

Preface

Brain, Self, and Consciousness: Explaining the Conspiracy of Experience brings to its readers the view that to unravel what experience entails, is to place brain, self, and consciousness in an integral space. I take no shame or express less confidence in maintaining the absolute existence of the self. Perhaps it is my lifelong interest in, and commitment to, the Vedantic tradition that inspires me in this book to critically view the no-self, fleeting self and such nihilist and reductionist views about the self. While I am aware of the slippery ground of dualism that gets precipitated when the body-sense and self-sense are presented as discrete senses, I find such a distinction is inevitable to bring in the idea of the core-self that I propose in this book.

Brain, Self, and Consciousness argues that the central issue in brain studies is to explain the unity, continuity, and adherence of our experience, whether it is sensory or mental. To address such a unity is to understand the challenges that the brain and the self give each other. I use a cross-disciplinary framework guided by three disciplines, neuropsychiatry, philosophy, and psychology, to present my arguments. I hope this book will be a trailblazer in inviting philosophers, neurologists, and neuropsychiatrists to engage in a discussion on the duo of the brain and the self as the final frontier to understand the greatest and profoundest riddle of human existence, namely consciousness.

The primary reason for me to write this book was that only few books are available in the academic world that focus on a discussion on the concept of the self in the context of brain sciences and consciousness studies. And there are even fewer books that attempt a distinction between the body and self senses. I am hoping that this book will inspire scholars and students of philosophy, psychology and biology to extend the scope of the concepts of the body-sense and the self-sense and in the process develop the idea of the core-self.

The first notes that went into the shaping of this book were prepared during my visit as Shivdasani Fellow to the *Oxford Center for Hindu Studies* (Oxford University) in 2009. I am thankful to the air and space of Oxford and OCHS that exuded a charm and quietude that helped me start conceiving the ideas in this book. The time I spent in the picturesque environment of the *Indian Institute of Advanced Study* in Shimla as a Visiting Professor in 2013 helped me to go through the final manuscript with a fine-tooth comb. The availability of resources in plenty

for reference is always a scholar's dream. I cannot thank enough the Library of the Institute where I work, the *National Institute of Advanced Studies* (NIAS), in Bangalore for making sure that I am always supported with easy access to a variety of reference material both online and print. Being in an institute like NIAS that favors interdisciplinary thinking and open questioning encouraged me to go beyond disciplinary confines in my thinking. If I was not a member of the NIAS family, perhaps this book would not have been possible!

The *Sambohdh Center for Living Values* (SCLV) in Bangalore bestowed me with the idea of organicity of life through its mission and community work initiatives. By being a part of the Center I got to learn to be sensitive to life in much finer ways and discover untold joy every time a fruit tree bloomed or a bird nest was discovered. SCLV taught me that to discover the self is to listen to the subtle call of Mother Nature.

Finally, I record my heartfelt gratitude to my spiritual Guru and mentor Swami Bodhananda who introduced to me the concept of consciousness for my Research 25 years back. Without his vision on the centrality of the self and the ontological primacy of consciousness my study would have lacked an anchor. I am indebted to you, Gurudev, for helping me gain clarity in my thinking and humility in my beliefs. I dedicate *Brain, Self, and Consciousness* to you.



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