



THE METHODOLOGICAL AFFINITY BETWEEN K.C. BHATTACHARYA AND HUSSERL IN DISSOCIATING THE SELF FROM THE OTHER

L. Monita Singha

Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy

Assam University, Silchar, Assam, India

Abstract

K.C. Bhattacharya, one of the well known modern contemporary philosophers whose contribution in Indian Philosophy is worth mentioning. There is cross-cultural dimension of philosophizing in his philosophy. He has refined the tradition Advaitic method to suit the modern philosophical attitude. He has developed a rigorous methodology for a logical analysis of Advaitic philosophical position and thus opens up scope for free-thinking and constructive interpretation of the traditional philosophy. K. C. Bhattacharya's contribution lies in giving this method a modern outlook. He makes it more intense and self-sufficient without depending on the śruti or Vedic testimony. In this paper, I shall also discuss Husserl's phenomenology and try to show the similarities between these two philosophers. Both the methodological approaches enlisted the method of reducing this empirical world which ultimately leads to the realization of Husserl's transcendental ego through his phenomenological method and Transcendental Self or *Ātman* in Sankara philosophy.

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K.C. Bhattacharya, in his philosophy wanted to free the Indian mind from the cultural subjugation during the post-colonial period. He has no issue regarding the assimilation of knowledge in order to enhance a certain concept. But he has problem of Indian ideology of blindly following the western culture at the stake of own. His reverence toward his motherland refrain him from working under British administrations. It is ‘an aesthetic way of thinking, a way of life’ (Ganeri). Moreover, K.C. Bhattacharya has developed a rigorous methodology for a logical analysis of Advaitic philosophical position and thus opens up scope for free-thinking and constructive interpretation of the traditional philosophy. This meditative thinking affirms the possibility to realize the transcendental consciousness and subjective freedom where there is no duality. It must be stated that the technique of negation or denial or dissociation is not a new method but is implicitly present in the śruti and has been followed even by the great Advaitic teachers like Gaudapāda, and Śaṅkara in several contexts. The method which K.C. Bhattacharya applied is the gradual withdrawal from the objective world of means and forms and realizing the absolute within. This process is going through the four stages of waking, dream, deep sleep and *tūriya*.

According to R. Balasubramanian, following Upaniṣads, there are both subjective and objective approaches of investigation in Advaita. The subjective approach is concerned with realization of the inner self which is identical and which is misidentifies as empirical self. On the other hand, the goal of the objective approach is to reach the Brahman overcoming the illusory appearance of the world. In brief, the former is an investigation of our inner world; the latter is an inquiry into the nature of the external world.

In waking consciousness, the subject always identifies itself with the object by losing its individuality in the other. There is confinement of ego consciousness in this empirical world and the object of knowledge is obtained through the various sense organs. Thus, in the waking experience, there is a non-difference between the knower and the known. This false identification can be removed only by unfolding the pure Self that is devoid of any changes, limitations, and fleeting features. It must be stated thereby, the object-directed being

the essential feature of waking experience is not essential to consciousness but is associated with the mind and sense organs which becomes more evident through the examination of the dream and deep sleep states. It would be wrong to argue that consciousness, even if it exists in a waking state, is absent later because it is the fundamental base that makes cognition possible and sustains our mind, sense organs, and the body. Even if the Self is essentially Brahman and thereby free from all limitations and bondage, it is superimposed with all finite, corporal properties of the not-Self. Thus R. Balasubramanian writes, “So long as our perspective is empirical, we are victims of *adhyāsa* at the metaphysical, epistemological and ethical levels.”(Balasubramanian)

After the withdrawal of waking experience, the self now proceed towards the second stage called dream experience. In this stage, the self realizes freedom from the empirical body. The self here can move freely and is not under any spatial-temporal limitations. But in the dream experience, the self is under the influence of mind which binds within empirical world and that suggests that it is not final to ultimate freedom. This is for this reason that the self dissociate itself from the dream state and proceeds toward the higher stage.

The next stage of a phenomenological study of our consciousness is deep sleep experience. Unlike Husserlian phenomenology, the study of consciousness in Advaita does not stop with waking experience but it has been extended to the deeper levels of our experience. In this regard, R. Balasubramanian says, “While the mind and the senses are the variable factors in the three states, the one factor which is invariably present in all the three states is consciousness.” (Balasubramanian)

Advaita denies the popular belief that sleep is marked by the absence of consciousness. Since to them, consciousness being the basis of all our existence cannot remain absent in any experience. It is a sheer contradiction to argue that one exists in the absence of consciousness. The self is not completely free from the empirical world even in the deep sleep state. This confirms that there is a higher state even from deep sleep where there will be complete negation of empirical world. This state is called *tūriya*.

The sole aim of Husserl’s phenomenological method is to discover the transcendental foundation of our knowledge. The phenomenological study is considered as a first person perspective. In it, Husserl shifted his focus from the objective world of the outside to the conscious experience that makes all cognitions and

appearances of the objects possible. The fact that the objective world presupposes an intentional subject to exhibit itself proves the priority of the subject over the former. On the other hand, the intentional subject does not depend on any objective world in order to express its being. One fundamental discovery of reduction is transcendental subjectivity of Husserl. He employed his phenomenological method as a criticism of psychologism which fails to differentiate the object of knowledge from the act of knowing

The epochē in phenomenological study signifies the process of bracketing or suspension of all our presuppositions or preconceived beliefs. This process of bracketing does not stand for a complete negation or denial of the objective world. Husserl is not worried about the validity of the world and the objects of consciousness. Rather the goal of this suspension or bracketing is to change our perspective or attitude from the mere objectivity to the subject that makes experience possible.

The second step of the phenomenological method is the reduction through which one unfolds the transcendental realm of consciousness. In this process of phenomenological investigation, the essence of knowledge is revealed after eliminating the non-essential structure from it. Through the assistance of epochē one brackets or suspends all presuppositions, natural attitude including the empirical ego, reduction takes us to disclose the transcendental subject as the absolute ground of all beings and knowledge. Thus, the process from epochē to reduction can be stated as the transition from facts to essence.

One can see the similarities in the above given approaches of K.C. Bhattacharya and Husserl. Let us first discuss the structure of similarities existing among them. Both the methodological approaches enlisted the method of reducing this empirical world which ultimately leads to the realization of Husserl's transcendental ego through his phenomenological method and Transcendental Self or *Ātman* in Śaṅkara philosophy. In Husserl's methodology, the *epoché* or suspension of the natural attitude leads to the essential structure knowledge; whereas the Advaitic philosophy, one is asked to denounce or discontinue the worldly adjuncts by reducing the world as a secondary reality (*vyavahārikasattā*) which will ultimately proceed for the Absolute reality (*paramārthikasattā*) of *Brahman*.

Husserl's transcendental ego which is constitutive of all being and experience has the same role as Advaitic concept of *Ātman* or *Brahman* who is the creator of this universe out of which this world is reflected. The reduction in Husserl's phenomenology is taken to be a process where the essence of knowledge is explored by reducing the non-essential structure of natural experiences. There is also reduction of different stages of consciousness in Advaitic philosophy which is reduced one by one in the process of realizing the supreme reality. Moreover, Husserl's attempt to acquiring the traces of apodictic certainty of Transcendental ego through the process of phenomenological reduction functions like the Advaitic method of attaining the self-evident knowledge of the *Ātman* which is made possible through the self-realization by dissociation the identity with the empirical adjuncts imposed on the self due to ignorance.

It is interesting to note that the Advaitic method also incorporates the modern phenomenological method in studying the nature of consciousness and they went much deeper and further than the Husserlian scheme. However, it must be mentioned at the same time that even if K. C. Bhattacharya was highly influenced by the Advaitic philosophical method and the core philosophical problems which are addressed by the classical Advaitins, he has contributed by sharpening and expanding their method in a more rigorous way without restoring to *śabda pramāṇa*. He shows us the way how classical problems can be examined and demonstrated from the modern Western perspectives and what limitations one may face in that case.

Above all, there are also some dissimilarities existing between the Advaitic philosophy and phenomenological methodology. The consciousness as discussed in the phenomenology is the conscious experiences of waking life where in case of Advaita philosophy the consciousness surpasses not only the level of waking life, but also it takes into consideration the other states of consciousness as such dreaming, deep sleep and even the transcendental consciousness which is the state of unity with the *Ātman*.

Moreover, the consciousness in Husserl's phenomenology is an intentional act in association with the Transcendental ego but the consciousness in Advaita philosophy is indescribable (*anirvacaniya*) in nature. The consciousness here is 'negatively defined as that which is diametrically opposed to an object, it has none of the characteristics which belong to the objects. It is neither quality nor a substance; neither a cause nor an

effect; neither the creator nor the created; in fact all categories are applicable to the world of objects, and not to the Absolute' (Garfield).

Both Husserl and K.C. Bhattacharya considered the object as the 'meant' content different from the subject. It is the subject which provides the meaning function to the object. But K.C. Bhattacharya goes little further from by saying that the pure subject is not only devoid of objective phenomena, it is devoid of meaning content. This transcendental consciousness is the complete negation of everything including meaning function, subject-object duality, and so on. It is indescribable in nature.

Notes and references

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