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CONCEPT OF TIME AND OBJECTIVITY IN K.C. BHATTACHARYA'S
IDEALISM

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1. Introduction

K. C. Bhattacharya (1875–1949), one of the most original and rigorous thinkers of twentieth-century Indian philosophy, sought to establish a bridge between the spiritual metaphysics of *Vedānta* and the critical idealism of the West. His intellectual enterprise was not merely comparative but transformative—an attempt to evolve an indigenous idealism grounded in the notion of *Ātman* as the self-luminous and self-determining consciousness (Bhattacharya, 1956; Raju, 1985). Influenced by both Kant and the *Upaniṣads*, Bhattacharya's philosophical endeavor aimed to transcend epistemic dualisms between subject and object, mind and world, by positing consciousness as the creative ground of all objectivity (Mohanty, 1992; Halbfass, 1990).

Unlike traditional metaphysicians who treated time as an abstract entity or cosmological measure, Bhattacharya interprets time as an ontological mode of the self's manifestation. For him, time is neither external to consciousness nor reducible to psychological flow—it is the very manner in which the self-differentiates its content. Similarly, objectivity is not the existence of things “out there,” but the act of objectification (*viśayīkaraṇa*) through which consciousness externalizes its internal content without losing its unity (Bhattacharya, 1957; Radhakrishnan, 1953). This dialectical conception aligns with his broader philosophical project—what he termed the “subject as freedom,” a conception of self as an autonomous, self-legislating principle that manifests both temporality and objectivity as its own modes of being (Bhattacharya, 1956).

Bhattacharya's concern with time and objectivity thus arises from his deeper engagement with the problem of consciousness—its relation to experience, freedom, and reality. He considered the self (*ātman*) to be both transcendental and immanent, revealing itself as time and objectivity within empirical consciousness, yet remaining beyond them in its pure nature (Bhattacharya, 1930). His reflections are, therefore, both metaphysical and phenomenological, anticipating many themes later articulated in existential and phenomenological philosophy, particularly those of Husserl and Heidegger (Husserl, 1964; Heidegger, 1962).

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The central purpose of this paper is to examine the interrelation between time and objectivity in Bhattacharya's philosophy and to show how both are understood as self-expressions of consciousness. This inquiry proceeds in three main stages: first, by analyzing Bhattacharya's conception of time as the inner mode of consciousness; second, by explicating his theory of objectivity as a process of objectification; and third, by integrating these dimensions to reveal the dialectical unity of self and world. The paper concludes with a critical reflection on Bhattacharya's philosophical significance, both within the Advaitic framework and in relation to Western phenomenology.

2. Time as the Mode of Consciousness

For K. C. Bhattacharya, time (*kāla*) is not an external container within which events unfold but the very inner rhythm of consciousness itself. Time, in his philosophy, is neither a physical magnitude nor a psychological category—it is the self's own creative movement in manifestation (Bhattacharya, 1930, p. 54). Bhattacharya distinguishes two aspects of time: objective or empirical time, which is measurable and quantitative, and subjective or pure time, which is the qualitative form of consciousness that underlies all experience. The latter, he insists, cannot be reduced to chronological sequence, for it expresses the *svarūpa* (intrinsic nature) of consciousness itself (Bhattacharya, 1956, p. 39). Thus, he writes, “time is consciousness of change, but consciousness itself does not change”—a statement that captures his radical synthesis of Advaita *Vedānta* ontology and phenomenological introspection.

In each act of awareness, consciousness experiences a passage—from one content to another—yet this very passage presupposes an unchanging witness (*sākṣin*) who observes the transition (Raju, 1985). Time, therefore, is not an entity added to consciousness but the mode in which consciousness apprehends its own self-differentiation. Bhattacharya's analysis echoes the Advaitic distinction between the eternal self (*ātman*) and its empirical modes (*jīva*), yet he reinterprets it dynamically: the self-manifests temporality without itself becoming temporal (Chatterjee, 1963; Mohanty, 1992). Time arises when the self becomes aware of its own movement; but the possibility of this awareness presupposes a principle that is beyond movement. Hence, temporality emerges as a tension between permanence and change—the unchanging self-realizing itself through changing appearances (Raju, 1985; Rao, 1982).

This conception contrasts with the Kantian view of time as a pure form of intuition that structures all possible experience (Kant, 1781/1998). While Kant considers time a necessary condition for the representation of phenomena, Bhattacharya transforms this epistemological form into an ontological expression of selfhood. In his view, time is not merely a cognitive condition but the self's act of self-

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expression—its “creative intuition” (*mūlāvidyā*), through which it externalizes its own potentiality (Bhattacharya, 1930; Mohanty, 1992). The Kantian “transcendental unity of apperception” becomes, in Bhattacharya’s Advaitic framework, the *Ātman*—a pure consciousness that manifests time without being bound by it. In this way, Bhattacharya fuses Kant’s critical idealism with the *ātma-vidyā* of *Vedānta*, giving rise to what Daya Krishna (1987) termed a “transcendental phenomenology of the self.”

Bhattacharya’s approach also finds striking resonance with Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology of internal time-consciousness (Husserl, 1964). For Husserl, consciousness constitutes temporal objects through the tripartite structure of retention (the just-past), primal impression (the now), and protention (the imminent future). Bhattacharya, while appreciating this analysis, grounds it in a deeper ontological insight: the *ātman* that constitutes temporality is itself timeless. As he observes, “Time-consciousness is but the self’s awareness of its own free movement in manifestation” (Bhattacharya, 1956, p. 41). Husserl’s “stream of consciousness” thus becomes, in Bhattacharya’s interpretation, the *līlā* (play) of pure self-awareness—a manifestation of the eternal within the flux of becoming. As Mohanty (1992) notes, this represents a decisive shift from descriptive phenomenology to metaphysical phenomenology, where temporality is seen as the self’s creative act rather than as a mere structure of experience.

In the Advaita *Vedānta* tradition, time is empirically real (*vyāvahārika satya*) but ultimately unreal (*paramārthika satya*), since Brahman—the absolute—is beyond temporality (Śaṅkara, *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāṣya*, II.1.14). Bhattacharya inherits this distinction but interprets it existentially: the self, when identified with its empirical consciousness, lives in time; but in its essential nature, it transcends it (Bhattacharya, 1930; Halbfass, 1990). Time thus becomes both the veil and the revelation of eternity—the very process through which the self alienates itself from and returns to its timeless being (Rao, 1982). The bondage (*bandha*) of time, Bhattacharya argues, lies in the self’s identification with the flux of experiences; liberation (*mokṣa*) arises when it recognizes time as its own projection. Hence his profound remark: “The bondage of time is but the self’s forgetfulness of its own eternity” (Bhattacharya, 1956, p. 44). This echoes Śaṅkara’s teaching that ignorance (*avidyā*) gives rise to the illusion of temporal succession, which dissolves upon realization of the timeless Brahman (Deutsch, 1969; Dasgupta, 1940).

In this sense, Bhattacharya’s conception of time also parallels Hegel’s dialectic of self-othering, where Spirit (*Geist*) realizes itself through negation and mediation (Hegel, 1807/1977). Time, for Bhattacharya, functions analogously—it is the self’s act of differentiation within itself, the means through which the eternal subject manifests multiplicity (Halbfass, 1990). Yet, unlike Hegel’s logically driven Absolute, Bhattacharya’s self is spiritually real and self-luminous (*svayam-prakāśa*), not merely

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a concept unfolding through negations. The self's differentiation in time is not a dialectical necessity but a creative freedom—an act of *ātma-vikāsa* (self-expansion). As Eliot Deutsch (1973) observes, Bhattacharya thus transforms German Idealism into an Indian spiritual idealism, where temporality is neither illusion nor necessity but divine expression.

This view carries significant implications for understanding subjectivity and temporality. Time, in Bhattacharya's framework, is not an external dimension into which consciousness is thrown; it is the very mode through which the self becomes aware of itself as finite and striving (Chatterjee, 1963). Temporal consciousness, therefore, reveals both the creative power and the existential limitation of the human being: it discloses our rootedness in the eternal even as it manifests our finitude. As Radhakrishnan (1923) observed in a related context, the temporal order is the self's "progressive self-realization in and through change." Bhattacharya's originality lies in grounding this process not in metaphysical speculation but in the lived experience of awareness itself.

Moreover, his analysis anticipates themes later explored in existential phenomenology. When Sartre (1943/1956) described consciousness as "a being whose being is in question," he unknowingly echoed Bhattacharya's insight that temporality arises from the self's self-transcendence. Similarly, Heidegger's (1927/1962) conception of *Dasein*'s temporality as the "ecstatic unity" of past, present, and future parallels Bhattacharya's notion of the self's movement within its own manifestation. Yet, unlike Heidegger, Bhattacharya never ontologizes finitude; instead, he interprets it as a creative limitation that conceals the infinite within the finite. Time, thus, becomes the bridge between empirical becoming and transcendental being.

Ultimately, for Bhattacharya, time is the mode of consciousness through which the self realizes its own freedom. It is neither a mechanical order nor a subjective illusion, but the dynamic self-expression of spirit (*cit-śakti*). In recognizing that temporality arises from within, the individual transcends temporal bondage and reawakens to the timeless ground of awareness. Bhattacharya's philosophy thereby integrates the metaphysics of Advaita with the phenomenology of consciousness, demonstrating that to understand time is to understand the very essence of the self.

3. Bhattacharya on Objectivity and Objectification

If time signifies the inner differentiation of consciousness, objectivity signifies its outer projection. For K. C. Bhattacharya, objectivity (*viśayīkaraṇa*) is the process through which consciousness

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externalizes its own internal content and thereby constructs the world of experience. In his *Studies in Philosophy* and *Studies in Vedānta*, Bhattacharya (1930, 1956, 1957) maintains that “the object is nothing but the self’s own content set over against itself” (1956, p. 213). Objectification therefore expresses a self-division within consciousness whereby the self (*ātman*) becomes simultaneously subject and object, knower and known, without losing its essential unity (Mohanty, 1992). The world is not a realm outside consciousness but the self’s creative manifestation—its *bahirmukhatā* (turning outward) that reveals its intrinsic freedom (Bhattacharya, 1930; Halbfass, 1990).

In contrast to naïve realism, which assumes that objects exist independently of consciousness, Bhattacharya argues that objectivity is constituted by consciousness itself. Every experience involves the self’s act of positing an “other” that is, in truth, nothing but its own content objectified (Raju, 1985). Yet, this standpoint is not solipsistic. Consciousness, in objectifying itself, affirms its universality, for the very possibility of a common world presupposes a common self (Radhakrishnan, 1953). “Objectification,” Bhattacharya (1930, p. 73) explains, “is the self’s creative act of setting itself forth as other while remaining the same.” The act of projection (*vikṣepa*) therefore preserves both unity and plurality—a hallmark of Advaitic ontology where *Brahman* manifests multiplicity without fragmentation (Śaṅkara, *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāṣya*, II.1.14; Dasgupta, 1940).

3.1 Three Levels of Objectivity

Bhattacharya distinguishes three ascending levels of objectivity that correspond to the progressive realization of consciousness (Bhattacharya, 1957, p. 122):

- I. Empirical objectivity, the level of ordinary perception, where external objects appear spatially and temporally distinct from the perceiver.
- II. Reflective objectivity, the level of critical awareness, where the subject recognizes its relation to objects and begins to see experience as a relational act.
- III. Transcendental objectivity, the highest level, where consciousness grasps that both subject and object are its own manifestations.

At the third level, the opposition between knower and known dissolves into pure self-awareness (*ātma-jñāna*), the state of non-duality described in Advaita *Vedānta* (Radhakrishnan, 1953; Rao, 1982). Objectivity here ceases to be confrontation and becomes participation—the world is not alien to the self but a mode of its own self-manifestation. As Bhattacharya’s interpreter Chatterjee (1963) observes, this

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gradation mirrors the journey from empirical cognition (*vyāvahārika jñāna*) to transcendental realization (*paramārthika jñāna*), where the knowing subject awakens to its identity with the known.

3.2 Relation to Western Phenomenology

Bhattacharya's analysis of objectification bears striking affinities with Husserl's doctrine of intentionality and Heidegger's ontology of worldhood. Husserl (1964) held that consciousness is always *consciousness of* something—an intentional directedness toward an object. Bhattacharya accepts this insight but radicalizes it: the “something” toward which consciousness is directed is itself constituted by the self's projection. Objectivity, therefore, is not merely intentional correlation but creative manifestation (Mohanty, 1992). Heidegger's (1962) statement that “the world worlds” resonates with Bhattacharya's idea that consciousness worldifies itself through self-differentiation. As Halbfass (1990) notes, both thinkers transcend subject–object dualism by grounding the world in the dynamic unfolding of being; but whereas Heidegger begins from *Dasein*'s finitude, Bhattacharya begins from *Ātman*'s infinity.

In Bhattacharya's Advaitic-phenomenological synthesis, objectivity is neither an illusion nor a given, but a movement of manifestation. It is the self's effort to realize itself in multiplicity, a process analogous to Hegel's dialectic of self-objectification in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel, 1807/1977). Yet Bhattacharya rejects Hegel's logical determinism: for him, objectification is not a necessity of reason but a spontaneous expression of spiritual freedom (*svatantra-śakti*). “The Absolute,” he implies, “does not unfold because it must, but because it can” (Bhattacharya, 1956, p. 218). This aligns him with the Indian notion of *līlā*—divine play—rather than the European idea of dialectical compulsion (Deutsch, 1973; Raju, 1985).

3.3 Reinterpretation of *Māyā*

A major innovation in Bhattacharya's philosophy is his reinterpretation of *māyā*. Classical Advaita treats *māyā* as ignorance, the source of illusory multiplicity that veils Brahman (*Śaṅkara, Upadeśa Sāhasrī*, 1.3). Bhattacharya, however, transforms *māyā* into a positive creative principle—the power (*śakti*) of manifestation through which the self projects the world without losing its unity (Bhattacharya, 1930). *Māyā* thus becomes *sr̥ṣṭi-śakti*, the energy of creation, not the cause of error. The world is not a mirage but a real appearance (*satya-ābhāsa*)—real as expression, though not as independent existence (Halbfass, 1990). In this light, objectification is the very means through which

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consciousness realizes its latent potentialities, paralleling Sri Aurobindo's (1951) notion that cosmic evolution is the Divine's "self-manifestation through differentiation and return."

3.4 Critique of Kantian Objectivity

Bhattacharya's conception of objectification also marks a decisive break from Kant's critical epistemology. For Kant (1781/1998), knowledge is confined to phenomena structured by the categories of understanding, while the *thing-in-itself* (*Ding an sich*) remains forever unknowable. Bhattacharya rejects this limitation by asserting that "there is no unknowable beyond consciousness, for the real is nothing but the realized self" (1956, p. 47). Since all that appears does so within consciousness, positing an unknowable noumenon is meaningless. Reality is self-realization, not correspondence between mind and thing (Mohanty, 1992). This transforms transcendental idealism into what Raju (1985) calls spiritual realism—an epistemology grounded in the self's ontological primacy. Bhattacharya thus anticipates the later *Neo-Vedāntic idealists* such as Radhakrishnan (1953) and T. R. V. Murti (1955), who similarly identified knowledge with self-manifestation rather than representation.

3.5 Objectivity, Self-Knowledge, and Liberation

In Bhattacharya's schema, objectification is not merely cognitive but existential and soteriological. Through the act of objectification, consciousness becomes aware of itself as finite, limited, and differentiated. Yet this very limitation enables the self to recognize its own infinity. When consciousness realizes that the world of objects is its own projection, objectivity transforms into self-knowledge (*ātma-jñāna*). The dissolution of subject-object duality corresponds to liberation (*mokṣa*), the state in which the self reclaims its identity as pure awareness beyond projection (Bhattacharya, 1956; Rao, 1982). Thus, objectification, though initially a mode of self-alienation, becomes the path of return to the Absolute. Time and objectivity are two aspects of the same creative act—the inner differentiation and outer projection of the same self (Raju, 1985). As the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (6.2.1) declares, "From that Self, verily, arose all this." Bhattacharya's philosophy gives this ancient dictum a phenomenological articulation.

This vision of objectivity as *self-manifestation* also challenges modern materialism and scientific realism, which interpret the world as a mind-independent totality. For Bhattacharya, such realism confuses the derivative for the original: what is taken as external nature is the crystallization of consciousness's own activity (Bhattacharya, 1930). Yet he does not deny the pragmatic validity of the

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empirical world; rather, he situates it within a hierarchy of realities. The empirical (*vyāvahārika*) is real for practical life, but its reality depends upon the transcendental (*paramārthika*), the self's self-awareness (Śaṅkara, *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāṣya*, II.1.14). Hence, true objectivity culminates not in opposition but in integration, where the finite mirrors the infinite.

Bhattacharya's philosophy of objectivity completes his doctrine of time. Just as time expresses the inner differentiation of consciousness, objectivity expresses its outer manifestation. The two together constitute a comprehensive ontology of manifestation in which consciousness, through self-division and projection, realizes its own fullness. In rejecting both naïve realism and subjective idealism, Bhattacharya establishes a spiritual phenomenology that integrates epistemology, ontology, and soteriology. Objectification is not illusion but creative revelation—the means through which the self becomes world and the world becomes self. In the words of Bhattacharya (1956, p. 219), "The object is the self's mirror; to know it truly is to know oneself."

IV. Integration of Time and Objectivity

Time and objectivity, in Bhattacharya's system, are not independent categories but complementary expressions of consciousness. Time represents the inward movement of differentiation, while objectivity embodies the outward movement of manifestation. Together, they form the dialectic of self-expression (*svaparakāśatā*)—the rhythm through which consciousness unfolds itself as world and experience (Mohanty, 1992; Raju, 1985). In the phenomenological field, every object appears within temporal awareness—as "now," "before," or "after." Conversely, time itself is apprehended only through the perception of change in objects. This mutual implication demonstrates that objectivity presupposes temporality, and temporality presupposes objectivity (Bhattacharya, 1956). Bhattacharya thereby anticipates the co-constitutive relationship between time and world later articulated by Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012).

This interrelation also reflects the Advaitic dialectic of manifestation and reabsorption (*sr̥ṣṭi-pralaya*). Consciousness differentiates itself into temporal and objective forms, experiences them, and finally reabsorbs them in self-realization. Time marks the unfolding, objectivity the unfolding's visibility. The entire process is cyclic and self-reflexive, not linear (Dasgupta, 1955; Rao, 1982). Bhattacharya's insight dissolves the dualism of subject-object by grounding both in the same self-luminous consciousness. In experiencing time, the self becomes aware of its movement; in experiencing objects, it becomes aware of its manifestation. Recognizing both as self-projections leads to non-dual

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realization (*advaita-jñāna*). Hence, the self transcends both temporal limitation and objective alienation, realizing itself as timeless subjectivity (Radhakrishnan, 1953; Halbfass, 1990).

Moreover, Bhattacharya's synthesis provides a conceptual bridge between Indian and Western thought. His integration of temporality and objectivity as self-manifestations anticipates existential phenomenology's concern with being-in-time (Heidegger, 1962) while preserving the Advaitic affirmation of unity-in-difference. As J. N. Mohanty (1992) notes, Bhattacharya's philosophy "renders time not as an empirical sequence but as the self's own creative pulsation" (p. 119). In the modern context, Bhattacharya's conception resists both scientific reductionism and psychological relativism. By situating temporality and objectivity within consciousness, he safeguards human experience from mechanistic objectification—a theme remarkably relevant to the age of artificial intelligence and technological mediation. His emphasis on the self as freedom provides a philosophical foundation for understanding consciousness not as computation but as self-originating creativity (Rao, 1998).

Conclusion

K. C. Bhattacharya's philosophy of time and objectivity stands as one of the most sophisticated syntheses of Indian and Western thought in the twentieth century. He successfully reinterprets Advaita *Vedānta* in a phenomenological idiom, showing that consciousness is not static but dynamically self-expressive. By identifying time as the inward differentiation of consciousness and objectivity as its outward manifestation, he articulates a unified ontology of experience. Nevertheless, critics have observed that Bhattacharya's idealism risks over-intellectualizing experience, reducing empirical reality to mere projection (Chatterjee, 1963). Daya Krishna (1972) cautions that such spiritual idealism must be balanced by acknowledging the autonomy of the empirical world. Yet Bhattacharya's nuanced concept of objectification as participation mitigates this critique—his world is not illusionary but a living expression of selfhood (Raju, 1985). His insights resonate strongly with later phenomenological and existential developments. Like Husserl, he views consciousness as intentional; like Heidegger, he interprets time as constitutive of being; but unlike both, he grounds temporality and objectivity in the absolute self (*ātman*) rather than in finite existence. Thus, Bhattacharya offers a unique spiritual phenomenology, where the structures of experience are modes of the self's divine creativity (Mohanty, 1992; Halbfass, 1990).

In conclusion, Bhattacharya's vision dissolves the rigid opposition between subject and object, mind and matter, time and eternity. Time is the self's inward dynamism; objectivity is its outward

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creativity. To transcend both is to awaken to the timeless consciousness that manifests them. In a world increasingly dominated by externalized technologies and objectified knowledge, Bhattacharya's reminder is crucial: the true ground of reality is the self-luminous freedom of consciousness itself.

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