

### 3. Appearances are Deceptive

3.1 The difference between what is and what we see

3.2 The concept and the nature of 'sat'/real

3.3 The difference between 'permanent' and 'impermanent'

3.4 Theistic and atheistic philosophy



Flower as seen by an insect    Flower as seen by human

#### Preface

The title of this chapter is a proverb. What do proverbs have to do here, you may think. This is a book of philosophy, not of language. But have you ever noticed how expressive even the simplest proverbs and idioms are? The wisdom of the generations in a culture transmutes into colloquial proverbs, phrases. 'Appearances are deceptive', 'All that glitters is not gold', 'Distance lends enchantment to the view'... all these proverbs warn us against the mistake of taking things for what they outwardly appear to be. Reality of things can be far removed from appearances.

#### Let's write!

Make a list of all the proverbs you know. Don't forget to write the metaphorical meaning hidden inside them.

To explain it in philosophical terms - it is true that our five senses inform us about the objects of the world, their shapes, structures, properties and interrelationships. But this knowledge isn't absolutely reliable. For several reasons, the world appears to be different than what it really is. All of us experience this one way or the other. So, the traditional wisdom instructs us in not believing anything blindly. We try to keep this in mind yet at times we are duped.

#### Shukтирајат Nyaya, Rajjusarpa Nyaya

In Indian philosophy, especially in Advaita darshana, two examples related to the proverb 'appearances are deceptive' are very famous. One is shukтирајат nyaya and the other is rajjusarpa nyaya. (The word 'nyaya' is used here to mean an analogy). Shukti is shell, rajat is silver. A shell shining in the sunlight if viewed from a distance, looks like a piece of silver; but the closer view reveals that it is a

shell. Similarly, if we see a rajju, i.e. a rope lying wishy-washy from a distance, we get scared thinking that it is a snake. A little more observation makes us realize that actually it is not a snake. What both these examples tell us is that we get deceived due to the similarities between what 'seems/appears to be the case' and what 'is the case'. The shimmer of the shell is like silver, while the wishy-washy

shape of the rope is like a snake. These examples are given in the Indian tradition in order to explain the fact that the true nature of the world cannot

be understood easily and that makes the attainment of the knowledge of the world, difficult.

If possible, arrange magic show in the class and introduce this topic to the other students.

Freak limbs of a tree sometimes frighten us in the dark, sometimes we try to smell artificial flowers taking them to be real. In short, it becomes urgent for us to be able to distinguish between illusion and reality.

### Let's discuss!

Discuss the examples of 'deceptive appearances' from day to day life.

### 3.1 The difference between 'what is' and 'what we see'

Let's get to the roots of the questions. For philosophers it is very much important to know how to make this distinction, and on what basis. Metaphysics studies reality or 'sat' as we saw in the last chapter. How to differentiate between the 'real' and what merely appears to be 'real' is crucial question therein. Layman does try to make such a differentiation. Do you remember the children's tale where a furious lion pounces on his own reflection thinking it to be his rival and falls in the well? We do not confuse reflection with reality. The existence of shadows and reflections depends on the objects that they are shadows or reflections of, and also on mirrors, the light or a water surface. But the object exists despite the existence of its shadow or reflection.

### Let's talk!

Collect and narrate the stories of confusion between illusion and reality. For example, The tale of Birbala where he detects the real garland from two exactly identical garlands.

All of us have dreams in our sleep. But we do not realize it to be a dream as and when we are dreaming. All that takes place in a dream appears true while we dream. We get scared or overjoyed in dreams, sometimes we cry as well. It is only after waking up that we know it was only a dream. Even in waking life we sometimes have illusions or hallucinations of things that don't exist.

### Let's write!

Describe an experience from your life which was later proved to be an illusion. Conduct a discussion in class.



The above discussion demonstrates that the truthfulness of our experience cannot be established until we examine it. Our experience of the world is the only footing we have for making a distinction between 'real' and 'unreal'. The metaphysical 'What is?' is invariably connected with the epistemological 'How do we know?'

### 3.2 The concept and the nature of 'Sat'/real

The experience that informs us on 'what is' is always subjective, meaning it changes to various degrees from person to person. Reaching college early in the morning, some find the weather cold, some find it hot whereas some find it pleasant! While having a sweetmeat, some find the taste sickly sweet, some find it perfectly fine and some find it insipid.

The main reason behind this is the differences in psychosomatic features of human beings. Specific situational factors affect our experiences too. There are internal factors as well. Just as sound travelling farther in winters due to high atmospheric density is an instance of external factor, the malfunction of our olfactory system when we catch common cold is an instance of internal factor. An experience is shaped by the complex interaction amongst factors such as a person's psychosomatic state and external circumstances. These factors change constantly. An experience cannot be called 'real' or 'unreal' until we thoroughly investigate it.

Through such investigations into experience philosophers reached the fact. Although the experience changes from

person to person, the object of experience does not change according to the changing 'experiencer'. It remains as it is. Its existence, nature, qualities are not dependent on experience. They are not affected by whether and how they are experienced. So, the existence and nature of an object is objective even though its experience is subjective. That alone is real, actual. From this fact it can be inferred that the objects or events experienced by one person only cannot possibly be real. The things that we experience in dreams and illusions fall under this category because their existence is limited to the single person only. Though such experiences are 'real' for the experiencer, their content does not exist really.

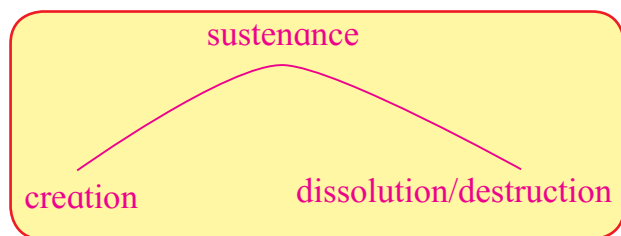
Going little further in this direction we come to ask if it is possible that 'real' has a changing nature and why does it change if at all it does? Distant sounds are heard only in winter and not in summertime. This fact applies equally to all persons with a normal hearing ability. The varying experience in changing seasons is conditional; it changes according to changing conditions. The properties of objects are similarly altered by change of conditions. The solid, liquid or gaseous state of water is determined by its temperature. These states of water are conditional. But under all conditions water is constituted by two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen. Therefore, it is the true nature, 'sat-svarupa' of water.  $H_2O$  is the permanent nature, of water. The changing states at various temperatures are impermanent transient. Both the 'permanent' and 'impermanent' states are 'real' because they are objective.

The sensation of taste, colour, odour and touch of water depends to a considerable extent on the experiencer. Water may taste sour to a person with fever, but the sourness is ‘unreal’ since it does not belong to the water.

### Let's write!

Describe a few experiences that vary from person to person and situation to situation.

The principle elucidated by the case of water applies to everything that can be perceived by the senses. The things, their states and qualities keep changing. Transience is their nature as it were. Creation, Sustenance and Dissolution are three basic forms of transformation.



Organisms are born, they grow, and they perish. Things naturally materialize and disintegrate due to changes in the basic element. Humans create stuff which breaks down some day or the other. The process of transformation ceaselessly goes on. But some philosophers thought that there must be an eternal principle which lies beyond this everlasting process of rise and fall of beings. They reckoned this principle to be eternal, permanent and constant. Getting back to the case of water, its original composition does not change with a change of states. The structure and existence of atoms that form a molecule of water is even more fundamental and precursory. These atoms retain their original form upon break-up

and can fuse with other atoms to constitute other molecules.

Since the ancient times metaphysicians laboured to unveil the eternal principle(s) underlying the transient world.

### Chhandogye Upanishad Khand 6

Yatha somya ekena mrut-pindena sarvam mrunmayan vidhyatam syat |  
Vachaarambhanam vikaro naam dheyam mruttika ityevsatyam ||

Shwetaketu's father said, "Dear boy, consider this example: Through a single clod of clay, all that is made of clay becomes known; for being based upon words any change to the clay is but name and the clay alone is real." Shwetaketu's father is explaining to him, do not stop merely at appearances. Ornaments like ring, bangle, necklace etc. are different but they all are made up of gold, instead of understanding these different ornaments try to understand 'Gold'. There are different tools like axe, knife etc. they all are made up of iron, instead of understanding these different tools try to understand the basic element 'Iron'.

### Let's do!

Form groups. Set a table for each group.

Table 1 - earthen pots / objects

Table 2 - metallic utensils / objects

Table 3 - objects made of paper

Table 4 - wooden objects,

Table 5 - objects made of plastic

Students will observe the objects in group and discuss the fundamental element.



Some philosophers proposed that the existence of that which changes depends on that which does not change and that alone is 'sat' / real. Change can't ultimately be real; it takes place only on a superficial level. But some other philosophers maintained that Change is the actual nature of the world. They dismissed the notion of an eternal underlying, unalterable principle. They believe that 'change is the only permanent principle / law of the world'.

### Number of fundamental principles

| Theories       | Philosophers/Darshana                        |
|----------------|--|
| 1) Monism -    | Paramenides, Advaita Vedanta, Spinoza, Hegel |
| 2) Dualism -   | Sankhya Darshan, Descartes                   |
| 3) Pluralism - | Empedocles, Jain Darshan, Leibniz            |

### 3.3 The difference between permanence and impermanence

We experience the relationship between permanence and impermanence in connection with our own existence. All of us firmly believe that we are the same person from the moment we were born up to this moment now.

But we don't mean to say that we are the same as 'the way we appear' in our childhood photographs. We undergo many physical, mental, intellectual changes. Yet we are dead sure that it is the same 'us/me' that has gone through these tides of change. Even while remarking 'I am not the old me anymore' we want to affirm that 'it's the same me but I have changed'.

We tend to believe that the changes that take place due to several reasons is my impermanent nature and the 'I' in relation to which the change occur is a never-changing permanent existence. But there's nothing in us that does not change, that does not come to an end. Our sentiments, wishes, thoughts, instincts, desires too change.

#### Let's talk!

Discuss 'the changes that have occurred in me' in class.

Where's the fundamental, permanent principle then? What is it called? Philosophers have called it 'Atma' (soul). Some philosophical systems sought to resolve the conflict of permanence-impermanence by putting forth the idea that; that which takes birth, that which dies and decays is body and that which is not subject to birth, that which is changeless, immortal, in other words that which is permanent is the soul. The streams of thought that rejected the notion of a constant fundamental principle obviously rebuffed the idea of soul, whereas those who believed permanent alone to be real declined that body is the ultimate reality. Many streams of philosophization that emerged in Indian and western world concerned themselves with diverse pairings between real-unreal and permanent-impermanent and the way they can be reconciliated. These endeavours shed light on other issues. What might be the number of these intransient, indestructible principles? What might they be like?

These two interrelated questions are central to metaphysics. To give you an

example, the pre-Socratic philosopher Thales proposed that water is the fundamental element; that the world originates from water. Now with this one would have to assume that fire too is made up of water. But in actuality water extinguishes fire, water destroys fire. How could this be settled? One has to carefully meditate on the nature and properties of an element while declaring it to be the only fundamental element responsible for the creation of the world.

A major question that arises here is, how can things which are in stark contrast with the element be formed of it?

All existing things of the world are loosely categorized into living and non-living things. What category does the fundamental element fall into? Philosophers have to explain how it produces the entities of the other category if it belongs to one of the categories. If 'consciousness' is considered a sign of life then those who regard the fundamental element to be 'matter' /non-living must account for how matter creates consciousness. Those who say that the fundamental element is consciousness, have to make clear how 'matter' is formed out of 'consciousness'. Some schools of philosophy propagate that the world is made of both conscious and material fundamental elements. Some

state that the world came into existence from interactions between multiple physical elements.

### Let's talk!

Conduct a discussion on permanence-impermanence matter-consciousness form of the fundamental element using Jurisprudential Model. In this model two students present their views in front of the class. Two other students present alternative views. 3 to 7 students become the jury. They hear the arguments with the whole class like in court of law and give judgment in the end.

One more important question pertaining to this is, are the fundamental elements static or dynamic? If they are responsible for the creation of the world then there must be some changes, constructions, deconstructions happening. Nothing can change without motion. Motion is a pre-requisite to change. A lot of times we perceive the changes that are caused by motion without perceiving motion itself. We can experience a volcanic eruption or tsunami waves but we can't possibly realize the movements that take place in earth's interior, movements that are responsible for these phenomena. The phenomena cannot occur without the dynamics.

## Nature of Reality

### Theory

### Philosopher/Darshan

- 1) Idealism - Vedanta darshan, Berkeley, Hegel, Bradley
- 2) Materialism - Charvaka darshan, democrites, Marxism
- 3) Realism - Jaina, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Purva Mimamsa, Locke, Russell, Moore

One more question follows - Are the fundamental elements dynamic by nature or are they accelerated by someone? It is a quality of animals to be able to move without any outside force. Things have to be set to motion. Explanation of motion and changes caused by motion is very much necessary for any theory regarding the nature of the world. Philosophers who believe the fundamental elements to be dynamic proclaim that various worldly entities come into existence due to the movements, the coming together and falling apart of the elements. According to the philosophers, these movements follow the laws of physics, they aren't driven by a purpose and they create all beings.



**Different causes of Motion**

The shifting shapes of clouds in the sky are a result of the movement of vapour, gusts of wind and the direction of the wind. Clouds cannot consciously 'decide' to assume the form of a plumage or a flower, nor are they crafted by anyone else.

### **Let's do!**

Observe the clouds in the sky at the time of sunset.

### **3.4 Theistic and atheistic philosophy**

Some thinkers believe that physical elements (matter) aren't inherently dynamic. They have to be set into motion from the outside, and they are thus moved by an omnipotent, omniscient God. According to this line of thought an all-powerful God intends to create the world out of these fundamental elements. He has an intention behind the creation of the world which we may or may not fathom. All things exist as long as God wishes them to exist. They cease to be when God does not want them to be. God is the creator-governor of the infinite forms, their relations to each other and the order of the world. Not all streams of philosophy believe in the existence of God though.

Indian and western traditions consist of both Theistic and atheistic philosophies. However they don't have a consensus over the nature and function of God. We looked at the notion of God that creates the world by amalgamating the already existing fundamental elements. Some philosophies think that God created the world from a void, a null. Nothing existed before God created the world. The world is wholly a divine creation. Human beings deem themselves a creator too and in a limited sense they are. But their creation is merely a renovated usage of that which already exists. They do not have the power to create that which does not exist. God has that power.

It is a speciality of philosophy to dig deep into every question it encounters. Everyone knows that ‘appearances are deceptive’ but the philosophical journey which begins in this awareness takes us to the fundamental metaphysical question - ‘What is?’ The question is not as brief as it seems. It accommodates many hidden questions such as ‘How much is it?’, ‘Where is it?’, ‘How is it?’, ‘How is

it interconnected?’ Every question points at newer questions. Grappling with such questions is a healthy exercise for our intellect, it strengthens our mental faculties. You must have grasped that this equips our brain to face new challenges. There is a great intellectual joy in pursuing new questions, looking for answers. You are intelligent indeed - so, ready to embrace new challenges?

- Shukrirajat - शुक्तिरजत
- Rajjusarpa - रज्जूसर्प
- Sat - सत्
- Asat - असत्
- Nitya - नित्य
- Anitya - अनित्य
- Darshan - दर्शन
- Vedant - वेदांत
- Charvaka - चार्वाक
- Jaina - जैन
- Nyaya - न्याय
- Vaisheshika - वैशेषिक
- Sankhya - सांख्य
- Purva Mimamsa - पूर्वमीमांसा

## EXERCISE

### Q.1 Fill in the blanks choosing the correct option from the bracket.

- (a) ..... is the branch of philosophy that studies reality. (Epistemology, Metaphysics, Ethics)
- (b) ..... is the nature of objects that can be experienced by senses. (illusion, sustenance, transience)
- (c) Dreams and illusions are .....  
(subjective, intersubjective, objective)

### Q.2 Take the odd word/pair out.

- (a) creation, sustenance, dissolution, permanence
- (b) static-dynamic  
permanent-impermanent

knowledge-information

real-unreal

### Q.3 Write the philosophical terms used to describe the following.

- (a) The stream of philosophy which believes that there is one ultimate reality (sat)
- (b) The stream of philosophy which believes that there are two ultimate realities
- (c) The stream of philosophy which believes that there are many ultimate realities.
- (d) The stream of thought which believes God to be the creator of the world
- (e) The stream of thought which rejects the existence of God



- (f) The stream of philosophy which believes the ultimate truth to be consciousness
- (g) The stream of philosophy which believes the ultimate truth to be matter

**Q.4 Distinguish between.**

- (a) Monism, Dualism, Pluralism
- (b) Idealism, Materialism

**Q.5 Write a short note on the following.**

- (a) Subjective experience
- (b) Theism
- (c) Problem of motion

**Q.6 Write the answers in 20-25 words.**

- (a) What is objectivity?
- (b) What are the concerns in Metaphysics?
- (c) Explain Rajjūsarpa nyaya.

- (d) Explain the relationship between motion and change.

**Q.7 Explain the following statements with examples.**

- (a) The existence of an object is objective even though its experience is subjective.
- (b) Appearances are deceptive.
- (c) Motion is a pre-condition to change.

**Q.8 Discuss the nitya-anitya problem in Metaphysics.**

**Q.9 Discuss various philosophical perspectives to the ultimate reality.**

**Activity**

Discuss the difference between 'what is' and 'what appears to be' with a friend who hasn't opted for Philosophy.

