

प्रश्न संख्या  
(Question No.)

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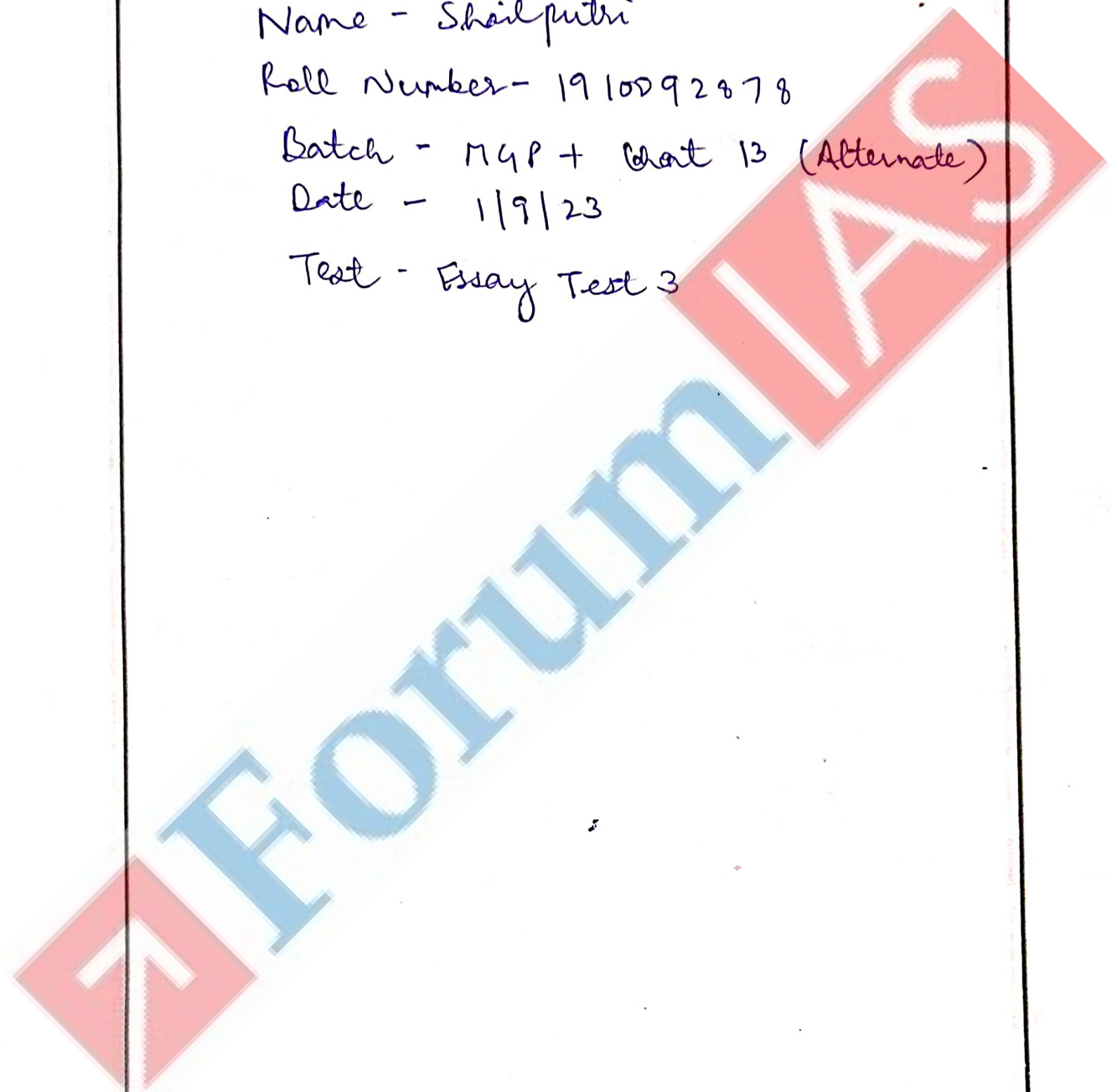
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## Section A

Power of perception shapes our understanding of reality

Picture this - a young girl living in a traditional band society. She does not go to school because society thinks women belongs to the kitchen. She is home schooled by her father. But she is very inquisitive by nature. She is a keen observer of society - its hypocrisy and boastfulness, insecurities and challenges and its pride and prejudice.

She went on to become the great novelist Jane Austen. She singlehandedly shaped most of the feminist literature of that era in England. Her perception of the society in all its contradictions shaped her understanding

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both as a novelist and as a woman.

In this essay, we will explore what is perception, how do we perceive things and how this perception shapes our understanding of reality. We will also look at what happens when our perception fails to provide us any understanding of the world. In conclusion we will have a gaze inside and have a holistic understanding of this haphazard world.

Perception is the ability to experience things - any object, event or a painting you saw at the gallery. After a long tiring day a melodious music can relieve us of exhaustion. This is because we perceive the music and understand the world through it.

Philosophy says we perceive things by our senses. We perceive external things by external senses (panchindriya) and internal operations of mind are perceived by internal sense i.e. mind itself.

But how do we make sense of things? Great philosopher I. Kant said perception and understanding go side and side. And both provide us knowledge - and understanding - of reality.

We conceptualise the sense data we get from outside. It is by understanding their intere-ctedness, linkages, connections and contradictions that we get understanding of things.

How this process of perception and understanding works can be

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Understood with the example of our  
country. In 1947, when India got  
independence, it had the option  
to follow any of the prevalent models  
of economic development - capitalism  
in Europe and USA and socialism in  
USSR:

Now India decided in favour  
of socialist model is the classic  
example of perception shaping  
understanding of reality. India saw  
extreme poverty, inequality of wealth,  
landless labourers, ruination of  
agriculture and absence of heavy  
industries.

Understandably this condition was  
not suitable for capitalist model.  
Even the businessmen of those times  
wanted state help for the development  
of country as outlined in Bombay  
Plan of 1944. Therefore India

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impressed by success of their USSR  
and DM conditions but for  
centralised planning, socialist model  
of economy.

This same phenomena can be  
seen in works of two greatest  
novelists of the USSR - Leo Tolstoy  
and Fyodor Dostoevsky.

One was born into poverty and  
other an aristocrat. This shaped  
their circumstances and consequently  
their works. Whereas Tolstoy wrote  
about wealthy socialite Anna  
Karenina, Dostoevsky wrote  
about poor and jobless Rodion  
Raskolnikov in Crime and Punishment.

Therefore we can realise  
that perception has a pervasive  
effect on our understanding of  
everything around us. It shapes

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not only our understanding of reality  
but also our reactions and responses  
to our unique circumstances or  
developments around us. This can  
be exemplified by differing  
responses to the industrial revolution.

The arrival of Artificial  
Intelligence has filled us both  
with anxiety and excitement.  
Whereas some people might consider  
AI as heralding of a new era  
of opportunities and growth, another  
person can be frightened of job  
loss and insecurity and uncertainty.  
How we perceive technology and  
its impacts will shape our  
responses and understanding of it.

Now we can ask can perception  
alone decides our understanding? Or  
it demands something else?

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Perception shapes understanding not alone but with other aspects like - Vision, motivation, attitude and a sense of foresightedness.

This foresightedness can be seen in two great people of two different continents. Both Gandhi and Charles Dickens saw the industrialisation with a sense of doubt. While Gandhi's perception of it based on his foresightedness made him predict its impact on civilisation, humanity and environment; Dickens who himself was from a poor family and worked as a child in many factories saw industrialisation as exploitative and oppressive.

Not only foresightedness and attitude, but empathy and vision



also provides shape to perception and understanding. Two people driven by same perception can have completely different understanding of what they see. It is because one is driven by sense of belongingness and care and other by greed. This motivation changes the understanding of reality.

This can be understood with the help of example of Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai.

Growing up in Kenya she saw greenery all around. But unfortunately she had to saw that greenery gone by pieces.

The advent of Multi National companies like Coca Cola, Kraft etc saw Kenya lose a lot of its forests. But Wangari had empathy for her environment

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and a motivation to work for it. Therefore as Gandhi said fight hate with love, she fought greed with giving. She gave herself for the cause of forests.

Her Noble Prize citation says she singlehandedly changed the brown Kenya to green. Along with the tribal community she planted a lot of trees and nurtured them. This also helped the tribal community gain their rights over forests and saved their livelihood.

Now we can look at what happens when the perceptions are blur and one is able to find neither understanding nor vision or motivation - everything becomes Kafkaesque.

This Kafkaesque is found in 'The Myth of Sisyphus' by

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great philosopher and writer Albert Camus. Sisyphus is condemned to a meaningless life. As a punishment he has to push a rock to the top of mountain, only to see it falling down. This brings absurdity to his life and he fails to understand reality.

Should Sisyphus commit suicide?  
Camus asks and Kantar replies it.  
And the conclusion is that the meaning is found in work we do. Life is not about seeing the rock at the top, but it is cherished while you push the rock towards mountain top. It is when our lives in all those moments and perceives the beauty of journey, then only. He understands reality and find meaning.

Therefore existentialists understand reality by experiencing it, perceiving

it and not theorising about it.  
This living and experiencing  
clears the perception, and reality  
shines forth.

In this quest to understand  
reality, a peek inside is really  
helpful. Therefore all the philosophers  
propound the utmost importance  
of internal perception.

Out of jail after a dozen  
years in prison, Mandela was asked  
what kept him going through all  
these years despite of adversity.  
He quoted his favourite poem

'Invictus' -

"I am the master of my fate  
I am the captain of my soul"

This is his perception and his  
understanding of reality. A  
gaze inside gives shape to

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our world, our aims and objectives  
and keeps on going. Yanisards also  
ask us to contemplate and reflect  
for it has the power to clear  
all the doubts and dispel  
all the clouds.

Perception with all that we  
have inside and outside shapes  
us and gives us concrete existence.  
It is what we add to what  
we perceive that we get  
understanding. Try to add  
empathy, love, care and  
compassion and reality will be  
more beautiful than the moon  
and stars.

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## Section B

A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old ways.

In her autobiography 'The Story of My Life', Helen Keller shared her experiences as a blind, deaf and mute girl in this world.

She became blind at age of nine months due to an illness and subsequently lost her speech and hearing ability.

This might feel like she could experience nothing in this world - after all she lost all her senses.

But as Keller said

'The most important things in life are not seen or heard but felt by a tender heart'.

And so she felt - the inherent beauty in nature - the water, air and all in between. And therefore

her mind was stretched to new fields by these experiences and she concluded

'What is life if not a constant adventure'.

Her fuller life indicates the mind that is stretched by new experiences can never go back to its old ways.

In this essay, we will see the importance of new experiences, how they take people to new ways and enrich their lives. We will also investigate how people go back to their old ways and commit same mistakes. In conclusion we will explore ways to ~~new~~ preserve new experience, nurture it and gain new experiences.

Experiences make life. After all we are sum total of our experiences. Experiences of Dr. Ambedkar in their early ridden India as an untouchable shaped his life

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and works as documented in 'The Amibiliation of Caste'. An experience of reading a book by Mary Wollstonecraft made Simone-de-Beauvoir a life long crusader for women's rights. Therefore experiences makes human beings.

Experiences comes in various forms. The great Adi Shankara had a spiritual realisation of 'essential oneness of Brahman and Atman'. This led Shankara propound the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta. He purged all the ills of then Hinduism, travelled far and wide from Kerala to Kashmir, conversed with so many philosophers and religious scholars, defeated them in debates, established the four 'Mathas' considered holy even today by all Hindus. An experience led Shankara to unexplored horizons and at the age



of twenty nine, it culminated in Moksha. After all the debates and mathas - what was Shankara but that moment of realisation. Shankara's story will always be incomplete without that realisation like Buddha's experience at Bodhi Gaya under the Bodhi tree.

Like his attainment of Nirvana under Bodhi tree Buddha never went back home, after new experiences one does not go back to old ways.

Similarly Gandhi was a lawyer, living a comfortable life in South Africa. But an experience at Pretoria station changed him forever. It started his political journey.

When he was thrown out of carriage meant for whites at Pretoria station, he had two options - to be angry on the white man who threw him out or to understand

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That this white man is just a symptom of deep rooted disease of colour prejudice.

What Gandhi decided is well known. His biographer Louis Fischer quipped that Englishmen who threw him that day out of carriage didn't realise that this same old, black, fragile man will throw English Raj out of India.

Gandhi's experiences and his response to those guided by deep analysis, love and compassion stretched his mind towards equality and fight for negation of it all over the world. It gave him new objective, a life long aim.

Experiences make a person realise his true potential and motivate him to work hard. A case in hand is that of Kalidasa.

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Kalidasa is known for cutting the same branch he was sitting on. But he is also known for Abhigyan Shakuntalam, meghaduta, and many other works which are unparalleled in human history.

How did Kalidasa become this great poet? By an experience. His well known debate with scholar Vidatama and subsequent humili-  
ation by her made him learn new things. It is that experience which shaped his creativity, his understanding of human emotions, tragedies etc reflected in his works. Kalidasa never went to the same branch.

Experiences also led to demolition of old theories, hypothesis, dogmas and superstitions. When USA was gripped under 1929 Great Depression,

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One man from this capitalist heaven proposed policies traditionally associated with socialist states - government intervention, unemployment benefits, push for infrastructure.

Roosevelt followed and slowly America recovered. John Maynard Keynes' theories changed dominant economic landscape of America and outlined the 'free market' plans.

Therefore experiences lead to new schools, thoughts and change.

It forces our mind to go beyond the traditional and status quo. It

heralds new eras and lead to new discourses.

But can we assure that one's mind does not go back to its old ways. America went back and that culminated in 2008 Global Financial Crisis.

Usher home, after realising the democratic dream in 1947, India went back to totalitarianism in 1975 Emergency. Even in Europe, post establishment of democracy, Germany and Italy witnessed Nazism and Fascism that led to severe dictatorialships and human rights abuses.

In the same line, neo-colonialism in Africa and elsewhere in world is the product of going back to old ways. The new player in the game - China with this debt trap and cheque book diplomacy is imitating European ways. The short sightedness of governments in countries like Sri Lanka is adding fuel to the fire.

The religious conflict in different parts of the world is also

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the product of repeating old mistakes.  
The recent riot violence in Karnataka,  
Delhi riots etc are grim reminder.

Partition Remembrance Day must be  
used to realise what religious  
conflicts lead to - unprecedented  
violence and chaos.

But there are also instances  
where going back to old ways is  
the best option. Indian philosophy  
of 'living in harmony with nature' is  
an example.

The unprecedented destruction  
with the experiences of new technologies  
for exploiting resources has made  
our planet suffer. Therefore this  
experience should make us see the  
past and our traditions of minimalism,  
tribal cultures and traditional knowledge  
will help us limit our greed and  
understand the importance of co-existence  
with natural resources and wildlife.

Similarly our experiences with nuclear families and a general decline of values of love, respect and care must make us ponder

Increasing suicide rates in youth, rising divorce rates and a general trend towards isolation and over emphasis on individual has led to serious concerns.

It is important that we nurture our families, the communities we live in with sense of togetherness.

We should strike a balance between individual and community.

This will lead to more peaceful and stress free lives.

As Socrates said years ago, 'an unexamined life is not worth living'. Therefore we should constantly reflect on our experiences.

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Reflection and introspection lead to refinement of our thoughts. It helps us understand what to discard and what to keep.

We also need to build awareness in our society. We should about issues concerning our welfare more openly.

We all know that we experience a lot of changes in our bodies during puberty. But because a lot of them are considered taboo, we don't talk about them. This leads to confusion and misunderstanding in teenagers and culminate in incidents like 'Bois Locker Room'.

Therefore for proper channelisation of experiences, knowledge is needed. This makes new experience



a valuable thing and contributes  
positively to individual and  
society both.

Discussions and debates will lead to more meanings and perspectives towards our individual experiences. It will keep the mind rooted and stretch it to unexplored horizons.

As Keller said, life is an  
adventure, but this adventure must have both - ability to embrace the new and a deep sense of reverence of our moral values.