



### TRUTH AND REALITY IN LITERATURE

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#### **Abstract**

The concept of truth and reality and the perspective of great philosophers like Epicurus and great personalities of Indian tradition are universal. The article compares Indian and western concept on truth and reality. The ideas in Upanishads can be compared to the ideas of Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Epicurus. This article highlights the similarity. Secondary sources used to analyse the views are The 100 Most Influential Philosophers Of All Times edited by Brian Duignan, The Tempest play by Shakespeare, Upanisads, a translated work by Valerie J. Roebuck and the Poem – Ode on the intimations of Immortality by William Wordsworth. Philosophy and religion have difference of opinion in various points and at the same time strengthen one another in many places. Great minds think alike.

**Key Word:** Truth and reality, Shakespeare's, bodily health and peace of mind.

Philosophers question the validity of observation and argue that people cannot trust their senses always.

Pyrrhon of Elis (36-270 BCE) and his fellow skeptics believed that truth is unknowable; therefore nothing is as it seems. If we can't trust what we see, hear, smell and feel, how can we be sure of anything? What we think we are experiencing in life might be nothing more than a dream. (Duignan 13)

In Shakespeare's "The Tempest", Prospero expresses his thoughts to Ferdinand who withstands all the hard ships. Prospero satisfied with Ferdinand courage, perseverance and tolerance wants to betroth his daughter formally to Ferdinand. Prospero orders Ariel to welcome his fellow spirits to present a masque to honour the couple as he has promised them to entertain. Meanwhile Prospero forgets the conspiracy of the savage Caliban and his confederate against his life. Ariel



summons his sub - ordinate spirits and presents a betrothal - masque taking the form of Iris, Ceres, Juno and Nymphs. Iris, the goddess of rainbow and the messenger of Juno; Ceres, the mother earth and the Roman goddess of fertility and the regenerative power of nature; Juno, the wife of the god Jupiter blesses the couple under the magic spell of Prospero. Prospero's mind gets disturbed by Caliban's treachery towards the end of the masque. So he orders to stop the masque suddenly and speaks in a very disturbed voice. All the spirits vanish with a strange, hollow and confused noise.

“Our revels now are ended.

These our actors,

As I foretold you, were all spirits, and

Are melted in to thin air:

And like the baseless fabric of this vision,

Shakespeare's final comment on life

The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,

The solemn temples, the great globe itself,

Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,

And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,

Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff

As dreams are made on; and our little life

Is rounded with a sleep. (Shakespeare 81)

Shakespeare's final comment on life through the voice of Prospero sums up the uncertainties of life and birth and death is compared to dreams and sleep.

Similarly in Brhadaranyaka Upanisad Book Two,



The Gargya, a learned man proudly says to Ajatasatru, the King of Kasi that he would teach him what Brahman is (the formulation of truth) . Then Gargya teaches that he worships ‘Brahman’ as ‘the person in the Sun’. Ajatasatru is unsatisfied with his answer and says,

‘Do not talk to me about him. I worship him as the topmost, the head and king of all beings whoever worships him as such becomes the topmost, the head and king of all beings’. (Roebuck.33).

Gargya guides him by giving various examples like his earlier one ‘Brahman’ as ‘the person in the moon’ ‘Lightening’, ‘Space’, ‘Wind’, ‘Fire’, ‘Mirror’, ‘the Sound which follows one as one moves’ , ‘Direction and Shadow ‘the person who is in the body’(atman). But Ajatasatru comes out with his own better explanation of those examples and tells that he already knows all the elements that Gargya introduces him. He is neither contented nor convinced about the ideas given by Gargya. All the efforts of Gargya end in vain because Ajatasatru gives clear understanding of the examples given by Gargya. Yet he wants his guru to help him to understand better. Finally Gargya finds it difficult to give more examples. He feels defeated in front of Ajatasatru’s knowledge. So he asks the king to teach him,’ what Brahman really is’ and he expresses his willingness to come to the king as a student.

The king reminds him about a natural order that a ksatriya should not teach brahmana about ‘brahman’. However he makes it known to Gargya. He tries to help his Guru to understand in a practical way. So he takes the guru to a sleeping man and calls the sleeping man to wake him up. The man who is sleeping did not get up. Then Ajatasatru wakes him up by patting him with his hand. He gets up.

Ajatasatru questions Gargya that ‘when he fell asleep, where the person made of knowledge was’ and ‘where he has come back from’. Gargya struggles to answer the question.

Ajatasatru teaches him giving brief explanation.



“When he fell asleep, the person made of knowledge, taking his knowledge with him, lay down in the space within the heart. When the person takes these to himself, he is said to be asleep; the breath is taken, the eye is taken, the ear is taken, the mind is taken.

When in dreams he moves about, these are his worlds. He seems to become a great king, or a great Brahmana, or to move high and low. Just as a great king, taking his subjects with him, moves about at will in his own country, so he, taking his senses (Prana) with him, moves about at will in his own body.

When he is deeply asleep, when he knows nothing at all, he moves along the seventy-two thousand channels called hita from the heart of the citadel of the heart. Having moved quietly along them he lies down in the citadel. He lies there as a young Prince or a great King or a great Brahmana would lie on reaching the utmost ecstasy of bliss.

‘As a spider moves up along its thread, as small sparks fly up from a fire, so all breaths, all worlds, all gods, all beings come up out of the self. Its inner meaning (upanisad) is “the truth of the truth”: the breaths are the truth, and it is the truth of them’.

(J.Roebuck. 37).

Ode on the intimations of Immortality deals with one such similar idea. Most of the poems of Wordsworth are recollections of his early childhood with his sister. He lost his mother when he was eight years old and father when he was fourteen. His works are not mere nostalgic when he thinks about his past his inspiration flows freely. Though unnoticed and insignificant his mystical experiences are strong. Those emotions went unchecked during his school days became popular and more powerful later. In Tintern abbey, he talks about what he felt, the mystical ineffable bliss in the universe, and “one life in the whole universe”. Ode on the intimations of Immortality stanza V deals with platonic system of pre-existence.

### Stanza V

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:

The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,



Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home:  
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!  
Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
Upon the growing Boy,  
But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,  
He sees it in his joy;  
The Youth, who daily farther from the east  
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,  
And by the vision splendid  
Is on his way attended;  
At length the Man perceives it die away,  
And fade into the light of common day. (58- 76)

The concept he explains in the above stanza matches with Indian ethics (sanatana dharma) which describes how humans start their life in an ideal world when they are born and how it turns to be a shadowy materialistic life when they grow up. Like this Wordsworth's another poem "Daffodils" The lines 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' is his recollection of butterfly chasing with his sister when he was a small boy when his parents were alive.

### Stanza VIII

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie,  
Thy Soul's immensity;  
Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep  
Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,



That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,  
Haunted forever by the eternal mind, —  
Prophet! Seer blest!  
On whom those truths do rest,  
Which we are toiling all our lives to find,  
In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave; (lines 108–117)

His words have the characteristics of both disturbed soul of mankind and joyful nature of the mankind when he was young. He comes out with the solution and acknowledges that though he couldn't experience the fullest spiritual life that he had in his childhood, the influence of the recollection would help him. He realizes that the presence of spiritual essence in every natural object. The glory (truth) that spread in every natural object was the inspiration of his poem. Stanzas V to VII contain the concept of man's gradual alienation from the spirit of the universe.

Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,  
And custom lie upon thee with a weight,  
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life! (lines 129–131)

## Stanza IX

Hence in a season of calm weather  
Though inland far we be,  
Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea  
Which brought us hither,  
Can in a moment travel thither,  
And see the Children sport upon the shore,  
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore. (Lines 164–170)



Critics say when he shares his experience from his recollection what stings him is the glory that had faded which was once pervaded everything. His concepts are “freshly born soul”, “spiritual glory”, “platonic idea” and “oneness”. His world is far from the physical or intellectual world. His occasional glimpses through spiritual perception present the force in the universe.

It is a prank of history that the word epicure is frequently used to denote a gourmet or a fastidious voluptuary. Epicurus’s enemies in fact accused him of sensualism, but his philosophical teachings and the frugality and simplicity of his life effectively refuted their charge. It was the nobility of his character which accounted for his great popularity. (Denis.48)

Epicurus believed happiness involves serenity and it can be achieved through the simple pleasures which ensure bodily health and peace of mind.

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