



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**Philosophy**

**PLACE OF UPANISHADS IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY**

**KEY WORDS:** Upanishads, Satya, Vedas, Brahman

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**ABSTRACT**

Upanishads form the core of Indian philosophy. The knowledge of the highest self that dispels ignorance; the root of all miseries and ushers in the mind of a learner the sense of oneness is called Upanishad. They deal with the universal themes: what is Truth (satya) or Reality (Brahman); what is the relation between the creation and its creator; what is the nature of the creator; how man can overcome existential problems; how man can lead a happy life without fear of death, the greatest fear. The Upanishads are religious and philosophical treatises, forming part of the early Indian Vedas. They teach that men can be happy once they realize the Truth and their inner essence. Happiness results from Knowledge - the Knowledge of Reality. Upanishads are the ancient Indian classical anthologies comprising the knowledge, revelation and logic. The message of Upanishads is very utilizing 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.

**INTRODUCTION**

The Upanishads are religious and philosophical treatises, forming part of the early Indian Vedas. The Sanskrit term Upanishad (from *upa* "by" and *ni- ad* "sit down") translates to "sitting down near", referring to the student sitting down near the teacher while receiving spiritual knowledge. (Gurumukh) Other dictionary meanings include "esoteric doctrine" and "secret doctrine". Monier- Williams' Sanskrit Dictionary notes - "According to native authorities, Upanishad means setting to rest ignorance by revealing the knowledge of the supreme spirit." Adi Shankaracharya explains in his commentary on the Kaha and Brihadaranyaka Upanishad that the word means Atmavidya, that is, "knowledge of the self", or Brahmanavidya "knowledge of Brahma". The Upaniads are the fourth and final section of a larger group of texts called the Vedas. There are four different collections of Vedic texts, the gveda, Yajurveda, Smaveda, and Atharvaveda, with each of these collections containing four different layers of textual material: the Samhitas, Brhmaas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads. Although each of these textual layers has a variety of orientations, the Sahits are known to be largely comprised of hymns praising gods and the Br hma as are mostly concerned with describing and explaining Vedic rituals. The ra yakas and Upani ads are also firmly rooted in ritual, but with both groups of texts there is an increasing emphasis on understanding the meaning of ritual, while some sections of the Upanishads seem to move completely away from the ritual setting into naturalistic and philosophical inquiry about the processes of life and death, the workings of the body, and the nature of reality.

The Vedic Upanishads are widely recognized as being composed during two chronological stages. The texts of the first period, which would include the Bhadrayaka, Chandogya, Taittiriya, Aitareya and Kausitaki, are generally dated between 700 and 500 B.C.E., and are considered to predate the emergence of the so-called heterodox traditions, such as the Buddhists, Jains, and Ajivikas. Scholarly consensus dates the second stage of Vedic Upaniads, which includes the Kena, Katha, Isa, vetasvatara, Prasna, Mundaka, Manukya, and Maitri, between 300-100 B.C.E. The older Upanishads are primarily composed in prose, while the later ones tend to be in metrical form, but any individual text may contain a diversity of compositional styles. Additionally, many individual Upanishads consist of various types of material, including creation myths, interpretations of ritual actions, lineages of teachers and students, magical formulae, procreation rites, and narratives and dialogues about famous teachers, students, and kings. Nyya, Vaieika, Mms, and Vednta darsanas do not adhere to the chronology above, as they regard all the Vedic Upaniads as sruti, meaning a timeless revealed knowledge. The remaining two *daranas*—Skhya and Yoga—are usually read as supporting the Vedas. However,

when tracing the historical development of philosophical ideas, it is helpful to note some differences in orientation between the two stages of Upanishadic material. While all the Upaniads devote considerable attention to topics such as the self (*tman*) and ultimate reality (*brahman*), as well as assume some version of the karma doctrine, the earlier texts tend to characterize ultimate reality in abstract and impersonal ways, while the later Upaniads, particularly the *s* and *Svet'svatara*, are more theistic in orientation. Meanwhile, the later Upanishads explicitly address a number of key topics such as *yoga*, *moka*, and *sasra*, all of which would continue to be central aspects of subsequent Indian philosophy. Upanishads 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". 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. 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.

**Vedas and Upanishads**

The four Vedas were passed down from generation to generation until they were committed to writing during the so-called Vedic Period between c. 1500 - c. 500 BCE in India. The concepts are generally thought to have originated in Central Asia and arrived in India with the Indo-Aryan Migration of c. 3000 BCE (though this is contested by some scholars). Although some schools of thought claim there are five Vedas, the scholarly consensus rests on four: Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda. The 13 best-known Upanishads are embedded in the texts of each of these in response to the particular concepts each expresses. The 13 Upanishads are: Bhadharanyaka Upanishad, Chandogya Upanishad, Taittiriya Upanishad, Aitareya Upanishad, Kausitaki Upanishad, Kena Upanishad, Katha Upanishad, Isha Upanishad, Svetasvatara Upanishad, Mundaka Upanishad, Prashna Upanishad, Maitri Upanishad, Mandukya Upanishad.

The composition of the first six (Bhadharanyaka to Kena) is dated to between c. 800 - c. 500 BCE with the last seven (Katha to Mandukya) dated from after 500 BCE to the 1st century CE. The works take the form of narrative philosophical dialogues in which a seeker approaches a master for instruction in spiritual truth. This seeker may not always know that he or she is seeking such truth and, in some Upanishads, a disembodied voice speaks directly to an audience who then

becomes the speaker's interlocutor in the dialogue or, in other words, the seeker.

Self-actualization is achieved with the understanding of the phrase *Tat Tvam Asi* – meaning one is already that which one wishes to become; one only has to realize it. Each individual already carries the Divine Spark within; recognizing this connects one to God and to other people. This understanding of human existence, basically, informs the belief system of Sanatan Dharma and the Upanishads suggest how one might best live that understanding.

### The Significance Of The Upanishads

Out of main 13 Upanishads, the oldest of the Vedas, the Rig Veda contains the Aitareya Upanishad. The next in antiquity is the Sama Veda which contains the Kena Upanishad and Chandogya Upanishad. Next comes the Yajur Veda which contains the most: four of the Upanishads namely, Katha, Taittiriya, Brihadaranyaka and Svetasvatara. The most recent of the Vedas is the Atharvana Veda which contains the Mandukya and Kaivalya Upanishad. This little article is an attempt to place the main the principal Upanishads within the reach of every man and woman.

The Upanishads are magnificent movements of ancient Indian wisdom, being the grand outpourings of the spiritual experiences of those unique seekers of truth who, having risen above the chaos of ritualism and word spinning of scholastic philosophy, saw the truth directly through intuitive insight and thus gave to the thinking world what no philosophy based merely on logical reasoning could possibly give. The aim of the authors in writing these scriptures was not, however, so much propagation of their metaphysical findings as to bring peace and freedom to anxious and struggling humanity through right living based on spiritual experiences. Who can doubt the fact that spiritual inheritance of the Hindus is as great, if not greater than, that of any living nation of the world? And yet no people are so poor in truly religious life as Hindus are at the present time. Is it not tragic that with such a treasure house as the Upanishads at our disposal, we are still weltering ignominiously in the quagmire of gross materialism and superstitious rituals.

It has been well said that “ideas are forces and they must be broadcasted if the ageing to death of a nation is to be avoided”. It is just this truth which has so long been ignored by the Hindu society with regard to the religious life of most of its members. Instead of broadcasting the sublime ideas and ideals of our ancient seekers, we had kept them confined in books which only a few could understand and had taught them in institutions to which still fewer could find access.

Our greatest need at the present time is, therefore, the dissemination of those noble teachings of our sacred scriptures which when reduced to practice can enrich human life and can, at the same time, make life thus enriched subservient to the achievement of social ends. It will, indeed, be strange, if the spirit of supreme wisdom of our Rishis which could at one time touch the deepest springs of human personality to such fine issues, should have lost its power of regenerating the present generations. Let us then go back without any farther delay to our ancient and ever-fresh springs of spiritual vitality which have always been and can still be the best restoratives of our lost vigor.

### CONCLUSION

The Upanishads are an impressive record of '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. The imprint of the Upanishads on Indian culture is all pervasive. The deeper we study these wonderful texts, the better our understanding of Indian culture and society. The role of Indian Civilization in the future world will be determined by how closely our society is guided by the philosophy of the Upanishads.

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