

Six Friends, One Elephant

A Jain story of Anekant





In a small village lived six friends who could not see. They knew the world by touching, listening and smelling.



Let us go and find
out what it is like!

An elephant has
come to our village!

*One morning the children ran in shouting.
The six friends had never met an elephant.*

You may touch him gently. He is very kind.

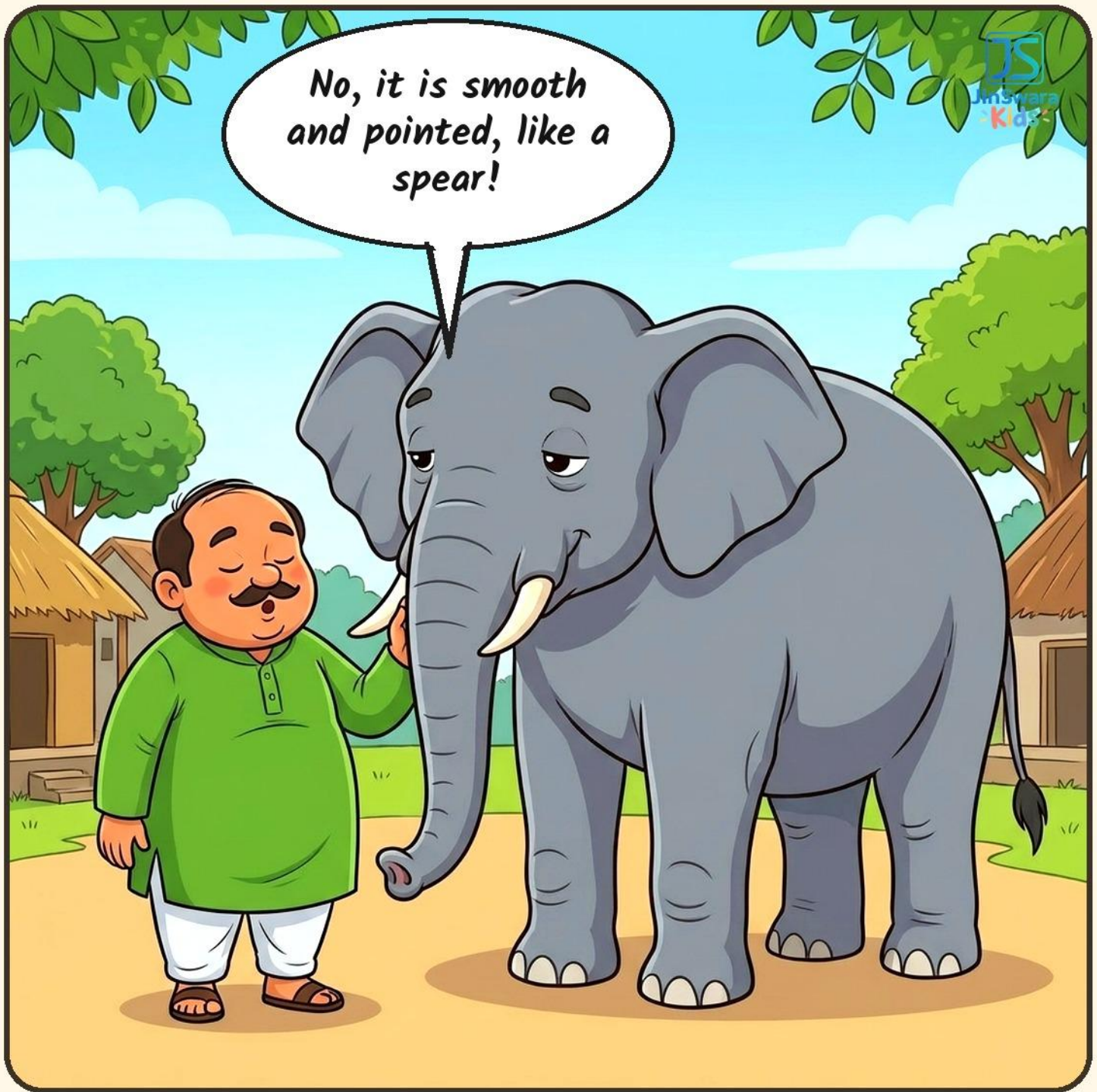


The elephant stood quietly near the well.

Oh! An elephant is
like a wall!



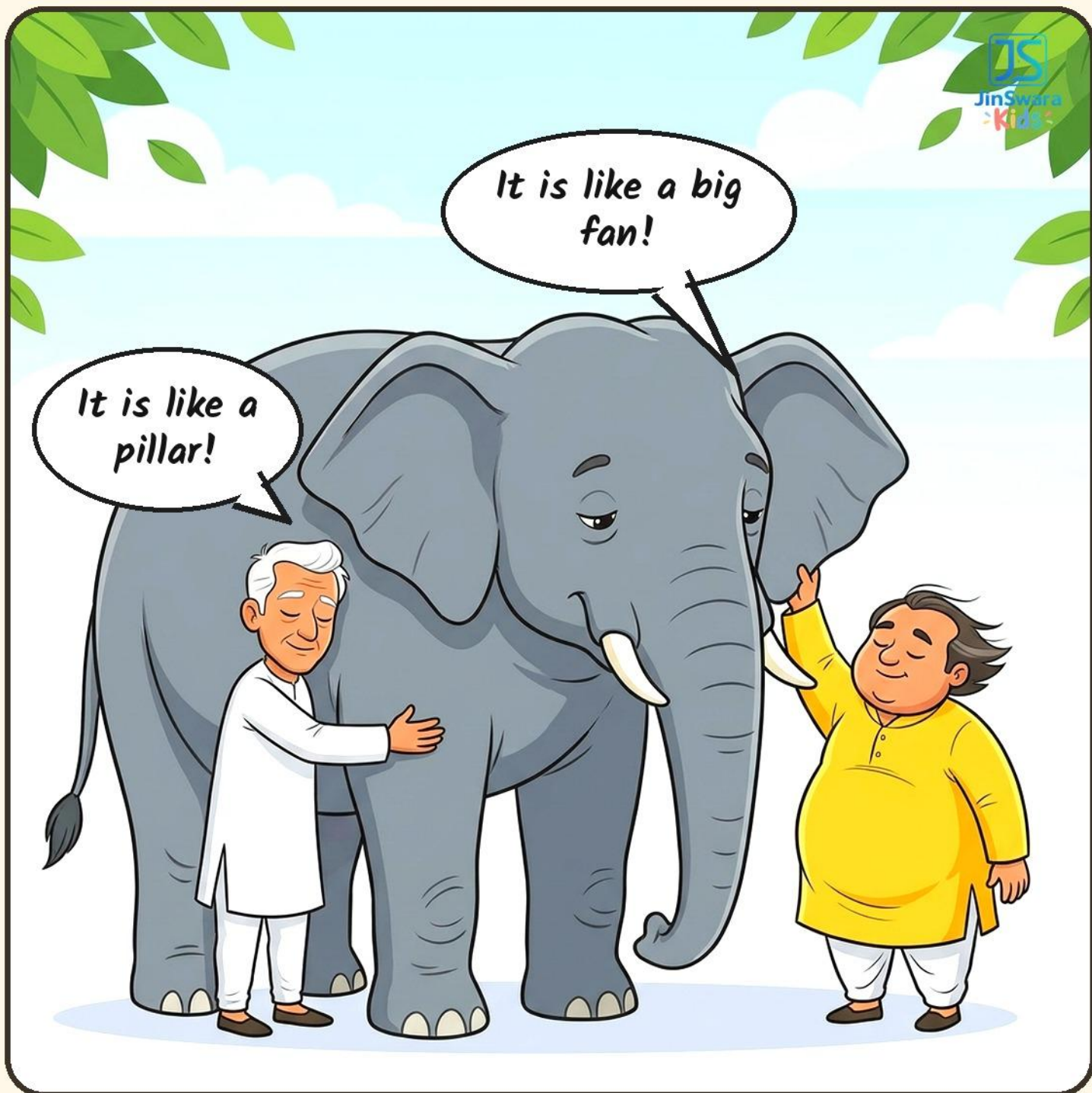
*The first friend touched the elephant's big
side.*



The second friend touched a tusk.

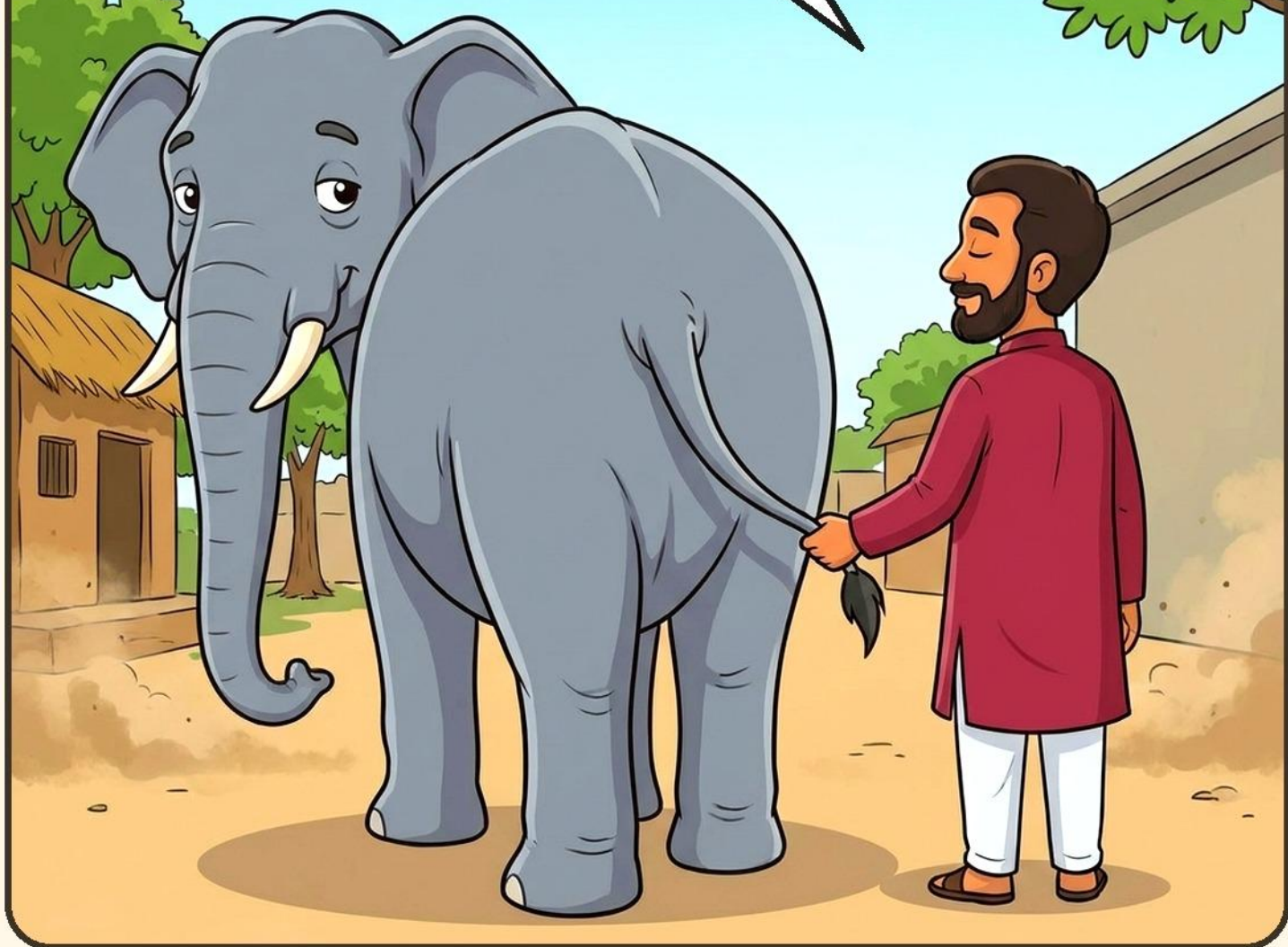


The third friend held the trunk as it moved.



The fourth friend hugged a leg. The fifth friend touched an ear.

You are all wrong.
An elephant is like
a rope!



The sixth friend caught the tail.



Soon they were arguing loudly. Each one was sure only he was right.

You each felt a real
part of the
elephant.

But one part is not
the whole elephant.

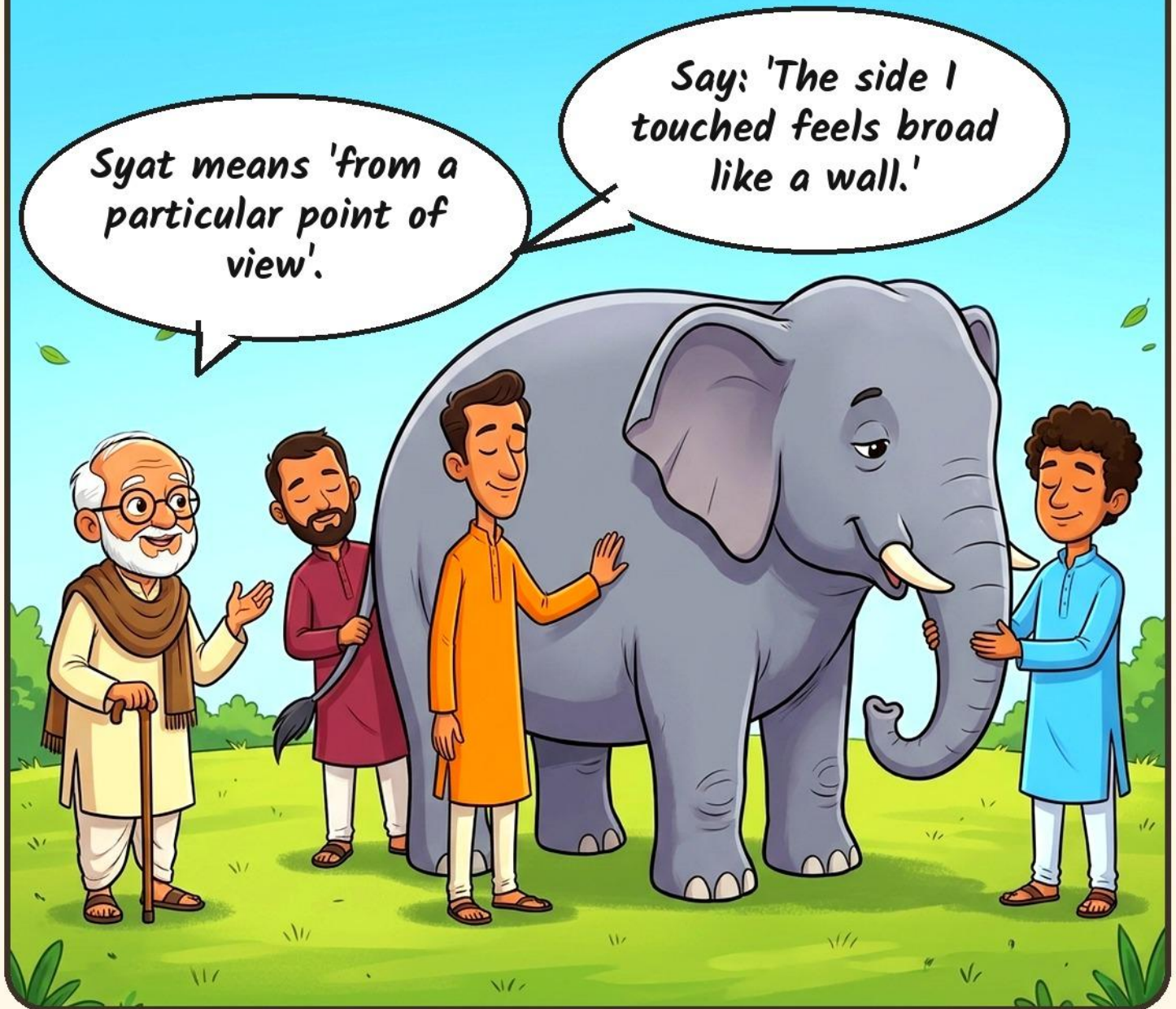
A wise Dadaji walking by heard them. He
smiled kindly.

Your mistake was saying that your part was the whole elephant.

But the elephant is not really a wall or a rope!



The broad side felt like a wall. The thin tail felt like a rope. Each description told something true about the part that friend touched.



Anekant teaches that a real thing has many sides to understand. Knowing just one side does not tell us everything about it. Saying which side we mean helps us speak carefully. This way of speaking is called Syadvad.

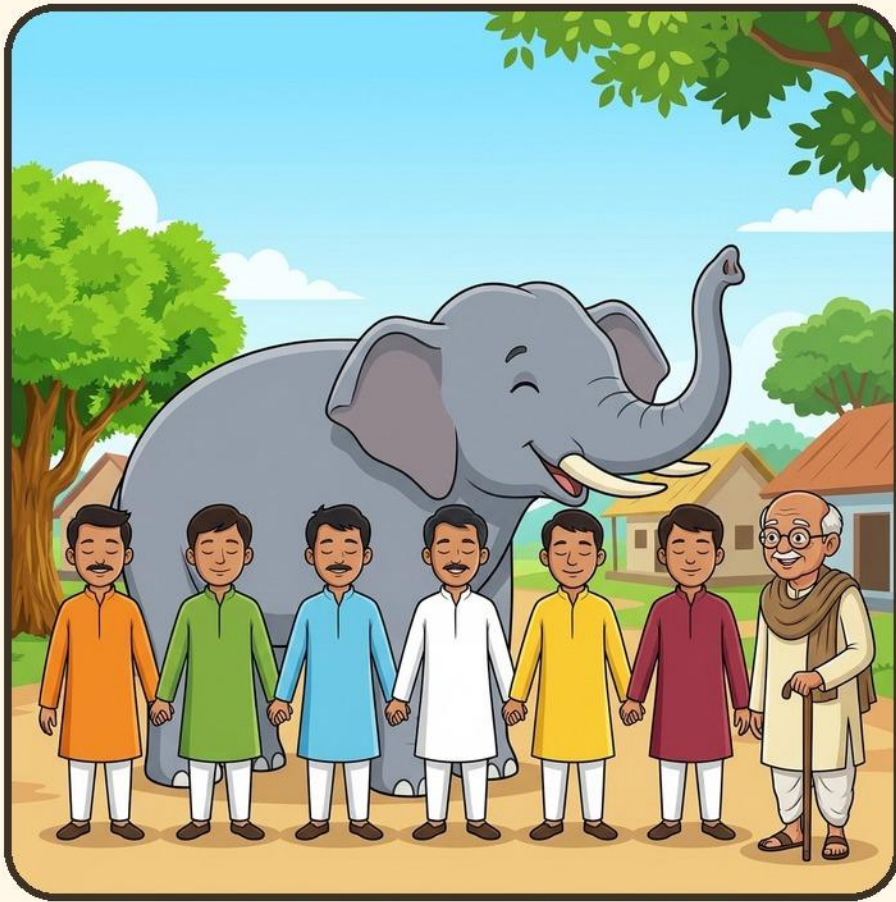


Dadaji was a father to his son and a grandfather to his grandson. Both were true because the relationships were different.

Now we understand
the elephant
better!



The friends gently explored more parts of the elephant and listened to one another. They stopped insisting that their own part was the whole elephant.



Moral

*One view can show a true part, not the whole.
Listen to other true views.*

Let us think

- 1. Which part felt like a rope?*
- 2. What was wrong with saying, "Only my description tells us the whole elephant"?*
- 3. How can Dadaji be both a father and a grandfather?*



Six friends who cannot see meet an elephant for the first time. Each one touches only one part and is sure he knows the whole truth. A wise Dadaji shows them that each of them is partly right. A gentle first story about Anekant: the truth has many sides.