self is also a Philosophical problem, because the Philosophers are different from one another about the nature of the self. The Concept of the self-soften taken to be something non-existent, or existent in the outward or visible form of one's own self, as present and participating in the daily activities of human life. Sometime self refers to embodied human being; sometime it also refers to separate mental entity. I can say that we cannot deny our faculty of awareness of something and if we want to search the background of our awareness, then we will get a subjective background. This subjective background may be treated as self. In this paper I shall try to discuss the soul-substance theory in Indian and Western philosophy. I have seen that there are many philosophers and philosophical schools in Indian and Western philosophy uphold this soul-substance theory. In this paper I intend to investigate the nature of the Self of Descartes in western philosophy and the theory of self of Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mimāṃsā in Indian philosophy very briefly. As per my view in spite of many differences they all maintain a soul-substance theory. Generally we can say that as per the soul-substance theory the self is substance and consciousness is its quality.

Keywords: *Self, Consciousness, Substance, Unity of thoughts, Thinking thing, self-consciousness.*

Introduction: The self both as a term and a concept, holds immense importance in moral legal, social, Philosophical, and Psychological contexts. The study of self and its knowledge has emerged in recent times as an area of major significance in Indian and western Philosophy.

Whenever we use some words in any language, the words also refer something. Similarly we have seen that the term 'self' is also used in Philosophy, Religion and Psychology. So we can say that self also refers something. Self is also a Philosophical problem, because the Philosophers are different from one another about the nature of the self. The Concept of the self I soften taken to be something non-existent, or existent in the outward or visible form of one's own self, as present and participating in the daily activities of human life. Sometime self refers to embodied human being; sometime it also refers to

separate mental entity. Lastly I can say that we cannot deny our faculty of awareness of something and if we want to search the background of our awareness, then we will get a subjective background. This subjective background may be treated as self.

In Western Philosophy we find much variety regarding the nature of self. In Western Philosophy the concept of self sometimes including the body, sometimes only an aspect of self and sometime apparently something, more abstract than either soul or body.

Every branch of Indian Philosophy have both given importance on theoretical and also on Practical discussion. Indian Philosophy is not only theoretical discussion; it is also related to our daily life. Indian Philosophy seeks the way of freedom from suffering. We see that Liberation is the highest end of life. So Liberation or *moksha* is freedom from suffering. If we ask, who suffers, then we will see that *ātman* or self is suffering from Pain. So *moksha* or liberation means freedom from sufferings of *ātman* or self. So we can say that the self or *ātman* occupies centre point in all Indian Philosophical discussion. From this point we can also mention self-knowledge is very essential part in Indian Philosophy. As ignorance or misconception regarding the real nature of self is the root cause of bondage or *bandhana*. So we can be freed from suffering through self-knowledge. Lastly we can also conclude that the concept of self and self-knowledge play a great important role in Indian Philosophy.

In Indian philosophy as per the fundamental concept the self is different from body and mind. *Ātman* is eternal, it never born and never dies. It is permanent, primal, and very ancient. *Ātman* is the highest self. An individual hears, sees, and thinks always with the help of *ātman*. In every stage of experiences we cannot deny the existence of *ātman* or self. Even when Consciousness ceases to work *ātman* continues to work. The term 'I' refers to self. Every Indian Philosophical school admits the existence of something corresponding to this 'I' or '*aham*' and this is called self.

If we careful study about the opinions of Indian and Western philosophers regarding the notion about self, we can divide those notions usually into four categories. These are- 1. Transcendental self 2. Materialistic view of self 3. No-self theory 4. The soul-substance theory.

In this paper I intend to discuss the soul-substance theory. In course of my investigation, I have seen that there are many philosophers and philosophical schools in Indian and Western philosophy uphold this soul-substance theory. In this paper I intend to investigate the nature of the Self of Descartes in western philosophy and the theory of self of Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mimāṃsa in Indian philosophy very briefly. As per my view in spite of many differences they all maintain a soul-substance theory. In the first part I will discuss the soul substance theory in Descartes' philosophy, In the second part I will discuss the soul substance theory in the Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, and the Mimāṃsa school and in the last conclusion part I intend to discuss the similarities and dissimilarities of the opinions of Descartes in western philosophy and the Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mimāṃsa schools of Indian philosophy.

Review of Literature: Highlights of few past research works on the present topic are being incorporated in this section of the work:

Dutta, Srilekha, (2003) in her article, The self and self-knowledge in Indian tradition, Calcutta: *Rabindra Bharati Journal of Philosophy*, page-1-8. mentions that Self-knowledge is a major topic in Indian philosophy. This knowledge is taught by the process of insight alone. This paper of Srilekha Dutta provides a clear and distinguishing idea of the term self or *ātman* of the different schools of Indian philosophy. She mentioned here that Indian philosophy has a practical goal, namely, *moksa*. This *moksa*. is possible through self-knowledge. The self or *ātman* occupies centre stage in all philosophic discussions because ignorance or misconception regarding the real nature of the self is the root cause of suffering or bondage (*samsāra*). Furthermore she presents a clear idea of self-knowledge in Indian philosophy and different meanings of self-knowledge.

Almog, J. (2003) mentions in his book, what am I? : Descartes and the mind – body problem the philosophy of Descartes. René Descartes the father of modern philosophy in his Meditations raises a question, "what am I?" The primary answer of Descartes is "a man." But he almost immediately rejects it. In its place of understanding what a man is, Descartes reallocates two new questions: "What is Mind?" and "What is Body?" These questions develop into Descartes' main philosophical obsession: the Mind-Body distinction. If Mind and Body are really distinct, are human beings merely a "construction"? Is the subjective quality absent in human being? Philosopher Joseph Almog in this book strongly makes out the French philosopher's argument for distinguishing between the human mind and body at the same time as maintaining concurrently their essential combination in a human being. Almog argues that Descartes made a way out whereby the three of Human Mind, Body, and Being are essentially interdependent however stay each a genuine individual subject. Almog's interpretation is very important for philosophers of language, ontology, and the metaphysics of mind. This book is not only a well-liked interpretation of Descartes, but it also helps readers to grasp directly with Descartes himself.

Objective of the study:

The main objective of this research paper are—

- i. To know the different theories of self in Indian and Western philosophy.
- ii. Through a comparative study try to know the real nature of soul-substance theory.

Methodology: This research paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. The methodology that is being adopted in this research paper is a comparative analysis of the key-issue of the fundamental themes, concerning around the soul-substance theory.

Discussion:

The Basic Idea of the soul-substance theory: As per the soul-substance theory the self is substance and consciousness is its quality, in other words they believe that self is endowed with consciousness. Self is a kind of unity of thoughts, which are mental processes and substance, which is a thinking thing. Thought is a mental process and it does not exist

separately. For the reason that thought is attribute which have to have locator and that is thinking thing or substance (this subject is nothing but self), which protects the unity of thoughts.

The soul substance theory in Descartes' philosophy: Descartes is esteemed as the Father of modern philosophy and it was he who had termed the self as 'the first certainty. We know that Rene Descartes was the first Philosopher who formulated the idea of a single self that is a substance endowed with Consciousness.

Rene Descartes dared to go against the scholasticism, the Philosophical traditions of his day and gives a new start of Philosophy. Before him the scholastic philosophers accepted some concepts in philosophy without any analysis. They established philosophy on some superstitions and unnatural believes, and thus scholastic philosophers produced a dogmatic philosophy. As a mathematician Descartes wants to establish philosophy on the basis of certainty, which will come through method of doubt. According to Descartes philosophy should be presuppositionless. Descartes' ruling passion and affirmed aim was to bring an end to subtle scepticism and uncertainty of that middle age. Descartes used the method of doubt in his philosophy. But his way of dealing with the problem was not by producing defenses for all the doubtful opinions that were under attack, but on the contrary by intensifying the general doubt to its ultimate extreme. His findings would be the basis for a new body of solid knowledge, there by indicating that his plan was to doubt his way to a new certainty.

The doubt of Descartes is starting point of philosophy, but it is not his conclusion. To build up a new concept, which will be the basis of philosophy Descartes starts to doubt everything. The world around us may be real, but it may also be a mere appearance, a deception. So Descartes mentions that everything may be doubtful.

From this method of doubting Descartes built up a new certainty in his philosophy and that is the existence of the doubter 'I' who exercises the doubting function. (Beck.1952). For the reason that we cannot doubt namely that I, myself who doubts, exist. So I can doubt everything except I doubt, and that in doubting, I am. So the existence of 'I' is the first certainly of philosophy of Descartes, from where he starts his journey. From this he draws his famous conclusion "cogito ergo sum" or I think therefore I am.

So we can say that in the Philosophy of Descartes doubt is a precept or principle, not a doctrine, the starting point of philosophy, not its conclusion, a methodological instrument in the hand of strong and confident longing for truth, which makes use of doubt to find the indubitable. After establishing that 'I exist' then a question may arise here and that is what nature of this 'I' is .Descartes says 'I' is a thinking substance. Thought is an attribute which belongs to 'I'. According to Descartes thought and existence are not separate, because thought reveals my existence. This 'I' is a rational soul, spirit an ego. Descartes also mentions that as long as my thinking process continues my existence will be unquestionable. But if I stop thinking my existence will also be ceased. So I am a thinking thing that thinks. This 'I' or mind or soul is therefore most certain of all things and every

other thing depend on this highest thing, which includes all conscious activities like emotions, sensations and cognitions.

The famous argument ‘cogito-ergo-sum’ or ‘I think therefore I am’ (Descartes, 1973) the self-known only as thinking substance and known without dependence on the senses, self-evident, independent of all proof marks the reconstruction of world with the discovery of self. This is Descartes’ famous epistemological principle of clear and distinct perception.

We have seen that from the existence of ‘I’ Descartes proves the existence of God with the help of causal and ontological argument. According to Descartes clearness and distinctness are the criterion of truth. On the basis of this principle we prove the existence of self, God, world etc.

Descartes admits three kinds of substance and these are God, mind and body or matter. But God is self-caused, it is independent and all other thing, depend on the God. God creates the mind and body apart from one another. At the instance of the senses we clearly and distinctly perceive body or matter distinct from our mind. (Halden & Ross.1934) So mind and body are distinct substances. Mind is a substance which possesses thought or consciousness, but it has not extensivity, because it does not belong to space. On the other hand body is a substance, whose essence is extension, but it has not thought or consciousness and it also belongs to space. All sensations come from body and God has given propensity to believe this, because he would not be a deceiver. Sense qualities like colour, sound etc cannot constitute the essence of matter, for their variation or loss changes nothing in it and it is closely joined with mind but it would have not any feelings like pain, pleasure which are merely cogitative and which belong to mind. We have seen that according to Descartes though mind and body are very distinct substance but they closely interact with one another (Almog, 2003). When some changes occur in mind then we see some changes in body and opposite side are also true. But it is very difficult to understand this relation to us. Descartes in his book “*The passions of the soul*” says that there is a place in brain which is called pineal gland where the two substances body and mind interact with one another. A union of mind and body gives birth to sensation and other feelings. Sensations cannot enlighten us about the real nature of things, but they can be reliable as sources of knowledge, useful for sustaining the unity of mind and body.

We can never deny the existence of this so called ‘I’. We can doubt everything; we may doubt the existence of body, world etc. But there is one single point of which doubt is forced to have at the doubter, at the self-existence of the thinker. Even if we conceive a deceiving God or a demon who tries to deceive me in all my thinking, then he will not succeed to do that unless I exist. For the reason that to be deceived means to think falsely. So thinking, doubting activity is not a mistake, and from this we must say the denier or ‘I; (who deny) remains because no activity is possible without the subject. (SCHWYZER, 1997). This ‘I’ or ‘doubter’ is subject of doubting or thinking activity which can never be doubted. So I must finally conclude that the proposition, ‘I am’ ‘I exist’ is necessarily true

whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind after considering everything very thoroughly.

Here we should keep in mind three important notes regarding Descartes' philosophy and these are firstly when Descartes says 'I think therefore I am' then he only claims the certainty of his own existence from the first point of view, but he has not proven the existence of other minds at this point of view or from the second person of view. Secondly he says "I think therefore I am" that declares that instead of saying that his existence is necessary, he is saying that if he is thinking, then necessarily he exists. So Descartes gives importance on the thinking activity instead of his existence, for the reason that his existence depends upon his thinking activity. Thirdly the principle "I think, therefore I am' is not be considered a deduction from the major premise, whatever think that exists or this proposition "I am, I exist" is held true not based on a deduction nor on empirical deduction, but on the clarity and self- evidence of the proposition. Thus the fundamental true is not a syllogism, but a not further deducible, self-evident, immediate cognition, a pure intuition. The cogito, as a foundation, upon which to build further knowledge is not used by Descartes as first certainty; rather it is the firm foundation upon which he can situate himself as he works to restore his beliefs. (Falckenberg,1960).

So we can say Descartes maintains a soul-substance theory. Descartes' self is a kind of unity of thoughts, which are mental processes and substance, which is a thinking thing. The existence of the self is deduced on the basis of Descartes famous argument "cogito ergo sum" or "I think therefore I am". Before the advent of modern philosophy with Descartes mental process were supposed to be divided into two kinds of entities of drastically different ontological status. In fact these concerning sensing were deemed physically and while those regarding thinking mentally. Descartes unifies these two into a single one, which he calls thoughts or cogitations, all members of which possessed the property of consciousness and by thought we are conscious about all which are functioning in us.

It can be said the very notion of consciousness derives from the recognition that all mental processes comprise a harmonized kind, because according to Descartes thought is a mental process and it do not exist separately. For the reason that thought is attribute which have to have locator and that is thinking thing or substance, which protects the unity of thoughts.

We have already said that Descartes identifies that there is still a subject of that thought which is self. Descartes also maintains that self is a unity of thought or mental process and thinking thing or corporeal part. Thus Descartes conceives of a mental, as well as mystifying substance, solely subjective in nature, to elucidate how the world is an object of human consciousness. Because thought is which possesses the property of consciousness is attributing of thinking thing, which is a subject and also a substance. So world is an object of consciousness.

The consciousness of finitude or limited ascertains the existence of infinite or unlimited. Descartes follows this principle to his argument "cogito ergo sum". Our thinking or our

being conscious of finitude is related at once with possibility of transcending the infinite and that is object of consciousness. So the consciousness of infinite must exist. Consciousness is not an attribute of the infinite itself. Hence the infinite is by nature pure consciousness. The consciousness of finitude indicates the possibility of exceeding the limits of finitude. So, the idea of reason should not be regarded as merely a speculation of the category bound understanding.

According to Descartes there is a close relation between existence and consciousness, and this relation is the basis of Descartes' philosophy. For the reason that we have seen that according to Descartes 'I' is such a thing who thinks, doubts etc and who does not depend upon any material objects. The essence of the 'I' is consciousness and 'I' is the ground of consciousness. So 'I' or my own existence and consciousness are closely related.

According to Descartes there is a subject and object distinction and subject or knower is a thinking thing that is not extended, and object, what is known is an extended thing which does not think. So we can say that Descartes maintains a soul substance theory. According to himself is a simple, undividable substance and as a locator of thinking, willing, feeling etc mental qualities we can't deny the existence of self.

The Soul- Substance Theory in the Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, and the Mimāṃsa School: The term 'I' refers to self. Every Indian Philosophical school admits the existence of something corresponding to this 'I' or '*aham*' and this is called self. As ignorance or misconception regarding the real nature of self is the root cause of bondage or *bandhana*. So we can be freed from suffering through self-knowledge and for that reason the concept of self and self-knowledge play a great important role in Indian Philosophy. (Dutta, 2003) Some Philosophical schools like Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mimāṃsa, believe that self is substance and consciousness is it's quality, in other words they believe that self is endowed with Consciousness.

Realist Philosophers of Indian Philosophy also make difference between empirical self or *Jivātman* and real self or *Svarupatah ātman*. According to them the empirical self falls in bondage and the real self never falls in bondage, it is free from bondage and it is liberated forever. The real self is devoid of all qualities like Consciousness, happiness etc, But Bhatta Mimāṃsa describe that self is Conscious – unconscious, they believe the self as such is endowed with potential Consciousness.

If we say the self is subject to bondage (*bandhan*) and liberation (*moksha*), then this definition will not be accepted by Naiyākas, because they hold the view that real self is not subject to bondage and liberation. The third view about self – consciousness is held by Naiyāyikas and Bhāṭṭa mimāṃsakas. They declare that the self is known by internal perception. We have seen that according to Bhattamimāṃsakas and Naiyāyikas self is owner of different mental qualities. When we know those qualities by internal perception, we are also aware the owner of these mental qualities by internal perception. (Radhakrishnan.1940).

But Prabhākara mimāṃsakas say self is the subject of Consciousness and self is revealed by the every state of Consciousness. Vedāntin and Prabhākaras mention that self is not object of Consciousness.

So the position of Prabhākara mimāṃsakas' view is some time very closer to Naiyākas, because like Naiyākas they believe that self is substance and Consciousness is it's quality, in other words they believe that self is endowed with Consciousness.(Vidyasagara.1897).In another case Prabhākara mimāṃsakas' view is very closer to Vedāntins,because like Vedāntin they mention that self is not object of Consciousness. Prabhākara mimāṃsakas ,Bhattamimāṃsakas and also Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, admit that soul or self is a substance (*dravya*), which is the substratum(*āshraya*) of consciousness. Prabhākara mimāṃsakas and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika confess that consciousness is not essence of soul. They hold that self is essentially unconscious (*jada*) and that consciousness is only an accidental quality which may or may not be possessed by the soul-substance. Actually self is void of all qualities like cognitions, feelings and volitions and also consciousness. According to Prabhākara mimāṃsakas and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika self or soul is pure substance. (Sharma.1997).

Bhattamimāṃsakas differ from the Prabhākara mimāṃsakas and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika regarding the nature of self. Bhattamimāṃsakas also admit that soul is substance, but consciousness is a mode, an act, a process of the self by which self cognizes the objects. Like Prabhākara mimāṃsakas and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Bhattamimāṃsakas declare that consciousness is not essence of self. However Bhattamimāṃsakas don't admit that consciousness is accidental quality of self.They do not hold like Prabhākara mimāṃsakas and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika that self is not wholly unconscious. Bhatta Mimāṃsakas describe that self is Conscious – unconscious (*chidachidrūpa*), as modes it is conscious and as substance it is unconscious.

Conclusion: Finally we can say that according to the soul-substance theory the self or soul is substance and consciousness is its quality. Descartes, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mimāṃsa schools of Indian philosophy all agree that self or soul is substance. But like Descartes, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mimāṃsa schools do not admit that consciousness is essence of the self. Prabhākara mimāṃsakas,Bhattamimāṃsakas and also Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, admit that soul or self is a substance(*dravya*), which is the substratum(*āshraya*) of consciousness. Prabhākara mimāṃsakas and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika declare that self is essentially unconscious (*jada*) and that consciousness is only an accidental quality which may or may not be possessed by the soul-substance. However Bhattamimāṃsakas don't admit that consciousness is accidental quality of self. They explain that self is Conscious–unconscious. Although Bhattamimāṃsakas too like Prabhākara mimāṃsakas and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika believe that in liberation the self remains as a pure substance divested of all qualities and modes including consciousness.

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