PHILOSOPHICAL AND EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE OF UPANISHADS

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ABSTRACT

Indian philosophy represent a highly wisdom not only of India but of world philosophy. Indian philosophy is not only a set of doctrine, in fact it is a power, and a glow with spiritual vibrations, it is developed through immortal dialogues between self realized rishis and earnest seekers for the truth deal with the great problems of human existence. From where does the universe arises; what is the nature of the immortal spark within each of us, and its relationship with the all pervasive divine; what are the modalities through which a union-yoga-between these two can be achieved in this very lifetime; these are some of the great conundrums with which philosophers and seekers around the world have grappled from the dawn of civilization. Western philosophy is concerned mainly with life in the world around us but Upanishads deal exclusively with our inner life. We the people of India, are privileged inheritors of Wisdom whose importance has not yet been fully realized by the world, or even by us. Some glimpses are:

➢ “Truth is one” and “That though art.”
➢ “The Lord pervades everything” and therefore, “The whole world is one family”.
➢ “Do not covet the wealth of others” because eventually, “Truth alone triumphs”.

Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagvad Gita are the prime sources of India’s spiritual heritage. As the concluding parts of the Vedas, the Upanishads are synonymous with the philosophy called Vedanta. The Bhagvad Gita contains the essence of the Upanishads, like flowers in a bouquet.

Keywords: Upanishads, Veda, Soul, Self,

INTRODUCTION

Veda means wisdom. Vedas are a vast collection of spiritual hymns and rituals, as also the principles which underlie them. Like the scriptures of other religions, Vedas are believed to be direct revelations from the divine. There are, however, two noteworthy differences. First, the Vedas preceded other holy scriptures by many centuries – even millennia. Second, the enlightened sages to whom the Vedas were revealed have remained anonymous. The Vedas are four in number: Rg Veda, Sam Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda. They were taught in Vedic schools called Shakhas (literally, branches of a tree). These differed widely in their teaching of even common subjects; and therefore, they produced distinctly different works. More than 5000 years ago, a sage named Krishna Dvaipayana compiled the works of as many as 1,131 Shakhas. However, most of his compilations were destroyed during repeated foreign invasions. At present, works of only about a dozen Shakhas are available.
For the purpose of study, each Veda is generally divided into two parts:

- **Karma Kanda**: This deals with prayers and rituals.
- **Gyana Kanda**: This deals with the rationale and the philosophy underlying prayers and rituals.
- In a second system of classification, each Veda is said to contain four books:
  - **Samhita**: These are a collection of hymns or mantras.
  - **Brahmana**: These explain the use of mantras and the procedure for performance of various rituals.
  - **Aranyak**: These explain the implied symbolism or the inner significance of various mantras and rituals. They are also called Forest books, as they were conceived and taught in the solitude of forests.
  - **Upanishads**: These are either independent books or continuation of any of the previous books.

The word Upanishad literally means knowledge received sitting close to the teacher not just physically but also mentally. (UP means near in means down shad means sit). As a subject becomes more deep and subtle it becomes difficult to explain it in words. Sitting close to the teacher helps in grasping the subject through his facial expressions and body language.

Another meaning given to the word Upanishad is that which shatters ignorance. Whatever the etymological meaning is due course the Upanishads came to signify secret knowledge. This knowledge was imparted only to those students who had undergone a long preparation and shown a strong aptitude for it. It involved spending many years in austerities and meditation under the feet of a guru. A very important reason for their secrecy was that they questioned the popular beliefs and practices which the traditional society of those times followed very obediently.

**Origin of Upanishads**

The Upanishads are of very ancient origin. It is difficult to be exact about their date However all historians agree that they belong to pre –Buddha Pre-Socrates era. Generally the Upanishads are said to have been revealed during 1000 BC to 300 BC. According to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, ‘these are the earliest literature of what has been called the Axial Era of the world (800-300BC) when—for the first time simultaneously and independently thinking men in India China and Greece questioned the traditional pattern of life.

**Numbers of Upanishads**

In ancient times the title Upanishad was used generically to signify authenticity and wide acceptance of an advanced text on philosophy. It is therefore impractical to assign a precise number to extant Upanishads. One of the Upanishads Muktika gives a list of 108 Upanishads. Depending upon their subject matter these have been classified into five groups. Upanishads were conceived over a span of a few centuries before Jesus Christ. Sri Shankara one of the greatest spiritual masters of India selected ten (eleven according to some) Upanishads and wrote mainly commentaries on them. They came to be known as principal classical or Major Upanishad. Of these one belongs to Rg Veda four to Yajur Veda two Sama Veda and three to Atharva veda.

**Nature and Content of Upanishads**

Vedic literature is of two types: Shruti and Smriti. A text dealing with eternal and universal truths is called shruti. A Shruti does not glorify any historical or mythological person. In contrast a Smriti always glorifies some mythological or historical person. Also it deals with rules of conduct which may need to be revised according to the dictates of time and place. A Smriti is based on a Shruti and is like its corollary literature. A shruti is considered to be timeless because the principles enunciated in it will
remain valid for all times –irrespective of the place or situation. The Upanishads are shruti texts and therefore they are considered timeless. Invalid for all times –irrespective of the place or situation.

- The Upanishads are different from other scriptures in many respects. Upanishads are texts of spiritual wisdom not religion
- The Upanishads are not religious texts.
- They do not advocate any dogma creed or ritual.
- Their emphasis is clearly and unmistakably on a spiritual perspective of life.
- Most important they encourage freedom in formulating a personal philosophy of life.
- Upanishads encourage enquiry and dialogue.

The main purpose of the Upanishads is to know the Ultimate Reality the Eternal Truth of everything that exists. This is done by method of enquiry and dialogue. In the Upanishads the students ask very fundamental questions: what caused the creation of the cosmos? And of human beings? What drives the mind and the senses? Is there anything that exists after death? If so what is it? What is God? Why can’t it be perceived by the senses? Of what use is it? How to attain It? And so on. These questions are invariably followed by long discussions. The participants in the discussion represent diverse profiles: father and son husband and wife teacher and students king and priest senior sage and young warrior one scholar against many others and the like. There are even discussions between the chiefs of gods and demons and the Creator Himself between a young boy and the lord of Death between another young student and representatives of Nature and between still another young aspirant and fire. On some occasions a learned teacher begins to instruct a king on what is cod but ends up becoming his student? The spirit of enquiry in the Upanishads is evident from even the names of two of the ten Upanishads: Prasna means Question and Kena is translated By what? The main finding of Upanishad enquiry – that one absolute Consciousness is the Ultimate Cause and the Substratum of both man and universe –is also in sharp contrast to faith in worship of Vedic deities as prescribed in Karma of the Vedas. Upanishads generally avoid rituals and sermons. By and large, the whole mankind believes in God as a supernatural Power. Religion prescribes prayers and rituals to please that power. It will be recalled that the first part of the Vedas called Karma Karma is also devoted to performance of rituals. The Upanishads pay very little attention to rituals. As the Upanishads are a continuation of the books of rituals (Brahmansa and Aranyakas) there are inevitably some passages which refer to certain rituals. However the Upanishads emphasize the futility of rituals performed without knowledge of their significance or inner meaning. A few passages seem to reflect even mockery and contempt. Some renowned commentators have however emphasized that rituals have hidden meanings. They also have tremendous value as preparatory steps for purifying the mind a prerequisite for gaining spiritual wisdom. In ancient times religion laid down Do’s and Don’ts for our actions. These were enforced through expectations of reward and fear of punishment however there are very few sermonizing passages in the Upanishad and even these touch upon the fundamental methods of harmony between a man’s inner life and outer world. Also they have universal value and validity.

Educational Perspective of Upanishads

Aims of Education

According to Upanishads main aim of education should be to prepare a child for the realization of Brahma. According to Upanishads Brahma and Soul are one and the same elemen . There is no difference between the two. Hence, education should make the child able to realize his self in all its aspects to the fullest possible extent so that he identifies and realize the ultimate reality.

1. Citta-Vritti- Nirodh: Education must aim at self- fulfillment and provide freedom from material desires and attachment.
2. **Education of Manas**: Education must provide knowledge for creativity and pursuit of culture and civilization.

3. **Make living worthy**: Education should make life worthwhile, purposeful and relevant.

4. **Tamso-ma-Jyotirgamaya**: Knowledge should dispel doubts, dogmas and darkness.

**Curriculum**

According to Kathoupanishad, the subjects fell into two categories: Para-vidya or (spiritual learning) Apara-vidya or (worldly learning)

**Paravidya**

Into this study fell the essential study of 4 vedas. Also included vedangas, upanishads, puranas, Pitrya (rules for sacrifices for ancestors), vakovsky (logic), Ekayana (ethics), Devavidya (etymology), Brahmaidya etc.

**Para-Vidya**

This included subjects like History, Ayurveda, Economics, Astrology, Physics, zoology, chemistry, science, kalpavidya, the rashi (science of numbers), bhutvidya (sci. of demons).

**METHODS OF TEACHING**

Two methods of Teaching were being practiced during vedic period. The first method was Maukhik (oral) and second was based on chintan (thinking or reflection). In the oral method students were to memorize the mantras (vedic hymns) and Richayas (verses of Rigveda). The process of education passed through three stages of comprehension i.e Shravan (Hearing), Manan (meditation) and Nidhidhyasan (realization and experience). Methods of teaching were based on apprenticeship and were psychologically sound. Teaching followed some strategies such as simple to complex, activity and skill oriented procedures. Question- Answer technique and illustrations. Self-study ( Swnadhyaya) was considered more important.

**Teacher**

According to Upanishads Teacher should be well versed in Brahma Gyan so that he can able to make the child develop to the full and realize his true and real self which is nothing but supreme Brahma.

**Student**

In the view of Upanishads, child is “Brahma” in its real nature. He is endowed with various inherent capacities due to his previous births. Hence, there exists diversity in children and this diversity according to Upanishads is due to ignorance. Hence, when this curtain of ignorance is removed, the real soul element shines forth in all brilliance.

**CONCLUSION**

Upanishads have influenced great educationists and philosophers but remained anonymous. The Upanishads are not the thoughts of a single philosopher or a school of philosophy committed to some specific belief. They are a collection of the thoughts of many thinkers interested in different aspects of life. Also as the Upanishad teachers followed a tradition of remaining anonymous their teachings are free from all prejudices. In fact the teachers proclaimed that the knowledge communicated by them was not what they discovered –it was revealed to them by intuition without any effort. As a result the Upanishads have been a rich treasure-chest of some very original teachings covering a wide spectrum of philosophy. These have influenced great thinkers and religious leaders of not just Hinduism but also of other faiths- like Buddhism Jainism and Sikhism. Upanishad doctrines like karma and Rebirth are common to all these religions. Thus the Upanishads have shaped the philosophy and life of millions of people for nearly three millenniums.
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