

Depicting Upanishads as the Secret of Life and the Universe

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Abstract:

This paper tries to throw light on the mysterious and the scientific aspects of the principal Upanishads in order to prove them as an absolute and concrete source of knowledge about the origin, evolution, structure and basic function of the universe and life. I have tried here to reveal the mystery beneath each and every page of the Upanishads. Eventually, care has been taken to reveal how they have tried to teach us actively as well as passively to learn and live the life. They have told and directed us to have values and ethics within us in our lives so as to feed the immortal soul for its healthy growth as per the prescription. And several other aspects of the Upanishads have been taken into account to discuss.

Key Words: *Bramha, Sanatan, Jurisprudence, physiology, matrix*

Upanishads are as evident as concrete source of absolute knowledge of the universe. At the very same time these are the sheer sources of our authentic *Sanatan* culture and original traditions that teach us the duty and beauty of life with an anchor of spirituality. How the spiritual life moves and moulds the other forms of life has dramatically been expressed and proved on the lap of the Upanishads.

We are human beings. Yes, of course, our nature (will) is the changing most thing in the universe. Under what circumstance and what condition what will be thought by us, could not be determined or decided. So, for a healthy, wealthy and a perfect life, we need certain guidance which is, to us, always useful. Upanishads deal with this delicate thing, that is,

our mind and conscience. This is our inner master, the supreme regulator of individual. That is because, actually, our mind shapes our life. Upanishads are the priceless pits full of intense experience of life and knowledge. We can rightly say that the Upanishads are the golden passage of Sanskrit literature. Life needs ethics to be enriched, nourished and filtered. Hence, this could be better told as the criticism of life. Upanishads also deal with life's delicate aspects such as the soul, the supreme soul, the regulatory power of the universe, our duty, the sheer virtue and vice of mankind. We find maximum pieces of Sanskrit literature embedded in the matrix of ethics. Says Dr. *Radhakrishnan*-

“Human nature is not altogether unchanging but it does remain sufficiently constant to

justify the study of ancient classics. The problem of human life and destiny have not been superseded by the striking achievements of science and technology. The solution offered, though conditioned in their modes of expression by their time and environment, have not been seriously affected by the march of scientific knowledge and criticism. The responsibility laid on man as a rational being, to integrate himself, to relate the present to the past and the future, to live in times as well as in eternity, has become acute and urgent. The Upanishads, though remote in time from us, are not remote in thought. They disclose the working of the primal impulses of the human soul which rise above the differences of race and of geographical position. At the core of all historical religions there are fundamental types of spiritual experiences though they are expressed with different degrees of clarity. The Upanishads illustrate and illuminate these primary experiences."¹

The thoughts that are embedded in the Upanishads are really very useful to the men of all ages, all lands and of all times. These are as true as today as ever. The Upanishads deal with several serious questions of and about life and answer them very tactfully too. Upanishads are the epitome of knowledge, in true sense. These hypothesize also about the "structure of the world"² and the origin, configuration and physiology of human being. Yes, we must distinguish between the message and mythology of the Upanishads. Yes, one who reads the Upanishads in its original Sanskrit version, can know and assimilate the poetic beauty of the same.

Upanishads have trade with very delicate issues of life and death. These have given a number

of concrete doctrines and ideas about the human existence and the origin of the universe as well. On the soul of human being the Upanishads have given their significant remarks. On *Bramha*, *Parambramha*, *Aatmaa*, *Paramaatma*, *Ethics*, *Duty*, *Love*, *Universe*, *Sins*, *Worship*, *Virtue*, *Rebirth*, *Ahimsa*, *Liberation*, *Death*, *Sacrifice*, *Life*, *Nature* and on many other things the Upanishads have remarked well. Basically we can say that the Upanishads have taught us the way of living, the concrete art of living in this earth. We can say, in other words, it is ethics, that makes us strong and meaningful and hence these precious books, the Upanishads, have taught us this thing rightly. *Upanishads* are the end points of the *Vedas* and hence they are told *Vedantas*. Says *Patrick Olivelle*, the Vedantas or the Upanishads keep the secret knowledges in them. They are mysterious in themselves .

"In the early vedic literature the term most commonly used for 'connection' is *bandhu*, a term derived from a verb meaning "to bind," "to connect." *Bandhu* commonly means a kin, but when one thing is said to be a *bandhu* of another, the meaning is that the former is connected to or is a counterpart of the latter. The earliest usage of the important term *upanishad* indicates that it, too, carried a similar meaning: *upanishad* means "connection" or "equivalence." In addition, the term implies hierarchy; the Upanishadic connections are hierarchically arranged, and the quest is to discover the reality that stands at the summit of this hierarchically inter-connected universe. It is, however, assumed that such connections are always hidden. We see the term used with this meaning in the Upanishads themselves, for example, at

CU 1.1.10 and 1.13.4. Because of the hidden nature of these connections, the term *upanishad* also came to mean a secret, especially secret knowledge or doctrine. It is probably as an extension of this meaning that the term came finally to be used with reference to entire texts containing such secret doctrines—that is, our Upanishads.”^{3,4}

Although ritual and cosmological speculations found and abound in the Upanishads, the focus of their, means the authors’ or the saints’ inquiry is the human being—the construction of his body, its vital powers and various faculties, the numerous cognitive processes, and the crucial core of a human being. It is, of course, the human being has always been a central concern of human thought of all time; that is way most probably the religious doctrines throughout the world tend to be anthropocentric.

“In ancient India, however, the human body was invested with unparalleled cosmological significance, and parts of the body were homologized with cosmic phenomena.”⁵

A couple of significant items, connected and organized systematically in this universe, are called Brahman and Atman. These two concepts have been played pivotal role in the development of later Indian philosophies and theologies and that have been subject to intense scrutiny by modern scholarship. Says Brereton, in his book These permit the Upanishads to create “an integrative vision by identifying a single, comprehensive and fundamental principle which shapes the world”.⁶ Both are arranged in their own way as occupying the summit of the hierarchically arranged and interconnected universe. By the way, the Upanishads not only

deal with these crucial and great issues of the universe but also with the acute and delicate issues of the life, death and its scopes and functions. These Upanishads and Vedas have taught us the highest truth of the world. Says Krishnananda-

“The Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita constitute a **trio** whose revelations may be regarded as the highest possible reaches ever achieved by mankind. The plumbing of the depths of the very nature of all life, which seems to have been the occupation of the ancient Vedic seers, is really an unparalleled adventure in the history of humankind. The Vedas are principally known as *Samhitas*, a body of invocations, prayers, supplications, attunements of spirit and a vision of things which beholds a uniform, unifying principle in the highest as well as the lowest, in what may be visible or what is not visible, what is related or what is not related to the human individual-physical natural or religious, or even the occupations of daily work day life—all these became the objects of attention of the great seers of the Vedas. That which cannot be known through ordinary means is supposed to be capable of being known through the Vedas. Hence the Veda is called *aloukika* or super-physical in its power of perception, while all our normal perceptions are physical and personal as well as social.”⁷

About the origin of this earth or this universe the Vedas have given certain postulates. This is the doctrine of the ‘*spotavada*’, i.e.,

“Something like a potentiality to manifest nebular dust, a kind of bang, sometimes called the big bang, at least from one angle of the vision of modern science. There are

many other doctrines of this split- the coming forth, the concretization of this great vibration.”⁸

The things or the doctrines are not argumentation or any theorization, these are the direct grasp by intense meditation. The writers of the Upanishads are the seers of the ultimate truth. They have felt and assimilated the highest truth by dint of their sheer meditation. Those experiences are absolutely undiluted as good as the meditations.

The Upanishads contain the philosophical zest of the Vedas and these are the end point of the Vedas and are therefore called Vedanta. Veda means knowledge, and anta means the end. In other words, proper understanding of the ultimate meaning and simplifying the themes and riddles of the Vedas is called Vedanta knowledge. Will Durant (1885-1981), American writer, historian, and a great philosopher said: “Upanishads are the oldest extant philosophy and psychology of our race; the surprisingly subtle and patient effort of man to understand the mind and the world.” We can have straight relations of the Upanishads to the pure branch of science as told and accepted by the great scientists. Even scientists like *Niels Bohr*, the atomic theorist (1885-1962), *Erwin Schrodinger* (1887-1961), *Nikola Tesla*, a great man and scientist of physics (1856-1943) and *Albert Einstein*, the ever great man and brain of the world (1879-1955) found the true meaning of Physics in Vedas and Upanishads. The founding fathers of Quantum Physics – *Niels Bohr*, *Erwin Schrodinger* & *Werner Karl Heisenberg* (1901-1976), were avid readers of Vedic literatures. They found that the theories and postulates they gave had already been given by the Vedas and Upanishads thousand years ago. While formulating their ground-breaking theories they

found their experiments to be consistent with the knowledge expounded in Vedas. They accepted these Upanishads and especially, to this Vedas as their master or guru. *Niels Bohr*, a physicist of Danish origin, said, “I go into the Upanishads to ask questions.” *Werner Karl Heisenberg*, a notable German theoretical physicist stated: “After the conversations about Indian philosophy, some of the ideas of Quantum Physics that had seemed so crazy suddenly made much more sense. Quantum theory will not look ridiculous to people who have read Vedanta.” There are more than two hundred or more texts whose number is increasing day by day which go under the title of Upanishads. However, only hundred and eight of these are considered authoritative and out of those only ten to thirteen are regarded as ancient and the principal Upanishads.

There are eighteen (18) principal Upanishads in Sanskrit. ***Mukhya Upanishads***, also known as **Principal Upanishads**, are the most ancient, widely studied Upanishads of Hinduism Composed between 800 BCE, these texts are connected to the Vedic tradition. While some early colonial era Indology listed 10 Upanishads as *Mukhya Upanishads*, most of the research scholars now consider the Principal Upanishads to be thirteen. They are as follows:

1. **Îûâ Upanishad, White Yajurveda**
2. **Kena Upanishad, Samaveda**
3. **Kamha Upanishad, Black Yajurveda**
4. **Pracna Upanishad, Atharvaveda**
5. **MuGaka Upanishad, Atharvaveda**
6. **MâGûkya Upanishad, Atharvaveda**
7. **Taittirîya Upanishad, Black Yajurveda**

8. **Aitareya Upanishad, Rigveda**
9. **Chândogyā Upanishad, Samaveda**
10. **Bhadâra Gyaka Upanishad, White Yajurveda**
11. **Shvetashvatara Upanishad**
12. **Kaushitaki Upanishad**
13. **Maitri Upanishad**

The first ten of the above Principal Upanishads were commented upon by the 8th century scholar Acharya *Shankara*. The adjective “*Mukhya*” means “principal”, “chief”, or “primary”. The *Mukhya* Upanishads are accepted as *sruti* by all Hindus, or the most important scriptures of Hinduism. By systematic study of these Upanishads, we can have the knowledge that will help us to discover our true self and thus we can realize the real ambition and ultimate goal of life, the crucial expedition of the soul. Today, the entire world has realized the universality of the messages contained in the ancient pages of these sacred texts of India. Here, hence, we can focus on the message of Upanishads with reference to the-

- Relevance of Upanishads in modern day life
- Relevance of Upanishads in the field of education
- Messages in legal system, business and governance
- Science in Upanishads
- Life Sciences in Upanishads
- Guidelines for political system
- Nature of World according to Upanishads
- Nature of Liberation according to Upanishads

- Nescience according to Upanishads
- Creation according to Upanishads in the light of Big Bang Theory
- Consciousness in Upanishads
- Upanishads – Karma Mimamsa vs. Brahma Mimamsa
- Upanishads are explained by great acharyas like *Shankara*, *Ramanuja*, and *Madhwa* and Various other disciplines like Psychology, Astrology, Ecology, Music, Management could also be discussed in the light of Upanishads.
- Ecology in Upanishads (importance of ecology what told there in the Upanishads.)
- Astrology in Upanishads (astrology in our day to day life, its functions, scopes and effects.)
- Human Psychology (both individual and collective as well as the modern psychology) in Upanishads
- Upanishads and Jurisprudence
- Upanishads and Music (the role of music in our modern day to day life)
- Upanishads and Management (importance of management in our life and role and scope of this significant discipline with respect to the so called time.)

Upanishads have taken their origins from different Vedas. Hence, many scholars have classified or distinguished them with respect to the Vedas while other have done this with reference to time, nature and other things. Prof. *M. A. Hegde* classifies the Upanishads in various ways: for instance based on the Vedas ...

- Aitareya Upanishad has its origin from the Rig Veda;
- Chandogya Upanishad and Kena Upanishad have their origin from the Sama Veda;
- Isopanishad and Brihadaranyaka Upanishad are parts of the Shukla Yajur Veda;
- Kathopanishad, Taittiriya Upanishad and Shvetasvatara Upanishad from Krishna Yajur Veda;
- Prashna Upanishad, Mundaka Upanishad, Mandukya Upanishad belong to Atharva Veda.

They can also be classified as *Shaiva Upanishads*, *Shakta Upanishads*, *Vaishnava Upanishads* and so on. The professors and researchers have presented these various classifications and their expert opinions. Other aspects that deal with Upanishads could also be mentioned here in this light. With this, we can conclude that the Upanishads have concealed the secrets of the vast universe and of life too. About the existence, evolution and future also the Upanishads have significant and mysterious information in them. We just have to reveal them only and, in true sense, it is the scholarly responsibility of the whole world.

- Mahakavyas in Upanishads
- Stories in Upanishads
- Upasana in Upanishads
- Poetry of Upanishads
- Subhasitas in Upanishads
- Role of Guru in Upanishads
- Aum in Upanishads
- Yoga and Upanishads

- Law and Legal Logic in Upanishads
- Women in Upanishads
- Panchekarana in the light of Upanishads

Prof. Hare Krishna Satapathy, Vice-Chancellor, Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha, Tirupati says, “We require the message of the Vedas and Upanishads in order to form a knowledge-based society. Once the message of these sacred texts is promoted and propagated, we are sure that we can have an atmosphere which will be filled with the mutual coexistence and universal brotherhood.”

We can have a short indication towards the *Vidyas* or the knowledge concerned with the principal Upanishads here. Isa Upanishad teaches us about the vidya or the knowledge of meditation on the almighty God. It also teaches the *Vidya-avidya Upashana*, i.e, meditation on knowledge and Karma(duty). It has another aspect that tells the concept of god (Ishwara) and *Hiranyagarbhaka*. Similarly the *Kena-Upanishad* teaches us about the *Nirguna Bramha-Vidya*, that is the Meditation on the Attributeless *Bramha*. It also teaches us the meditation on with attributes, *Adesa Vidya*(meditation on the Bramha with the help of analogy) and the *Tdvanam Vidya* along with. The *Katha- Upanishad* deals with very important aspect of life and the universe. It teaches us the knowledge of self. It teaches us the meditation of one’s own self. *Nachiketa Upaakhyana* teaches us very important lessons on life and death. It trades with the meditation on the Supreme Person, acme of Perfection. This teaches us about the meditation on the Purusha of the size of the thumb (*Angushth Mantra Vidya*), the *Atma* in the city of Eleven gates(*Ekadasha-dvara-puri-vidya*) lesson on the effulgence. This

Upanishad sketches a beautiful logical figure of the Bramha as a sacred *Peepal* Tree. It give immense knowledge on the Bramha as Existing. The *Prashna Upanishad* teaches us about the lower *Bramha* and the supreme *Bramha*. It teaches the mystery of “*Pranava*” or “*Aum*”. It teaches us the meditation related to the entity with sixteen limbs. *Mundaka Upanishad* also teaches us about the lower *Bramha* and the transcendental *Bramha*. This deals with a very significant subject, and that is the meditation on the lord in the form of the manifested macrocosm. This is called the *Virat- Vidya*. This says very mysterious thing. That is the *Dvaa-Suparnaa Vidya*. The knowledge of the two golden birds, one is the soul and the other is the Supreme Soul. The *Atma-Paramatma Tatwa* is well explained here. This is one of the important most Upanishads in deed. *Mandukya Upanishad* is the smallest Upanishad of all. But it is not less important than any other Upanishad. Sage *Manduka* has told this Upanishad. This Upanishad says that this soul is the Supreme Soul, this is the supreme power (*Ayamaatmaa Bramha*). This also says about the four steps of a soul. The four stages of human mind or the four stages of the soul is well explained here. Similarly, the *Taitiriyi Upanishad* deals with several great aspects or vidyas, such as- *Maha-Samhita-Vidya* (Meditation on great conjunctions), *Vyahiriti- Vidya*, *Pankata-vidya* (on the five membered group), meditation on Truth-Knowledge-Eternity, *Pancha Kosha-Vidya* (Meditation on the five sheaths), Meditation on the Bliss-sheath (*Anandamaya-Vidya*), Meditation on the Unmanifested (*Asad-Vidya*), Meditation on the food and food-eater (*Annam aanada Vidya*), meditation on the Safety (*Kshemadi- Vidyas*). The conversations of *Bhargavi* and *Varuni* is very meaningful. Similarly, the *Aitareya Upanishad* was written by the sage

Aitareya. It teaches us about the meditation practised by *Vaamadeva*, and about the Consciousness of *Bramha*, which is very significant aspect of this Upanishad. The *Chhandogya Upanishad*, like these, has trade with the mystery of the *Udgitha* or *aum*. This *Udgitha-Vidya* is discussed here with great emphasis. Then it emphasizes and rather teaches us the art of meditation and meditation on the Vital Force, Syllables of *Stobha*, meditation on the Supreme as honey, as Sacrifice, meditation on mind and Ether, on the Sun, on the All-absorbent, meditation taught to *Satyakaama*, meditation by the great sage *Saandilya*, meditation practised by *Upakosala*, meditation on the Eye and the Indweller in the Sun, meditation on the Cosmic person (*Visvanara-Vidya*), on the Existence absolute, on the small-heart-space (*Dahara-Vidya*), on the supreme plentitude (*Bhumaa-Vidya*) and the Supreme person (*Uttana-Purusha- Vidya*) etc. This particular Upanishad gives birth to a great sentence and that is “Thou art That” (*Tat-tvam-asi*). This is a very big Upanishad and is musical by nature. It is very meaningful and as informative as poetic. The biggest Upanishad of all is *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. It tells us the three kinds of food and determines the natures of animals and human beings. It also deals with the same “*Udgitha*”. It explains the theory of “I am the Bramha”. It has taught us the “*Neti-Neti Vidya*” (i.e, Not this, Not this). It gives us immense knowledge on illness, *Bramha*. It teaches about the light of lights. *Satya Bramha Vidya*, *Hridaya Vidya* and *Purna-Vidya* (The meditation on the whole or the infinite) are the other important aspects or meditations that it deals with. Likewise the *Kaushitaki Upanishad* and *Svetasvetara Upanishad* deal with several other aspects of the life and universe too like the *Bramha*, meditation on the glory of the Supreme,

on the transcendental *Bramha*, on the In-dwelling Atman and the Universe as *Bramha* etcetera. Every Upanishad is here connected with each one by means of theme or style or any other aspect.

We can see the principal Upanishads, which are connected one another by means of the structures like the *Plasmodesmata* in plant cells. But surely these are unseen and could be felt only if one reads digests them thoroughly. We ruminate the essence and the do's and don'ts of life by ruminating the words and hymns of the Upanishads.

By the way, Upanishads are filled up with immense knowledge and embedded in the ethical matrix. The Upanishads are really the essence of the hour as these bear the true values and ethics. Hence, it could be told without any doubt, that the Upanishads are not only the need of this hour but of all time.

Notes :

01. Radhakrishnan, Dr. S.- '*Preface*' - **The Principal Upanishads** - Sixteenth Impression- 2006- New Delhi, India: Harper Collins Publishers, pg. 05.
02. *Ibid*- pg. 05.
03. Olivelle, Patrick,(ed./ trans.), **The early Upanishads : The text and Translation**- 1998- OUP, Oxford, Pg. 24.
04. On this meaning of *Upanishad*, see Renou 1946; Thieme 1968a, 83-87, and Falk 1986b. Gren-Eklund (1984, 117) states that the term "denotes the fact of two things being placed in a relation to each other." In the light of these studies, the older view (Deussen 1966 [1906], 13) that the term derives from "sitting near" a teacher and refers to a group of disciples at the feet of a teacher imbibing esoteric knowledge is clearly untenable. The term comes to mean also a secret doctrine or rite: see Bodewitz 1986b,438, n. 4.
05. Olivelle, Patrick, **Op. Cit.** – Pg. 22.
06. Brereton, J.1990. "**The Upanishads.**" In *Approaches to the Asian Classics*, ed. W. T. de Bary and I. Bloom, pp. 115-35. New York: Columbia University Press.Pg.118.
07. Swami Krishnananda – '*Vedic Vision*' - **The Vision of Life**- First Edition- 2005- Uttaranchal, Himalayas, India: The Divine Life Society, pg. 85.
08. *Ibid*- pg. 87.

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