

Towards the Creative Understanding of Consciousness: An Autoethnographic Philosophical Account of a Poetess

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Abstract: *Knowing thy self is the only relevance that construes the significance of consciousness. Often, poetry is considered as a tool to express inward emotions. But it could also be used as a tool to unite with the Brahmana (the ultimate, the sublime). When the nothingness is the origination, poetry could help us rejuvenate the sense of 'being' that is seeking to get united with the ultimate truth and the ultimate source of sublimity. The abstraction of self occurs within and for that, we need to experience life in this world. This paper would highlight the journey of self that is questing for knowing the truth which is beyond the binaries and worldly constructivism. Although this self identifies itself as a radical feminist yet, it seems the self has transcended towards 'Virakti Bhava' in terms of experiencing itself. It is experiencing catharsis in its relevance while diluting the hegemonies. The more we tend to understand the purpose of life, the more we enjoy the calmness within. The world is in chaos as we seek to divide it and see it as two facets: the self and the others. We tend to forget that we belong to the same universe. As and when we realize, we close the gap between the truth we perceive as truth and the truth that we want to seek. In this paper, the self would reflect on its origins not in the terms of mechanical evolution as proposed by Darwin but it would reflect upon the journey of understanding the 'Virakti Bhava', leading to spiritual mobility. Here, the self is not seeking to pose arguments but is seeking deeper insights into itself. The self becomes a metaphor in itself. It has an identity of a female. Yet, it would try to understand the relevance of twin consciousness regarding merging masculinity and femininity into one soul forming the universal ethos of 'Prakriti' and 'Purusha'.*

Keywords: Autoethnography; Consciousness; Indian Philosophy; Shakta Tradition; Poetry

1. Introduction

This paper is an introduction to the journey of the self that is seeking its way to uplift itself from worldly affairs. Yet, the self will be used as a metaphor here. There is an inner world within us. The inner world is evoked when the self has been realized in terms of existence. Existence is not that of the self but it is about the interconnectedness shared by us with the surroundings, voices of nature, and the ultimate. Hence, we are the existence ourselves. As humans, we are trapped into perceiving the 'isms' imposed by the outside world which is just a form of illusion. Thus, the outside world is an output of 'Maaya'. We seek answers from others but there is no other as there is no self. The self is an illusion drawn from the metamorphosis of the ego. The ego is the world that we see outside us. We are both the insider and the outsider. Often, we get caught up in the *maaya* of binaries. Rather, we can say that these binaries are created by illusions. Often, the truths we perceive are relative. We are trapped in the notion of pluralities concerning multiple identities attached to the self. Here, the self has its gender, colour, caste, creed, ethnicity, nationality, religion, race, etc. Thus, there is a continuous conflict between one or more identities. These self-assertive conflicts create an illusionary other while the binaries are the two opposite sides of the same coin. It does not mean that that darkness will exist where there is light but it means that we recognize light because we know what darkness feels or looks like. Eventually, these differences exist because we are trapped in three vices namely, 'lobha' (greed), 'moha' (attachment, delusion), and 'dosha' (fallacy). The identities attached to the self are products of ignorance and these vices. The greed for power and distortive attitude towards understanding

reality along with falsehood leads to the creation of the 'other'. Somehow, we tend to forget the complexity of the material body even in its biological essence. The human body is a complex structure and it is not just about syncing of matter and energy. We tend to neglect that our bodies have a complex origin and such a complex structure could only be created by supreme energy. We might recognize that energy as God or pure consciousness. So, the power we are trying to claim is simply an aversion and a desire to control everything. Except for Karma, we cannot control anything. Only conscious and good *karma* will lead us towards desired outcomes. The cause-and-effect relationship cannot be denied. The supreme reality or pure consciousness has been considered as the Brahman by Sri Aurobindo (Sharma, 1962, p.371). The pure self is the unborn and immutable spirit who is not involved in the world of ignorance (Sharma, 1962, p.371). Usually, humans are unaware of their soul as mentioned by Sri Aurobindo (Sharma, 1962, p.371). We tend to get entrapped in the pursuits of desires created by the illusions. Hence, Sri Aurobindo suggests that the soul is subjected to mentality, vitality, and physicality (Sharma, 1962, p.371). He also suggests that we tend to focus too much on the mind. After the mind loses its sense of unity then, ignorance starts (Sharma, 1962, p.371). Aurobindo considers Mind as Avidya and this ignorance leads to fragmentation and multiplicity.

In Shakta tradition, Shakti is considered as the power of existence, knowledge, and bliss of Brahman. Shakti can be seen as male, female, or neutral. It is believed that Shiva can only create if he is united with Shakti otherwise Shiva is similar to a corpse (Sharma, 1962, p.378). We tend to think that we are finite due to our limitations and illusions.

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Liberation can be attained if we are aware of the Brahman i.e. the Shiva. We will be able to unite with Shiva only with the help of Shakti. In most of the schools of Indian Philosophy, there is a sense of self-integration. I believe that writing is one of the best mind exercises to gain clarity about the right understanding and taking the right actions. In Buddhism, the intermix of right understanding and right action leads to wisdom. Thus, this article will focus on how poetry helps me to realize the interconnectedness of spirit, mind, and matter. It will also focus on how poetry dissolves fragmentation and allows us to understand the confluence of femininity and masculinity.

2. Review of Literature

Although, this paper will focus on the experiences of the self as this article will present the autoethnographic journey of the poetess. But literature suggests that consciousness is a complex process in itself. It is easy to talk about empowerment but empowerment cannot happen without consciousness. Often, we focus too much on empowerment without focusing on improvising or raising consciousness. For writing a single word on a blank sheet, the writer requires consciousness to articulate his/her feelings while keeping the readers in their mind. As writing is a conscious process. Thus, it is complex and a structured articulation of unstructured thoughts emerging in our mind. Somehow, the initial thought process is unstructured because it is a cloud of clustered ideas. Thoughts get structured when we are conscious. Literature suggests that writing in various genres and styles enable us to understand different realms of consciousness (Luce-Kapler, Catlin, Sumara, & Kocher, 2011). Every genre of writing allows us to imagine different characters, contexts, etc. Writing in different genres also requires a shift in states of mind ((Luce-Kapler et al., 2011). Thus, we can define consciousness as the flow of self-imagination and the process of self-identification. While writing, we remain cognizant of the situations we want to discuss with our readers. Thus, writing helps us to dissolve the boundaries between the self and the other because both perspectives get acknowledged while writing. Certainly, due to ignorance, we keep believing in 'isms' and think that we have the right vision and right solution. Within this context, Jainas quote a story of six blind men and the elephant. In this story, the blind men touch different parts of the elephant and try to describe the elephant as a whole while touching its parts. Thus, the man holding its ear describes it as a country made fan; the man holding its trunk describes it as a python; the feeler who is holding its tail describes it as a rope; the person who is touching its side describes it as a wall, and the person who is touching its forehead describes it as breast. And all the six quarreled among themselves while asserting that only their perspective is right. The 'isms' we adhere to are relative truths (Sharma, 1962, p.41). We associate with one reality greater than other realities but it does not mean that other realities cannot exist. Even in Vedanta, it is stated that conforming to only an ideology limits our thinking and imagination process. Thus, writing mindfully becomes an essential exercise to dissolve the boundaries between the self and the other.

Writing is a creative instinct and is evolutionary. It changes according to time, space, and context. Evolution is

considered as nature's innovation as nature is innovative and creative (Sharma, 2005). Our existence is shaped by nature. Thus, the actions which we undertake follow the principles of nature's evolution. 'Evolution proceeds through adaptive innovation wherein organisms adapt and act on the environment (Sharma, 2005).' Thus, the act of writing is evolutionary. The actions we take are momentary and there is no permanent self that executes them. We are exposed to momentary evolution. Thus, there is no permanent self but we exist. We can only feel the sense of being when we are interconnected with nature. Nature or Shakti is the power of existence, knowledge, and bliss. Writing can help us to understand our existence because it requires a lot of self-reflection to understand one's mind and other's minds too. It is not just about exploring human selves but it is also about connecting with both the natures either human nature or nature in its abstract. In Shakta tradition, the whole world of matter and souls exists within Shakti. Prakriti or nature is existing within Shakti. 'Liberation is due to the knowledge that the so-called soul is non-different from Brahman' (Sharma, 1962, p.378). So, the soul we inherit is a part of the supreme. Writing is the path to appreciate the co-presence of souls and matter. This union between souls and matter is quite invaluable to understand one's journey of self.

Virakti Bhava or the feeling of renouncing the world of desires emerges from acknowledging one's freedom from the trap of *Maaya*. It is not easy to get out of it because we believe that our desires or our attachments are real and permanent. While the world keeps evolving, we feel that we will always remain the same. When we understand that our life on this Earth is temporary then our realization will take us towards understanding the nature of Shiva, the pure consciousness. *Virakti Bhava* acts as a bridge between understanding the nature of self and understanding the nature of pure consciousness. Through this article, I would like to explore how *Virakti Bhava* while composing poems helps me to gain clarity about what is happening around me through my personal experiences.

3. Methodology

I will be using autoethnography as the research method to explore personal narratives while identifying myself as a poetess and examining how the *Virakti Bhava* within me helps me to compose poems and gain clarity about what is happening around me. Autoethnography is a qualitative research method and it is an autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting personal to cultural.

4. Analysis and Discussions

Virakti Bhava, as I have already mentioned is not about renouncing the world but it is about understanding the nature of impermanence and embracing the world in a new way. Attachments often lead to pain and suffering. They suffocate us and snatch away the freedom we are seeking. I have always felt that the world is a chaotic place because everyone is seeking power. Power indeed corrupts minds. The mind is considered as *Avidya* by Sri Aurobindo because of the fallacies we embrace out of the ignorance which we consider as bliss. Recently, I composed a poem in Hindi

highlighting the problems in the education system wherein I mentioned that our education system is operated by ignorant minds who capitalize on the social inequalities inside the system while talking about education. Our education system minimized the broader aims of education of creating robust minds who are trained to think critically about social issues and find relevant solutions. But the system orients its students not to question the system and accept it without changing it. I have also highlighted the discord between teachers and students who are boasting about their partial truths while talking about Indian Philosophy. Hereby, the poem on the education system reflects upon the *Virakti Bhava* I am facing as a student which is helping me to understand what affects my peace of mind as a student. Here, due to feelings of *virakti*, I am not trying to leave my University just because I feel that my professors are not realizing my potential or are acting biased in various ways. But I am trying to reflect on the psyche of people who are engaged in the process. Thus, I am trying to understand the reason behind their behaviours and dualities. To some extent, I know, we are all acting out of ignorance. Thus, I am conscious that social inequalities are outcomes of the power structures existing in society. Thus, we tend to attach ourselves to an illusion that by marginalizing others and by curtailing their voices, we can be powerful. But we tend to forget that we are just a small part of the vast universe or the pure consciousness that created us. In this world, nothing belongs to us. Nobody belongs to us. The professors who are talking about Indian Philosophy or Western Philosophy are not only trapping themselves into disillusionments but they are trapping their students to get attached to these illusions. It is an irony that I am using Indian Philosophical perspectives to decode the psyche of the professors who are into Indian Philosophy. In this case, while composing the poem, I have chosen certain metaphors and idioms describing the positionality of my psyche and other's psyche. A writer has to be conscious of his/her perspective and other's perspectives too (Luce-Kapler et al., 2011).

Sometimes, I feel the *Virakti Bhava* when people understand feminism as just a way of thinking towards women's empowerment where men's needs are not taken into consideration. So, in one of my recent poems titled, 'Making this world a better place', I have focused on the sense of interconnectedness as explored by (Sharma, 1962) while interpreting various Indian Philosophies including, the Shakta tradition. In the Shakta school, it is mentioned that Shiva is a corpse without Shakti as Shakti is his wife. Without Shakti, Shiva will not be able to create (Sharma, 1962). Even then, we fight over who suffers the most. Thus, in this idealistic poem, I have focused on the integrity of feminine and masculine energies that eventually leads us to understand the concept of '*Ardhnarishwara*'. As a poetess, I feel that I do not belong to any particular gender. If I feel to express myself as a female, I use feminine expressions. If I feel to express myself as a male, I use masculine expressions. Each of these expressions is void if another does not exist. I believe that we are born out of '*Ardhnarishwara*'. Thus, both masculine and feminine energies collaborate to develop the *Atman* (the soul) inside us as, without Shakti, Shiva will not be able to create the world. In this case, the poem helps me to understand the interconnectedness between Shiva and Shakti and helps me

to gain clarity regarding why, at times, I feel that I am driven by both energies even if I consider myself a radical feminist. Feminism helps me to realize material truths but somehow, it fails to fulfill my spiritual positioning. Poetry has often helped me to understand my spiritual desires even though, I do not have much knowledge about literary criticisms. It is not just an imaginary exercise for me. Rather, poetry guides me towards *samadhi*, a point where self-consciousness meets the *shunya* or nothingness. For me, embracing that nothingness is evolved consciousness. It is absolute bliss to experience it while meditating on words.

5. Conclusion

Poetry is a tool of self-exploration and one of the forms of self-reflexivity. It is a journey of the self not in the terms of winning name and fame for composing poems but it is a journey from understanding the concrete realities to embracing nothingness because nothingness is the ultimate end. For a new beginning, the soul has to travel from abstract to concrete and vice-versa. Poetry is like a journal that describes our journey of self-actualization. In the process of composing poems, I have realized that even the thoughts change within seconds. Thus, it means that all our material connections to ourselves and others are impermanent and relative depending on space and time.

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