

## CONCEPT OF REALITY IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY IN SPECIAL REFERENCE TO TRIK PHILOSOPHY

Dr. Vikas Kumar Singh\*

### ABSTRACT

*The concept of reality in Indian philosophy unfolds as a rich tapestry, woven with diverse threads of thought across major philosophical traditions. Vedanta, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Buddhism, Jainism, and Trika philosophy contribute distinct perspectives on existence, consciousness, and the ultimate truth. Vedanta's non-dualism contrasts with dualistic views, while Nyaya and Vaisheshika explore metaphysics through logical reasoning. Samkhya enumerates principles, Yoga blends metaphysics with practical aspects, and Buddhism emphasizes impermanence. Jainism intertwines Syadvada and asceticism with the eternal existence of souls. Trika philosophy delves into non-dualistic monism, emphasizing the dynamic nature of consciousness and the cyclical play of creation and dissolution. Vedic schools embrace realistic pluralism, while Buddhism evolves into the Middle Way doctrine. Theistic orientations face scrutiny, and Trika Saivism introduces theistic monism. These perspectives collectively paint a nuanced exploration of reality, spanning realism, empiricism, and critical philosophy. The intricate concepts of self, consciousness, karma, and the dynamic interplay of the Absolute with the manifested universe form a rich tapestry that inspires contemplation and inquiry within the diverse traditions of Indian philosophy.*

**Keywords:** Vedanta, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Buddhism, Jainism, Trika philosophy, non-dualism, monism, consciousness, existence, cyclical play, creation, dissolution, realistic pluralist, theistic monism, self, karma.

### Introduction

The concept of reality in Indian philosophy is rich and diverse, with

---

\*Former Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Simdega College, Ranchi University, Ranchi.

different schools of thought offering distinct perspectives on the nature of reality, existence, and the ultimate truth. Several major philosophical traditions in India contribute to this understanding, including Vedanta, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, and Buddhism. Here, Indian philosophy presents a rich tapestry of perspectives on reality, each contributing to a nuanced understanding of existence and paths to liberation. Advaita Vedanta asserts the formless, infinite Brahman, considering the material world and souls as illusory, emphasizing self-realization. In contrast, Dvaita Vedanta posits a clear distinction between individual souls and Brahman, advocating devotion to God for liberation. Nyaya and Vaisheshika focus on metaphysics and epistemology, with Nyaya emphasizing logical reasoning and Vaisheshika delving into atomistic metaphysics. Samkhya enumerates fundamental principles, highlighting the distinction between Purusha (consciousness) and Prakriti (material nature) for liberation. Yoga, according to Patanjali, combines metaphysics with practical aspects, advocating self-discipline and meditation for spiritual liberation. Buddhism rejects eternal self, emphasizing impermanence and unsatisfactoriness, with Nirvana as the goal. Jainism, rooted in non-violence, details a complex reality involving living and non-living substances, karma, six fundamental substances, cosmic regions, and ethical principles leading to liberation.

The Trika philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism centers on non-dualistic monism, dynamic consciousness, the role of Sakti, and the cyclical creation and dissolution of the universe. Together, these diverse perspectives within Indian philosophy offer profound insights into the nature of reality and the paths to spiritual liberation.

### **Influence of Diverse Philosophical Traditions on the Evolution of Kashmir Shaivism**

The Trika philosophy, also known as Kashmir Shaivism, is a school of thought within the broader tradition of Shaivism that emerged in

Kashmir around the 9th century CE. This philosophical system places a unique emphasis on the concept of reality, viewing it through the lens of non-dualistic and monistic perspectives. Many Vedic schools of thought embrace a philosophical perspective characterized as realistic pluralism. Within this framework, they affirm the existence of multiple entities, reflecting a realist stance. Among these schools, Nyaya-Vaiśeṣika, the oldest realistic school, posits the reality of various elements such as atoms, souls, minds, time, space, and God. Mimāṃsā, another realistic school, aligns with Nyaya on several points, emphasizing strict realism. Sankhya-Yoga, yet another school, believes in the eternal existence of matter (*prakṛti*) and soul (*puruṣa*), attributing the evolution of materiality to disturbances among its innate constituents.

According to Sankhya-Yoga, disturbances in the equilibrium of peaceful (*sattva*), passionate (*rajas*), and inert (*tamas*) constituents trigger the evolution of materiality into manifest categories. During this evolution, the pure and non-objective soul becomes entangled with insentient materiality, leading to what is termed as embodied existence. Despite this entanglement, the soul remains pure, akin to the reflection of an object in a mirror, suggesting an apparent rather than real involvement with matter. The theory of the three constituents is also interpreted in terms of *gunas* (qualities), determining the nature of entities as good, energetic, or harmful. This perspective extends to psychological and ethical considerations, influencing various aspects of Indian philosophical thinking.

Sankhya's realistic pluralism has a far-reaching impact, influencing Vaisnavism and Saivism in the South. However, Buddhism, categorized as a heterodox school, rejects the pursuit of metaphysical reality. Early Buddhists, initially analytical realists, acknowledge the existence of elements but emphasize empirical verification. They view phenomenal entities as existing momentarily within a psycho-physical complex. The world's existence, according to Buddhism, is

explained through a chain of causation, eliminating the need for a first cause.

As human subjectivity is considered, Buddhism rejects permanent entities within individuals, viewing humans as transient bundles of ever-changing aggregates. This naive realism is eventually abandoned in favor of critical philosophy with the emergence of the Madhyamaka school. This school neither affirms nor denies the existence of anything, advocating silence concerning reality, aligning with the Buddha's Middle Way doctrine.

Sectarian Hindu religious schools, such as the Vaishnavite school of Vallabha, claim monistic orientation but face logical scrutiny. The Viraśaiva School introduces the ambiguous concept of samarasya, making it challenging to discern the relationship between the liberated soul and Siva. The diverse perspectives within Indian philosophy reflect nuanced explorations of reality, spanning realism, empiricism, and critical philosophy.

Advaita Vedanta of Sankara, although monistic in its orientation, is not sufficiently theistic

### **Nature of Reality in Kashmir Shaiv System-**

The Trika Saivism of Kashmir, while upholding monistic theism, thinks that the Absolute is the ontological substratum of all that is manifest. As Absolute, it is beyond the reach of empirical or rational categories of thought. The Absolute as transcendent can neither be explained nor expressed in terms of intellectual concepts. Whatever rational knowledge we may gather about the Absolute, it is always in terms of approximations. The Absolute is un-namable, and so we cannot speak of it as being Siva or Sakti.<sup>2</sup> Whatever linguistic or conceptual formulation we may make concerning the Absolute, it is never absolutely real or authentic<sup>3</sup>.

The challenge in formulating intellectual concepts about the Absolute lies in the inherent limitations imposed by the space-time continuum

on the intellect's ability to comprehend. Since the Absolute transcends the constraints of space and time, the intellect, which operates within this framework, lacks the capacity to fully conceive the nature of the Absolute. This incomprehensible Absolute is asserted to be the origin and underlying essence of all that is manifest.

Despite its inherent indefinability, attempts have been made to describe the Absolute as eternal and possessing an infinite I-consciousness. Functioning as the source of everything, the Absolute is not just associated with all phenomena but is, in fact, everything itself. In its role as the source, the Absolute is not only identical to every manifest category but also surpasses and transcends them all.

Furthermore, the intrinsic nature of the Absolute is characterized as Godhead, implying that the Absolute is inherently divine. The Trika philosophy aligns itself with theism by identifying the Absolute with Godhead, earning it the classification of theistic monism. In essence, the Trika philosophy advocates the idea that the Absolute, as the ultimate reality, is not only the source and substratum of all existence but is also inherently divine in its Godhead.

Insofar as ontological explanation of the Absolute is concerned, the Trika Saivism has adopted the following philosophical approach. Every entity, whether phenomenal or numinous, owes its existence to Shiva, who is identical with the Absolute as God <sup>4</sup>

### **Shiva As Ultimate reality**

Shiva as absolute God is pure Light (prakāsa), that is, the light of consciousness. This Light of Shiva is self-evident everywhere and in everything due to its very nature<sup>5</sup>. It is on account of the light of consciousness that we are able to know what is to be known. If consciousness was destitute of this light, then there would be utter darkness and the emergence of knowledge would be impossible. Since it is in and through consciousness that knowledge is actualized, the nature of consciousness as light is self-evident. It, therefore,

means that consciousness as light cannot be known by employing the empirical means of knowledge. The identity of consciousness with the luminous light is established by the fact that every conscious being is conscious of himself. This self-consciousness arises on account of consciousness being identical with light, that is, with revelation. As the nature of light is luminosity, so the nature of light of consciousness is to illumine everything by its light. Light reveals that has existence or it exists. In the context of phenomenal entities it means that they depend for their existence upon the light of consciousness.<sup>6</sup> To shine as well as to illumine everything that exists is the very nature of the light of consciousness<sup>7</sup>. Since everything shines in and through the light of consciousness, it is the light of conscious-ness that shines in all manifest categories of existence.

This philosophical monism of Trika Saivism is known as the pratyaksa advaita, or the monism that can be perceived through the senses (Srimālinīvijayavārtikam, 1.763). Light, as one of the inherent aspects of the Absolute, is infinite, sovereign, eternal, and thereby beyond space-time continuum (Tantraloka, 1.59.60).

The Absolute, identified as consciousness, not only embodies light (prakāsa) but also encompasses self-reflection (vimarsa). This reflective dimension of the Absolute unveils its dynamic nature, serving as the mechanism through which the Absolute manifests in various shapes and forms within phenomena. The Absolute, appearing as phenomena, self-manifests in the universe and everything within it. Those who have attained perfection in Saiva-yoga, according to Sivadr̥ṣṭi, perceive that everything is an extension of Śiva himself. In their vision, the presence of Śiva extends not only within the manifest categories but also transcends them.<sup>8</sup>

### **Difference Between Advaita Vedānta and Kashmir Shaiva System**

In contrast to Advaita Vedānta, which employs the principle of indicative power of speech (laksana) in interpreting scriptural

statements like "tat tvam asi" ("that thou art"), Trika Saivism takes a different approach. Trika Saivas assert that Śiva, as the Absolute, radiates in both the manifested world and beyond it. This perspective underscores the simultaneous transcendence and immanence of the Absolute. When conceptualized as God, the Absolute is vested with absolute powers of will, action, and knowledge. Drawing inspiration from the Upanishads, Trika Saivism endeavors to elucidate the manifestation of Siva as consciousness in psychological terms. The reflective aspect of the Absolute, its dynamic manifestation in various forms, and the recognition of Śiva's presence both within and beyond the manifest categories characterize the nuanced understanding of the Absolute within the Trika Saiva tradition. The Absolute manifests itself not only as an objective universe, but also in and through the three states of consciousness—waking, dreaming, and deep sleep.<sup>9</sup>

It is in and through its luminosity that the Absolute both pervades and transcends the objective world of phenomena. It is in the revelatory aspect of the Absolute in which has been located the cause of the universe. It is maintained that the light of consciousness continuously shines forth as well as maintains the playful drama of the universe (TA, 1.92). The entire universe is nothing but the manifestation of the light of consciousness by virtue of its playfulness. To be playful is the basic nature of Siva (TA, 1.66). Prakāśa, in the process of its manifestation, does not suffer from any modification because the Absolute manifests itself in the same manner as moon is reflected in a clean pool of water.<sup>10</sup>

The indivisibility of the Absolute perpetually radiates, embodying the eternal nature of light. This luminosity represents the static facet of the Absolute. Just as light's essence is reflection—a stirring of consciousness—the Absolute manifests as God through five cosmic powers: manifestation, preservation, withdrawal, obscuration, and revelation. The reflective aspect, known conceptually as Sakti, symbolizes these cosmic powers, with devotion embodied by the

the Goddess.

In the symbolic realm, the Goddess, as a representation of femininity, embodies the creative dimension of the Absolute. In contrast, representing the principle of maleness, Śiva remains passive and inactive, conceptually mirrored by the luminous aspect of the Absolute. Sakti, in turn, injects essential dynamism into the otherwise passive state of Śiva. It's crucial to recognize that these aspects—passivity and dynamism—aren't distinct possessions, as per the Trika perspective. Viewing them as such would imply a dualistic understanding, wherein the possessor and possessions are entirely separate. For the Trika, both passivity and dynamism constitute the essential nature of Śiva, forming a single unity that doesn't internally divide the Absolute.

Luminosity signifies the boundless light of absolute consciousness, while dynamism embodies the creative activity of consciousness as light. Since both passivity and dynamism are identical to the Absolute, the Absolute is aptly referred to as absolute consciousness (samvid). Luminosity and dynamism, embodied as Śiva and Sakti, respectively, are two facets of ParamaŚiva—the Absolute—viewed through the lens of consciousness (samvid).

Luminosity represents knowledge, whereas dynamism represents creativity (Iśvarapratyabhijñā-vimarsini, 1.8.11).

### **Nature of Reality In Trika**

The Absolute of the Trika is not an impersonal and abstract being. The Absolute, rather, is God, and as God he is, in the fullest sense of the word, sovereign. It is as sovereign that God engages, without depending on anything, in the five cosmic activities of manifestation, preservation, absorption, obscuration and revelation (Tantraloka, 1.79). Since the manifest is the self-emission of the Absolute, so it means that the manifest categories, prior to their manifestation, exist as consciousness (samvid) in the Absolute (Iśvarapratyabhijñākārikā,

1.5.1; 5,10). The phenomenal categories, in their un-manifest condition, exist in terms of an integral "I" of the Absolute. The "I" of the Absolute is not to be equated with the empirical ego. It is, rather, the absolute consciousness of the Absolute. The absolute "I" has, therefore, been spoken of as perfect (paripūrṇa) in itself.

It is through grace that the divine nature of one's self is realized. It is the five cosmic activities or powers that constitute the essential nature or the Absolute. Before the manifestation of the universe and its various categories, they exist within the Absolute as pure ego (अहम्).

Upon manifestation, they take on the form of the "this" (इदं). The Absolute, through this transformation into the "this," presents itself as the diverse universe with a multitude of entities. In this manifestation, the Absolute seems as if its absolute powers of knowledge and action have been fragmented into individualized entities.

This process of the Absolute appearing in a diversified form is likened to a play, wherein the actor, though identifying with a character, remains unaltered in essence. While the Absolute seems to take on the limited and individualized form of a phenomenal entity, it remains inherently undivided and unchanged. This divine drama unfolds to sustain the ongoing creative manifestation for aeons.

At the conclusion of each cosmic cycle, there is a withdrawal, culminating in the absorption of the manifested entities back into the pure subjectivity of the Absolute. During this dissolution, non-liberated beings are immersed in the abyss of ignorance, leading to the actualization of the process of obscuration. As the Absolute obscures itself, it also conceals the divine potential of countless beings. The removal of the concealing power of obscuration is termed the act of divine grace. This cyclical process of manifestation, withdrawal, and obscuration perpetuates the cosmic drama, illustrating the dynamic interplay between the Absolute and the manifested universe.

In summary, the concept of reality in Trika philosophy revolves around the non-dualistic monism of ParamaSiva, the dynamic nature of consciousness, the emanation and manifestation of the universe, the pivotal role of Sakti, and the cyclical play of creation and dissolution. The Trika perspective offers a profound exploration of the nature of reality within the context of Kashmir Shaivism. The Trika philosophy, also known as Kashmir Shaivism, is a school of thought within the broader tradition of Shaivism that emerged in Kashmir around the 9th century CE. This philosophical system places a unique emphasis on the concept of reality, viewing it through the lens of non-dualistic and monistic perspectives.

Vedic schools, such as Nyaya-Vaiśeṣika, Mimāṃsā, and Sankhya-Yoga, present realistic pluralism, affirming the existence of multiple entities. Buddhism, initially analytical realists, evolves into the Middle Way doctrine, emphasizing empirical verification. Theistic orientations within Hindu schools face scrutiny, while the Trika Saivism of Kashmir introduces the concept of the Absolute as theistic monism.

In essence, the philosophical traditions of India contribute nuanced explorations of reality, spanning realism, empiricism, and critical philosophy. The intricate concepts of self, consciousness, karma, and the dynamic interplay of the Absolute with the manifested universe provide a rich tapestry of thought that continues to inspire contemplation and inquiry. The diverse perspectives within Indian philosophy reflect the depth and complexity of human understanding as it grapples with the profound questions of existence and the nature

of reality.

The concept of reality is multifaceted and varies across philosophical traditions. In broad terms, reality refers to the totality of what exists, encompassing the observable world and any underlying principles or entities. Different philosophical schools offer distinct views on the nature of reality.

Metaphysical realists assert that reality exists independently of human perception, with objects and entities possessing inherent existence and objective properties. Idealism posits that reality is fundamentally mental or consciousness-dependent, suggesting that the external world is a product of the mind shaped by subjective experiences.

Materialists view reality as primarily composed of physical matter, emphasizing tangible and observable aspects while often rejecting the existence of non-physical entities. Dualistic perspectives propose a fundamental duality in reality, often distinguishing between mind and matter or the physical and the metaphysical.

Monism asserts that there is a singular, fundamental substance or principle underlying all of reality. Non-dualistic monism posits ultimate oneness, while dualistic monism acknowledges a fundamental duality within a unified framework.

Empiricists stress the importance of sensory experience and observation in understanding reality, deriving knowledge from direct perception and empirical evidence. Phenomenalists argue that reality is comprised of phenomena or experiences, with the external world being a construct of perceptions, and the ultimate reality is the collection of individual experiences. Existentialists focus on individual existence and subjective experience, viewing reality as subjective and shaped by personal choices and actions. Religious traditions often introduce transcendent dimensions to reality, incorporating concepts of God, the divine, or spiritual realms. Scientific realists assert that the scientific method provides a reliable means of understanding

objective reality, aiming to describe the world independently of human perception. Constructivists argue that reality is socially and culturally constructed, shaped by human perspectives, language, and societal structures. Philosophical skepticism questions the certainty of knowledge and reality, often doubting the reliability of sensory perception or the ability to attain true knowledge about the external world. These diverse perspectives contribute to a nuanced understanding of the nature of existence and the various paths to comprehending and experiencing reality. These diverse perspectives demonstrate the richness and complexity of the concept of reality within the realm of philosophy. Different schools of thought provide nuanced interpretations, reflecting the diverse ways in which humans have sought to understand the nature of existence.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the concept of reality in Indian philosophy is a tapestry woven with diverse threads of thought, each school offering unique insights into the nature of existence, consciousness, and the ultimate truth. Vedanta, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Buddhism, Jainism, and Trika philosophy contribute distinct perspectives that enrich our understanding of reality. Vedanta, with its Advaita and Dvaita branches, explores the nature of ultimate reality as formless and infinite in non-dualism, while recognizing a clear distinction between individual souls and the divine in dualism. Nyaya and Vaisheshika delve into metaphysics and epistemology, emphasizing logical reasoning and atomistic metaphysics. Samkhya enumerates fundamental principles, distinguishing between Purusha and Prakriti, and Yoga incorporates practical aspects to achieve spiritual liberation.

Buddhism rejects the concept of an eternal self, emphasizing impermanence and the cessation of suffering. Jainism, rooted in non-violence and asceticism, delineates the eternal existence of individual souls, their interaction with karma, and the path to liberation.

Trika philosophy, within Kashmir Shaivism, offers a non-dualistic monism of ParamaSiva, emphasizing the dynamic nature of consciousness, the emanation and manifestation of the universe, and the cyclical play of creation and dissolution. The key role of Sakti as the creative power of ParamaSiva adds a unique dimension to the understanding of reality.

### References

- 1-(See Mandūkyakārikā, 1.16-17).
- 2-(Tantraloka, 2.24).
- 3-Isvarapratyabhijñāvimarsini, 1.1.2
- 4-(Tantraloka, 1.52).
- 5-(TA, 1.54).
- 6-(TA, 1.59-60).
- 7-(TA. 2.16)
- 8- Sivadr̥ṣṭi (5.105-9)
- 9-(Tantrāloka, 1.80).
- 10-(TA 3.4)