

3. Who am I?... What am I?

- **Introduction**
- **Indian philosophy**
- **Western philosophy**
- **Scientific perspective**

Introduction

We seldom or in fact never ask ourselves, 'who am I?'. When we come across a stranger, an obvious question that comes to our mind is, 'who is this person?' We may even ask "May I know who are you?" The other person may also ask the same question in return. Neither of us get baffled by these questions! Rather we introduce ourselves to each-other. This introduction can be a lengthy one including name, place, education, occupation, likes, dislikes, hobbies etc. or it can be a short one by mentioning just the name. We usually carry a college identity card or even the card. This identity card provides specific information about us and also a photograph.



This identity is necessary and even sufficient in order to get access to certain places or for the bank and government office related work. However, just a formal introduction is generally not enough for the

relationship between two individuals. For example, a relation develops between fellow travelers. In addition to the formal introduction, other aspects such as understanding each-other's personalities, opinions, habits, manner of speaking etc. are also included in this relationship.

Many a times we find that even in a short meeting we learn a lot about a person. At times we face such situations where we doubt whether we have really understood the person we have known for years. Moreover, we may sometimes even surprise ourselves by what we speak and the way we behave. We say, 'I never thought I would do that or behave like that'. If that is so, doesn't it mean that we have not really been acquainted with ourselves? We do not know ourselves well. We may be able to respond to the question 'who are you?' in such a way that the other person understands, accepts and is satisfied with the given information. Nevertheless, this information that is provided to the person is in a way superficial. That is because we have never asked the question 'who am I?' to ourselves and have never tried to find its answer.

We all know that grammatically the 'I' is a first person, singular pronoun. Every individual uses the pronoun 'I' while talking about oneself. That means everyone's 'I' is different from the others 'I', it is unique. At times we say 'I am not like you to speak/act/behave in this way'. Our sense of 'I' is our 'distinctness' from others. The information provided in any identity certificate mostly introduces us on the basis of caste, religion, age, gender, class and education. It gives a fair idea of our social, cultural and economic status. There may be many people who have the same economic and social status. That means according to the above mentioned

criteria we may be similar to many other people. However, our behaviour, our way of thinking, our habits, our emotions, opinions, values, thoughts are mostly personal or private in nature. The 'I' that we consider as different from others is a unique blend of all these different aspects. Many of these aspects are changeable and they keep changing.



Let's do!

Prepare a collage of your photographs since childhood. Gather all the collages and exhibit them in the class.

We, however, believe that all these changes have taken place in 'me'. According to the metaphysical terminology, 'I' is a substance in relationship with which these changes occur.



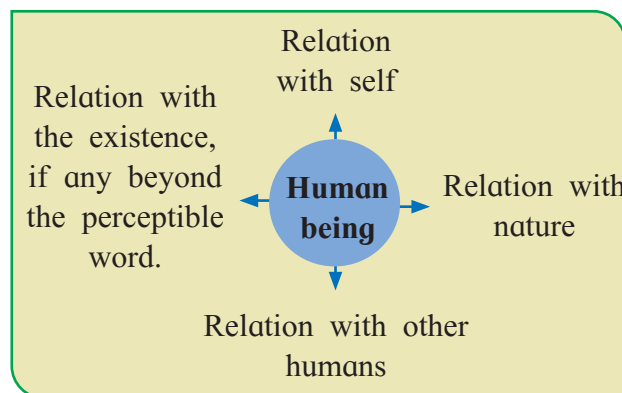
Let's do!

Make a concept map in a group that explains the nature of 'I'.

If the 'I' is considered as a substance, then it obviously turns out to be independent and self-existent. But, basically is there any such substance? If yes, then what is its nature? Matter or consciousness? Many such questions arise in philosophy. Fundamentally, the question "Who am I" or "कोऽहम्" does not refer to any specific individual 'I'. As we have seen above, each person's 'I' is distinct from others and is one of its kind. It is obvious that at that level of distinctness, a general answer to the question 'who am I' is not possible. But philosophy is interested in knowing that 'I' which is commonly found in all human beings. In a sense, it is the 'I' that represents the mankind. It is the 'human self'. So, the answer to the question, who am I? introduces man to one's own self.

As we have seen in the previous year,

the four relations that philosophy primarily studies, also includes man's relation to one self.



This study is essential to live a good life. In order to know who we are, what we are, our abilities and limitations, what we want, what we do not want, what we should do, what we should not do, we must first understand what we exactly are when we say we are 'human beings'. This question has great importance in metaphysics, a branch of philosophy. The responses given to this question directly affect the problems and concepts of other branches like: epistemology, ethics, aesthetics etc. Contemplations on self are found in both - the Indian and the Western traditions.

Indian Philosophy

Charvaka Darshana

We know that the Charvakas are materialists. They obviously reject the existence of consciousness or non-material substance independent of material body. This does not mean that they deny the existence of consciousness or awareness. As long as we are alive, our body is animated. According to Charvakas, this conscious body itself is the 'I' and that is their answer to the question 'Who am I'. In other words, Charvaka deny the existence of soul.

It is generally believed that the 'soul' is the consciousness that does not perish with the body. Idealist and realist philosophers believe in such an independent existence of

consciousness. However, the materialists assert that the consciousness necessarily emerges from matter/material substance only. The obvious question that is asked here is, if the material substance is fundamentally devoid of consciousness how can consciousness emerge from it? Charvakas answer this with the help of some analogies. Just as the combination of green betel leaf, brown betel nut and white lime if chewed together produces red color which does not exist in any one of them; peculiar combination of the various material elements produces consciousness. Charvakas define soul as ‘the conscious living body’. They would always state “Chaitanya vishishta deha eva atma”. As a result, they explicitly rejected all the then existing philosophical views and common beliefs, that the soul is immortal, that it goes to heaven or hell after death or that it takes re-birth and enters a new body etc. This view of Charvaka is known as ‘Bhutchaitanyavada’ or ‘Dehatmavada’. This metaphysical standpoint of Charvakas is logically consistent

with their epistemological perspective which accepts perception as the only valid source of knowledge. We shall study their epistemology in the coming chapter.

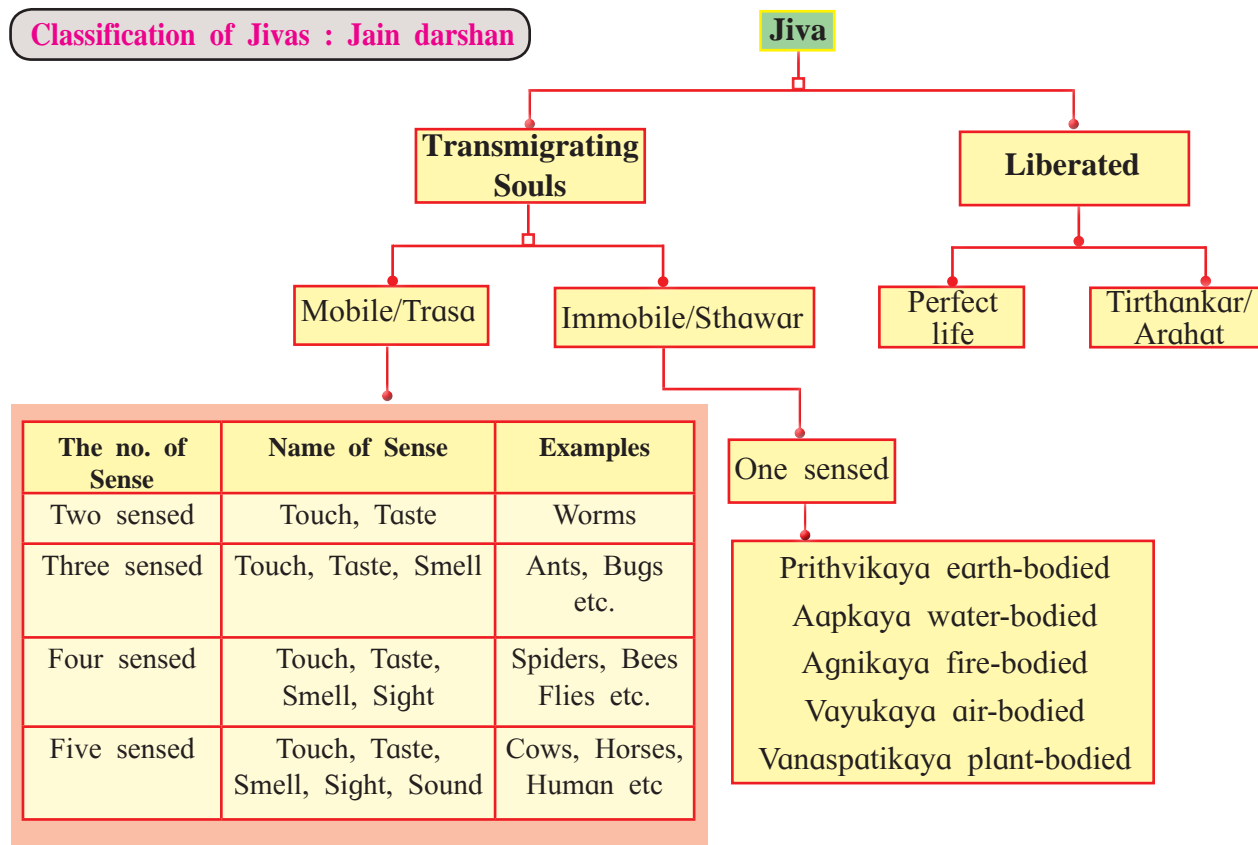
Let's search!

Find out the examples suggesting ‘Consciousness emerges from the material substance devoid of consciousness’.

Jaina Darshan

Jainas are realists; they believe that every living organism is a combination of two independent substances viz., the material body and consciousness. According to Jainas, not only animals, but plants and even dust particles also have souls; however, the level of awareness or consciousness differs. Jainas have systematically classified the jivas (living beings) on the basis of following criteria: their ability to move, the number of senses they use to experience the world, whether they are liberated or bound.

Classification of Jivas : Jain darshan



Although there are such differences in the consciousness level of different jivas; every jiva is of the nature of consciousness. This jiva itself is the knower, the doer and the enjoyer. Every jiva has the potentiality to attain infinite knowledge, faith, power and bliss. However, there are obstacles that need to be overcome. The material body, to which the jiva is connected, causes these obstacles. The material body is formed from the minutest particles of matter, which are known as 'Pudgala' in Jaina darshana. 'Pudgala' means the particles or atoms that can be combined or disintegrated. The passions and desires present in jiva or soul originating from their past karmas, attract peculiar particles towards the jivas taking a particular form. Consciousness exists in each of these particles of the body. The body, the senses, the mind are all considered to be the obstacles in the path towards the perfection of the soul. Until this perfection is achieved, the soul remains bound with matter. It continues to move from one body to another after the death of the earlier one. Jainas believe that faith, knowledge and character are essential in order to get liberated from the cycle of re-birth. The Jaina answer to the question 'who am I' is that, I am the soul that can attain infinite wisdom, faith, power and bliss on liberation.

Buddha Darshana

Other than Charvaka, the school that rejects the existence of soul in the Indian tradition is Buddhism. Their reasons behind this are much different from those of the Charvakas. We have seen that Buddhism does not believe in any kind of permanent or eternal substance. They believe that impermanence is the essential nature of Sat/Reality. With reference to the 'I' or 'Self' this position implies that the 'self' is constantly changing. There is nothing in us which is constant from birth to death. We are different every moment. But we are not aware of this change that takes place from moment to

moment. We do change, but it does not mean that every moment we become a completely different person. Many a times when friends meet after a long time they say, 'You look just the same; you have not changed a bit.' The experiences and memories that we have gathered since our childhood make us believe that we are the same person; it is the same 'me'. If we are constantly changing, then why do we experience constancy or identity?

The answer of the Buddhists is that, what we experience is a kind of continuum. However, continuity is not eternality or permanence. If we take a pot of oil and pour it slowly, we see a continuous stream of oil. But in reality it consists of several drops. Due to the succession of these drops we do not see that they are distinct. Every moment a new drop is poured out of the glass but we look at them as a single constant flow. Same is the case with our existence. It is made up of several changing constituents. There is no constituent or substance which is present throughout. The arrangement of these constituents keeps changing; but their continuum is maintained, since there is no interruption. As a result, we start feeling that there is some never-changing, permanent principle in us. To clarify this further, Buddhists give an example of the flame of an oil lamp. The flame that burns in the lamp is different every moment, since every moment a different drop of oil burns along with a different particle of the wick using the oxygen in the air. But due to the rapid succession and continuity we experience it as one and the same flame. Similarly, our existence is composed of five components according to Buddhism.



Let's Talk!

Discuss with your classmates the continuity in change and the experience of constancy it gives.

Sankhya Darshana

According to the Sankhya, 'self' means soul. It is completely different from the body, mind and intellect. The self is the purusha while the body, mind and intellect etc. are prakriti. In human beings both elements exist together. Generally, we identify ourselves with our body. We have also seen that Charvakas too believe so. Sankhya, however,

propound that to identify the body with the 'self' is ignorance. Our self is in fact our soul. Consciousness is the very nature of the soul. It never changes or perishes. It has no joys and sorrows. It does not perform any action. Change, activity, pleasure and pain, desire and aversion, all these are present in the body and mind, meaning these are thus the attributes of prakriti.

Panchaskandha (five aggregates):

- 1) **Rupa skandha** : physical body or material form
- 2) **Vedana skandha** : feelings of pleasure, pain and indifference
- 3) **Sandhya skandha** : giving a specific name to that experiences
- 4) **Sanskara skandha** : after naming the reawakening of the past impressions related to it
- 5) **Vidnyana skandha** : consciousness of an object generated through sense-experience

Rupaskandha is material while the remaining four skandhas pertain to mind. 'Self' does not refer to any soul, individual or cosmic. Actually collection of the five aggregates is only a named as 'Self'. In order to explain this view better we can refer to the dialogue between King Milinda and the Buddhist monk Nagasena.

Milinda : What is your name sir.....?

Nagasena : I am Nagasena. I am only called that way, but there is no such thing as 'Nagasena'.

Milinda : If there is no 'Nagasena', then who is the one that prays, who puts on certain robes, who eats, stays, follows morality, is in meditative state and attains nirvana? There is no merit, demerit, there is no doer and there is no one who performs meritorious or sinful acts, there are no consequences or fruits of good and bad deeds. Then is Nagasena merely the

name given to the hair that grows on body...?

Nagasena : 'I did not say that, Oh king'

Milinda : Then is Nagasena either the nails or teeth or skin or flesh or nervous system or brain any one of these or all of these?

Nagasena rejects all these possibilities.

Milinda : Then is Nagasena the collection of all the aggregates?

Nagasena : No, Oh king.

Milinda : Is there anything in Nagasena apart from these skandas?

Nagasena answered this question negative and then said,

Nagasena : Oh King, have you come walking or in a chariot...?

Milinda : "In a Chariot."

Nagasena : Then please explain what is a chariot. Is the chariot the spokes, axle, the chassis or carried? Of course not. Is the chariot then a combination of all of these? No it is not. Is it something apart from all of these? Nay, not so. But that which is made from the combination of all these parts is called 'Chariot'. That means chariot is not any permanent substance. It is the combination of all these elements and commonly known by this name. Just as chariot is not a permanent object, similarly soul is not a permanent object. The collection of the five aggregates is called 'Soul' or 'Self'.



Even though the self is not the doer or the enjoyer, it is the knower. Everything that manifests from prakriti can be an object of knowledge, but the purusha who exists independent of prakriti can never be the object of knowledge. Everyone's self is different. It does not perish with the body. According to the Sankhyas, we are not the changing, perishable bodies; rather, our true nature is an immortal soul which is pure consciousness, that is what we truly are.

Advaita Vedanta

Since the Jaina and Sankhya schools of Indian philosophy are not materialists, they accept the independent existence of self, but at the same time they do not deny the existence of matter. The Advaita Vedanta darshana is essentially Idealist; hence it accepts the existence of self only and rejects the existence of material substance. Similarly, being monist, it does not accept the plurality of selves like the Sankhyas. We have studied that, for Advaita Vedanta, Brahman is the one and only reality. What we understand as 'Soul' is Brahman itself. The answer to the question 'who am I?' ('कोऽहम्?') is, 'I am Brahman'. Just like Brahman I am without any attributes, formless, eternal, indestructible, non-moving and never changing. It is only because of the ignorance that we identify our self with the body and distinguish our self

from others. It is true that our action and behaviour at practical level is in accordance with this belief. However, Advaita propounds that when we attain the knowledge of self that is the knowledge of Brahman, we experience ourselves as the all-pervading pure consciousness.



Let's do!

Present a debate following the method of 'vaad sabha' between the materialistic and the spiritualistic positions regarding the soul.

Western philosophy

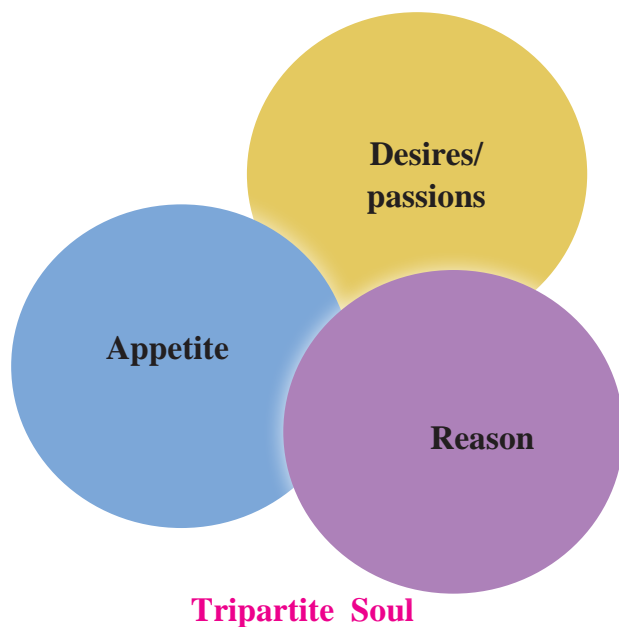
It is observed that since pre-Socratic period western philosophy has been contemplating over the nature of human 'Self' or 'I'. All of you must have studied the Pythagorean theorem in geometry. Did you know Pythagoras was an ancient Greek philosopher? Pythagoras considered philosophy as a way of life. He had even established a sect of those who followed this path. The Philosophy of Pythagoras and his sect is known as Pythagorean Philosophy.

Like the Sankhya tradition of India, this philosophy too asserted that human being is a combination of body and soul. They accept both the notion of re-birth and the immortality of the soul. They were of the belief that the body is as if a cage that traps the soul and the objective of soul is to free itself. On the contrary, Democritus being a materialist believed that the soul is essentially material in nature. According to his view the soul is created from the soft and round atoms of fire. However, he rejects the immortality of the soul.

Plato

Plato was also influenced by the view that the body and the soul are two independent substances. Pythagoras and Plato were the only two philosophers in the mainstream of

western philosophy who have accepted the idea of re-birth and liberation (of Indian style). As we have seen previously, Plato had divided the reality into two independent worlds; the world of abstract, universal forms and the world of concrete, particular objects. The soul is the resident of the world of forms whereas the body resides in the world of particulars. Like all other particulars the body takes birth, undergoes change and perishes. The soul, however, never changes; it is neither created nor destroyed. When it is in the world of forms it has knowledge of universals and forms. When the soul gets connected to the body it forgets that knowledge. Although the particular objects remind the soul of the world of forms, it recollects the knowledge only through the study of philosophy. The soul is basically indivisible. However, the soul that is bound with the body comprises of three parts namely: reason, emotion/desires (spirit) and appetite (basic instinct). Plato has asserted that these three parts must remain in balance and the passions and desires must always remain under the control of reason.



Aristotle

According to Aristotle, only the world of particulars exists. The forms or essences do

not exist in any other world; but are incorporated in the particulars themselves. Every particular object is made of both; the material substance and the form. One can never experience a formless matter or a matter-less form. There is a combination of matter and form even in the living beings. What distinguishes living beings from the non-living things is that they are mobile. They can move themselves. The principle of mobility is inherent in them. They develop in accordance with this principle. Every living being has potentiality to perform certain functions. Development is the actualization of these potentialities. The form of the body of the living beings is as per their potentialities to perform specific functions. A body is formed by the coming together of the matter and its specific arrangement or form. According to Aristotle this form is the soul. He also believes that all living beings have soul.

Aristotle's hierarchical classification of soul

| Type | Functions/Potentialities |
|------------------|---|
| (1) Human Beings | Nourishment, reproduction, sensation, imagination, mobility, intelligence |
| (2) Animals | Nourishment, reproduction, sensation, mobility |
| (3) Plants | Nourishment, reproduction |

He classifies them into a hierarchical order as per their potentialities: plants, animals and humans. Soul being the form of the body, it perishes along with the body. Therefore, Aristotle does not accept the idea of the immortality of the soul. Rationality is the essential characteristic of the human soul. Animals and plants are not rational. That is why he says that it is beneficial for a human being, to live in accordance with reason or to live a rational life.

The Mediaeval philosophy was mainly influenced by the Christian religious ideas; according to these ideas, man is a combination of material body and a conscious soul. The body is perishable whereas the soul is immortal; which means that it survives even after the destruction of the body. However, most of the medieval philosophers did not believe in re-birth. They believed that God has created the universe out of nothing and man is his most cherished creation. It was their belief that God created man in his own image. According to them, God is the father all human beings, therefore the objective of human beings should be to live life as per his commands and in a way that would please God. Barring a few exceptions, the dualist nature of man was accepted by western thought tradition until very recently.



Let's write!

Write the similarities and differences in the concept of 'Self' by Aristotle and Charvaka.

Rene Descartes

All the philosophers who embrace both realism and dualism have accepted the dual nature of man. Descartes is not an exception. We have already seen that according to Descartes, the two independent substances, viz., matter and consciousness combine in human being. Body is made of material substance and 'extension' which is an attribute of matter is integral to the body. However, the mind or soul lies beyond space and reason or thought is its essential characteristic. These two independent substances come together because of God. What kind of relation exists between them after they come together, needs to be considered. As per our day-to-day experience some or the other interaction constantly takes place between the body and the mind.

When one is not well one does not feel

like doing anything, when one is distressed and depressed one loses appetite. We see that a cheerful mind forgets illness, while physical exercise improves our mental state.



Let's Talk!

Discuss the examples from our day-to-day life which show the interaction of mind and body.

On the basis of such experiences, Descartes propounds the theory of mind-body 'interactionism'. Although the body and the mind are completely different, they can influence each-other; there is a causal relation between them. This view of Descartes was considered as controversial in metaphysics.

After Descartes 'mind-body relationship' emerged as a new metaphysical problem.

Theories regarding the nature of body-mind relationship and the philosophers-thinkers who propounded them.

| Theory | Philosopher |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| (1) Interactionism | Rene Descartes |
| (2) Occasionalism | Geulincx, Malebranche |
| (3) Parallelism | Spinoza |
| (4) Pre-established Harmony | Leibniz |
| (5) Behaviourism | Ernst Mach, William James |
| (6) Behaviourism | James Watson, B.F. Skinner |

David Hume

In modern philosophy the views of the British empiricist David Hume are very peculiar.

Hume is regarded as a skeptic. He raised basic doubts about some of the most important concepts of his time. One of those important concepts is Substance. According to the empiricists only that which is experienced by our sensory organs is real. They assert that

anything that is real cannot be beyond our sense-experience. In accordance with this view, Hume propounds that we do not experience anything which is denoted by the term substance and which is supposed to be the substratum of all qualities; hence there is no need to accept the existence of substance. What we experience is only various characteristics of physical objects, their magnitudes and interactions. We cannot experience anything which is beyond this such as a 'material substance'. Similarly, if we try to explore our inner world and try to understand what is known as 'I' or 'self', we merely stumble upon several thoughts, feelings, sensations, ideas etc. Our consciousness is nothing but a constant flow of all these experiences. In this constantly changing flow we never experience any kind of permanent, eternal, conscious substance which is known as 'Soul'. Our memory as if forms a chain by connecting all these different elements and that is how we experience of the continuity of the 'I'. However, we have seen that continuity does not mean permanence.

When we watch a movie, what we experience is just a collection of constantly changing images and sounds. It is not a single 'picture' but it is a series that presents several pictures together. It is a 'motion picture'. Likewise, Hume argues that our self is just a bundle of thoughts, ideas, feelings, passions and motivations.



Let's discover!

Find out how the animation films are made.

The most recent developments in western philosophical thought with reference to the concept of 'Self' are influenced by modern scientific research on artificial intelligence, neuroscience and other such branches of sciences.

The Scientific perspective

Philosophers and thinkers tried to contemplate about the concept of self and our awareness and association with self. Scientists took this search ahead with the help of scientific methodology. Scientific methodology is nothing but a verifiable study of objective reality. The two branches of biology, namely evolutionary biology and neuroscience tried to explore our understanding of the self. As we compare humans with other animals we find out that other animals too must be aware of their existence. But Humans are different in a way that humans also have awareness of awareness. Our species has been named as 'homo sapien sapien' on the basis of the same criteria. However, the puzzle is not entirely solved yet. Neuroscience is trying to pursue the question what exactly is awareness or consciousness. Can we call the collection of feelings, sensations and thoughts as awareness? Since it is the self that experiences feelings, sensations and thoughts it is important to discuss awareness while discussing self. Evolutionary history of humans tells us certain important points about self.

Evolutionary perspective tells us that humans are social beings. Living in groups helped them to deal with the brutal forces of nature. However, our sociality is not comparable with the sociality of ultra-social organisms like ants. You must have seen an ant hill. A single ant looks like a separate animal. However, it is a part of a super colony. Every ant has a given function. Only the queen is capable of laying eggs. It is because of this behaviour ants are called as eu-social animals. Ant hill is called as super organism. Humans are gregarious but they are not eu-social or a super organism.



Let's discover!

Let's gather more information on gregarious animals. Discuss the traits of their social life in class.

We do believe that every human has his own aspirations and also the potential to fulfill those desires in the given framework of time, space and conducive/non-conducive environment. Each individual has a right to reproduce. (this is a general statement, made from species point of view.) It is important to know the association between individual and society while trying to understand the concept of self in humans. In the machine era, because of the complexity of technology, humans have to come together artificially (that is more in number than their natural, biological group size). This gives rise to unending conflict and compromise. Let's study this further in the Chapter on Science, Technology and Philosophy.

In the tradition of philosophy, we will find many such terms and concepts as mind, soul, spirit etc. Today, science tells us that all these names ultimately denote only one organ and that is brain. Brain is the basis of awareness. Brain undergoes many changes from childhood to adulthood. Different enzymes and hormones affect its functioning. Thanks to neuroscience, we now know how

all of this is ultimately connected with human behaviour.

Is the consciousness and intelligence one and the same thing or are they different? This is the next important point in the discussion of self. When we refer to awareness, we are basically talking about feelings, emotions and thoughts. Intelligence can be of different types as intelligence in pattern recognition, carrying out mathematical processes, intelligence in tool making, tool handling etc. The most important aspect of being intelligent is to be able to change. Humans domesticated other plants and animals by using his intelligence as a powerful tool.

20th century saw the rise of modern day computers and they kept on evolving. Today, as far as intelligence in data handling and data processing is concerned computers prove to be far too faster and superior than humans. On this background, as we witness the decoupling of awareness and intelligence, there is a great fear what will computers do with humans on the basis of sheer intelligence. Our ideas of self may undergo sea changes in coming era. We will discuss some of the issues related to this in the last Chapter.

Chaitanya - चैतन्य

Bhutchaitanyavada - भूतचैतन्यवाद

Dehatmavada - देहात्मवाद

Pudgala - पुद्गल

Vedana - वेदना

Sandhya - संज्ञा

Sanskara - संस्कार

Vidnyana - विज्ञान

EXERCISES

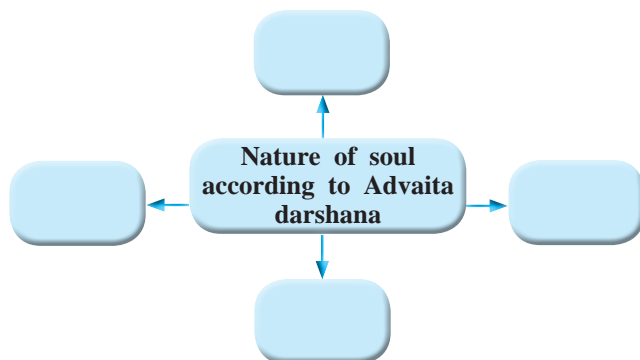
Q.1 Fill in the blanks choosing the correct option from the bracket.

- (1) From scientific perspective is the base of consciousness.
(mind, brain, feelings)
- (2) According to Charvaka, when different material substances come together in a peculiar combination then is manifested.
(consciousness, intellect, insight)
- (3) doesn't accept immortality of soul and re-birth.
(Jain, Charvaka, Advaita)
- (4) According to Buddhism is the essential nature of 'Sat'/'real'.
(purity, impermanence, permanence)
- (5) proposed the theory of 'body-mind interactionism'.
(Descartes, Plato, Hume)

Q.2 State with reason whether the following statements are true or false.

- (1) Aristotle accepts the idea of immortal soul.
- (2) Advait Vedanta is pluralist.
- (3) According to Charvaka consciousness is by product of matter.
- (4) According to Hume our consciousness is a constant flow of thoughts, feelings, sensations, ideas.

Q.3 Complete the concept map/flow-chart.



Q.4 Explain the following statements with examples.

- (1) A human being is not a super-organism like ant.
- (2) My 'I'ness is my distinctness from others.
- (3) What we experience is continuity.

Q.5 Write a short note on the following.

- (1) Dehatmvada
- (2) Panch-Skandha
- (3) Sankhya's notion of self
- (4) Difference between intellect and consciousness.
- (5) Plato's notion of self.

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

- (1) According to Democritus what is the nature of soul?
- (2) What is Descartes's body-mind interactionism?
- (3) Give Aristotle's classification of soul.
- (4) State any four theories of body-mind relation and the philosopher advocating those theories.
- (5) What is a super organism?

Q.7 Explain in detail Buddhist notion of self.

Q.8 Explain Plato's notion of self.

Activity

Collect stories, poems on the theme of self awareness, self image and discuss them with your classmates with the philosophical context of 'self'.

☆☆☆