



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE UPANISHADS AND THE MODERN WORLD: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY.

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Manuscript Info**Manuscript History:**

Received: 15 October 2015
 Final Accepted: 16 November 2015
 Published Online: December 2015

Key words:

Upanishads, Vedanta, Modern
 World, Chhandogya, Scientific
 Knowledge, Self-Knowledge.

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Abstract

Modern age is the age of reason and science. Human is more advances in all field. But besides these all there is some unrest in the world. Modernity have spoiled the pristine figure of the world which is peaceful and sound environment. Upanishads are the ancient Indian classical anthologies comprising the knowledge, revelation and logic. The message of Upanishads is very utilising in the modern world, because Upanishads believes in making a sound and healthy atmosphere without affecting the present picture of world. This is demand of the modern time.

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INTRODUCTION

Upanishads---Upanishads form the core of Indian philosophy. They are an amazing collection of writings from original oral transmissions, which have been aptly described by Shri Aurobindo as "the supreme work of the Indian mind". It is here that we find all the fundamental teachings that are central to Hinduism—the concepts of 'Karma' (action), 'Samsara' (reincarnation), 'Moksha' (nirvana), the 'Atman' (soul), and the 'Brahman' (Absolute Almighty). They also set forth the prime Vedic doctrines of self-realization, yoga and meditation. The Upanishads are summits of thought on mankind and the universe, designed to push human ideas to their very limit and beyond. They give us both spiritual vision and philosophical argument, and it is by a strictly personal effort that one can reach the truth. The Upanishads are a collection of texts of religious and philosophical nature and containing the traditional Vedic religious order. The Upanishads are ancient texts, which record the foundation of Hindu thought. They are the final part of the Vedas, the part that is concerned with pure knowledge and briefly expound the philosophic principles of the Vedas and are considered the essence of the Vedas. The Upanishads were composed in Sanskrit, the main language of classical Hindu learning.

The word 'Veda' means 'Knowledge'; and the Upanishads are sometimes described as 'Vedanta', which means the 'Culmination of knowledge'. The philosophy of the Upanishads is sublime, profound, lofty and soul-stirring. The Upanishads speak of the identity of the *Atman* (individual soul) and *Brahman* (the Supreme Soul). They reveal the most subtle and deep spiritual truths. The Upanishads contain the essence of the Vedas. They are the concluding portions of the Vedas and are the source of the Vedanta philosophy. Profound, original, lofty and sublime thoughts arise from every verse. They contain the direct spiritual experiences or revelations of seers, or sages, the *Rishis*. They are the products of the highest wisdom, supreme divine knowledge.

The Upanishads are metaphysical treatises which are replete with sublime conceptions of Vedanta and with intuitions of universal truths. The Indian Rishis and seers of yore endeavoured to grasp the fundamental truths of being. They tried to solve the problems of the origin, the nature and the destiny of man and of the universe. They attempted to grasp the meaning and value of knowing and being. They endeavoured to find a solution for the problems of the means of life and the world and of the relation of the individual to the 'Unseen,' or the Supreme Soul.

Etymologically, the name Upanishad is composed of the terms *Upa* (near) and *Shad* (to sit), meaning something like “*sitting down near*”. The name is inspired by the action of sitting at the feet of an illuminated teacher to engage in a session of spiritual instructions, as aspirants still do in India today. It points to a period in time when groups of pupils sat near the teacher and learnt from him the secret teachings in the quietude of forest 'ashrams' or hermitages. In another sense of the term, 'Upanishad' means '*Brahma-Knowledge*' by which ignorance is annihilated. Some other possible meanings of the compound word 'Upanishad' are "placing side by side" (equivalence or correlation), a "near approach" (to the Absolute Being), "secret wisdom" or even "sitting near the enlightened". The authors of the Upanishads were many. They were poets prone to flashes of spiritual wisdom, and their aim was to guide a few chosen pupils to the point of liberation, which they themselves had attained. The traditional number of Upanishads is 108, though there are many more, especially of recent origin. Of these, 11 are usually considered most important.

The Essence of Upanishads---The Vedas start out as mythical and ritual texts. In the Vedas there are three parts; Upasana Khanda, Jnana Khanda and Karma Khanda. The same three parts are also contained in the Upanishads. These Upanishads have been telling man, what it is that he should do, what it is that he should not do; what paths, if adopted, will lead to good, what paths if adopted will lead him to bad, and so on. When we go deeply into the contents of the Upanishads and when we understand their inner meaning, then our own life will look to us like a happy dream. It will lead you to a situation when you will not again want to be attached to this life. In the Upanishads, we get an intelligible body of verified and verifiable spiritual insights mixed with a mass of myths and legends and cosmological speculations relating to the nature and origin of the universe.

Upanishads contains the stories of individuals and their teachings. These individuals are surprisingly often kings and warriors; they are sometimes scholars and priests; they are often householders, sometimes Sannyasi or ascetics; they may be men or women. But such personal characteristics do not matter. What matters is knowledge, beyond all personality. The statements of the Upanishads have two aspects:

- The first aspect is called '*Mantra*', which literally means 'device' or 'design'. Here, the shape of sound in the chanted words has an effect upon mood, in much the same way that music does. As a listener keeps concentrating attention through these shapes of chanted sound, the mind is thrown into special states of experience, called '*Samadhis*'. These *Samadhis* are trance-like states of mental concentration: where the powers of the mind get expanded to an extraordinary degree, beyond the usual limitations of ordinary experience. The mantra aspect is thus associated with the discipline of yoga or mystical meditation.
- The second aspect is called '*Vicara*', which means 'thought' or 'enquiry'. Here, the mind reflects back to its own basis of understanding; beneath all physical or mental shapes of sound. The physical and mental sounds are heard at the limited surface of the mind's attention. The questioning thought of *Vicara* is not concerned with the shape of spoken sounds, but with their meaning. Here, thought looks back into meaning, thus reasoning its way towards the underlying ground of understanding. This *Vicara* aspect is nothing else but the reflective reason of philosophy.

The purpose of the Upanishads is to ensure the true welfare of all beings, worldly as well as spiritually. Upanishads were composed and learned in an environment that contained a great deal of mystical and ritual practice. And for this reason, they developed a powerful mantra aspect, which was often used to help with their philosophical enquiry. Upanishads can be studied from different angles such as a historical document, a spiritual treatise, a scriptural text for daily chanting and prayer, a sublime poetry, an exposition of Grammar and meter, or a management manual, depending on one's own outlook and purpose. Self-Knowledge (*Atman Jnana*) which eliminates our ignorance and the consequent problems created and bestows the ultimate good for all of us is the core theme of Upanishads. Upanishads gives us the vision of a person who has gained the supreme Knowledge and lives anchored in it. Upanishads is an ultimate source of inspiration and enlightenment for generations. The message of the Upanishads is not merely a general spiritual philosophy or ethical doctrine but it has a bearing upon the practical aspects in the application of such principles in our day-to-day lives. Upanishads generally dealt with the following method of action and procedure---

- Identifying the problem,
- Finding a solution,
- Implementing the solution,
- Understanding the values of life, and
- Achieving perfection

The main philosophical subject matter of the Upanishads is the explanation of five basic concepts.

- Jiva, the individual soul or the living being
- Jagat, the universe he lives in or nature or matter

- Jagadishvara, the creator of the universe or the Supreme Controller and the relationship between Jiva, Jagat and Jagadishvara.
- Dharma (Duty in accordance with Divine law)
- Kaala (Time)

Besides these delineating various spiritual experience, the Upanishads also give a few hints on Sadhana i.e., paths of spiritual realization. These methods of Sadhana are called Vidyas. The Upanishads does not give much detail about the vidyas because such details cannot be conveyed in print. Typically, a teacher transmits these truths to the students, often in silence. There are not many books in print which discuss the relevance of Upanishadic thought for spiritual practice.

The method of empirical knowledge or 'Sadhana' took entire possession of the doctrine of Vidyas, that the knowledge through which deliverance is attained came to be regarded as a becoming something, as an effect of definite causes, which might therefore be brought about by promoting such causes. The Upanishadic Sadhana is mainly deals with the:-

- The removal of all desire, and
- The removal of the consciousness of plurality.

It was worth while therefore to produce or at least to expedite emancipation by artificial means, and the result was two remarkable manifestations of the culture of India, which are contained in germ in the older Upanishads, and in a series of later Upanishads pass through a complete development. To produce these two states artificially was the aims; of two characteristic manifestations of Indian culture.

- Of the yoga, this by withdrawing the organs from the objects of sense and concentrating them on the inner self endeavoured to shake itself free from the world of plurality and to secure union with the atman.
- Of the Sannyasa, which by the "casting off from oneself" of home, possessions, family and all that stimulates desire seeks laboriously to realise that freedom from all the ties of earth, in which a deeper conception of life in other ages and countries also has recognised the supreme task of earthly existence, and will probably continue to recognise throughout all future time.

The former seeks by artificial measures to suppress desire, the latter the consciousness of plurality, and thus to secure the attainment of the knowledge through which deliverance is wrought, as far at least as its external signs are concerned. Practical philosophy is comprised in these two manifestations of culture, which pursue their course on parallel lines, and often touch; and it has been developed out of the thoughts of the Upanishads.

In Chhandogya, life is regarded allegorically as a great soma festival. In this a miniature ethical system in five words is incidentally interwoven, when as the reward of the sacrifice (*Dakshinaa*), which is to be offered at the great sacrificial feast of life, are named :- 1. *Tapas*, asceticism; 2. *Danam*, liberality; 3. *Arjavam*, right dealing; 4 *Ahimsa*, no injury to life; and 5. *Satyavacanam*, truthfulness.

In Taitteriya twelve duties are enumerated, by the side of each of which the "*Learning and Teaching of the Veda*" are constantly enjoined. These are:-Right dealing and truthfulness; asceticism, self-restraint, and tranquillity; and as duties of a household--Maintenance of the sacred fire and the agnihotram, hospitality and courtesy, duties to children wives and grandchildren. In India, also, as in other countries, men believed that they heard the voice of the moral law-giver (Prajapati) in the roll of the thunder, whose Da! Da! Da! is explained in the myth of Brihadaranyaka as damyata! Datta! Daya- dhvam! (Be self-restrained, liberal, and pitiful).

In the Upanishads, we get an intelligible body of verified and verifiable spiritual insights mixed with a mass of myths and legends and cosmological speculations relating to the nature and origin of the universe. While the former has universal validity, and has a claim on human intelligence in all ages, the latter forswears all such claim. All positivistic knowledge contained in any literature, including religious literature, is limited and conditioned by the level of contemporary scientific knowledge. Modification, and even scrap- ping, of much of this knowledge due to subsequent advances has affected the truth-validity of much of man's literary heritage, including his religious and philosophical ones.

Upanishads and Modern World---Science today has given up treading the paths that are likely to yield results useful to people. On the other hand, scientists are taking to paths which will be harmful to people. They have also been taking to paths that create some difficulties and conflicts in the people. Because they have abandoned useful paths and have taken to harmful and dangerous paths, it has also resulted in their forgetting the presence of God. In whatever field it may be, if an individual is working so that ego gets hold of him, then it will not only land him into a dangerous position but will also create considerable difficulties for him. Ego works on the stature of a man as the rays

of the morning sun work on his shadow. In the morning, on account of the rays of the sun, our shadow will be a very long one. As the sun goes higher in the sky, the length of the shadow caused by the sun's rays will become smaller and smaller. In the same way, the stature of an egoist is something that has to go down and down as time goes on.

In the modern world, the situation is quite different; because our society has now learned to thrive on sceptical questioning. There is no longer any need to hide philosophical enquiry, from ordinary life and education. In particular, there is no need for the traditional mystique that kept the Upanishads inaccessible. The desire for fame, wealth and the consequent pressure, from the fiercely competitive world of national finance, compounded by the invisible world of scientific peerdom, drove researchers to establish credible avenues of escape from irresolvable errors. The process of redemption was to dilute every serious and irreconcilable error through a profound principle. It is unbelievable but true that every profound principle in Physics and Cosmology, gloss over areas ridden with hidden problems that defies human understanding.

Upanishads deals with human problems in a human way. That is why it has a tremendous appeal. It has inspired the human mind in world for centuries and today it casts its spell on millions of people across the various parts of the world. It remains the most translated work in the Globe. The modern technology like the Internet has further increased its reputation by carrying its message to every nook and corner of the world. Despite this enormous popularity, the Upanishads remains a less understood but a better known text; people know more about it than what is it about. Upanishads being a subjective science rarely one tries to know how to remove one's weaknesses and develop inner strength much less one tries to live up to the ideals propounded by it and bring about consequent re-adjustments in one's life. We grope along by the voice of tradition, authority, herd-instinct and group-mentality.

Upanishads teaches how to achieve harmony with divinity in the midst of disharmony by subduing all outward energies and remaining in equanimity with pairs of opposites like pain and pleasure, aversion and attraction, success and failure etc. The problem that is facing us today is that while the world is coming closer physically it is drifting apart mentally and emotionally. Hence all the conflicts and violence, destruction and damage across the globe. The urgent need, therefore, is the reconciliation and reconditioning of the human mindset, to inculcate a global vision and bring about the universal brotherhood.

The spiritual insights of the Upanishads, however, are an exception to this tyranny of time. Subsequent scientific advances have not only not affected their truth-value but have, on the contrary, only helped to reveal the rational basis of their insights and enhance their spiritual appeal. This is no wonder, because these insights are the products of an equally scientific investigation into a different field of experience, namely, the world of man's inner life. All science is the search for unity. Upanishads discovered this unity in the Atman; it followed its own method relevant to this field of inquiry. But it illustrated its conclusions with whatever positive knowledge was available at the time. In recent centuries this knowledge has been advanced radically and vastly by modern science, the impact of which on Upanishads, however, has been most wholesome.

In fact, Upanishads hopes for and welcomes further radical advances in modern science by which its own spiritual vision of the One in the many may be corroborated by positive scientific knowledge, so that the spirituality of science and the spirituality of religion may flow as a united stream to fertilize all aspects of human life. Upanishads is thus both religious and philosophical tradition. As religious tradition, it discovers the truths of the inner world, and fosters the same discovery by others; and as philosophical tradition, it synthesizes this science of the inner world with the other sciences of the outer world, to present a unified vision of total reality, and to impart to human life and character depth of faith and vision along with breadth of outlook and sympathy.

The Upanishads are rather plain and direct. They do not construct any complex system of ideas and beliefs. They do not build any elaborate or strange or difficult picture of the world. Upanishads are very much like the Greek philosopher Socrates, who played a major part in the founding of Western reason. From what we are told of his life, he was something of a mystic, known for his trance-like states of mental absorption and for his extraordinary powers of endurance. As he said: '*The unexamined life is not worth living.*' It is the same with the Upanishads. There was plenty of mysticism around them; and they took account of it, along with everything else. But they are not basically concerned with the mystical expansion of mental power. Their essential core is the pure knowledge of philosophy. And here, the emphasis is clearly on the *Vicara* or enquiry aspect: of reflective reasoning. Upanishads is specially suited for the purpose, as it attempts to bring together varied and apparently antithetical forms of the consciousness and emphasizes the root conceptions of humanity which are neither ancient nor modern, belonging neither to the east nor the west, but eternal and universal.

Conclusion---The Upanishads are an impressive record of this 'reading of the book within'. The Upanishads are the only sacred books which addressed themselves exclusively to the discovery of essential spiritual truths and to leading man, irrespective of creed and race, to their realization in his own life. Modern world is dynamic and scientific and everything nothing but base upon the criteria of logic. Human understating is more rational than ancient time. In the

contemporary age of religious pluralism and peaceful co-existence, we have to do something better for our brighter future. Upanishads are utmost store of Knowledge, Revelation and Logic; and easy to understand and application. Modern world warrants more rational methods and action for its betterment; because all are inter-dependent. And Upanishads are totally worthy of this.....

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