

THE UPANIṢADS

AN INTRODUCTION

Preface

Ramakrishna declared that God-realisation is the goal of human life.

The Upaniṣads enunciate that if a person fails to realise the Ātman, great will be his loss.

Ramakrishna averred that a guru was necessary to realise God.

The Upaniṣads proclaim that the Ātman can be understood properly only when a person of spiritual experience teaches it. They advise the aspirants to cultivate devotion to the guru even as towards God.

Ramakrishna advocated the renunciation of lust and greed as a necessary precondition to spiritual life.

The Upaniṣads enjoin upon the spiritual seekers the need to practise celibacy and austerity. They assert that renunciation and renunciation alone can lead one to immortality.

Ramakrishna exhorted his disciples to cultivate intense longing for God since that was the quickest way to beatitude.

The Upaniṣads prohibit giving their knowledge to anyone who has not carried out the 'rite of carrying fire on his head!'

Ramakrishna emphasised the need for grace of God in attaining success in spiritual life.

The Upaniṣads are very definite that, though only he who seeks God can get Him, grace is no less important.

Ramakrishna lived Vedānta, the quintessence of the teachings of the Upaniṣads and taught us out of the fulness of that realisation.

The Upaniṣads can guide us to tread the path of spiritual practice which can ultimately lead us all to that summit of inner mystical experience which Ramakrishna got.

This monograph is designed to serve as an introduction to the study of the Upaniṣads. The readers are advised to go through the originals, with the help of good translations and annotations.

May Ramakrishna be pleased with this small effort of ours and bless us in our humble prayer.

Swami Harshananda

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THE UPANIṢADS *An Introduction*

1

General Introduction

If there is one mass of scriptures that has inspired and sustained the Hindus over the millennia, it is the Upaniṣads. By advocating the ultimate triumph of the spirit over matter, of man over nature, the Upaniṣads have created, strengthened and preserved a great tradition of spirituality. This they have done, not only by a fearless spirit of inquiry to its logical conclusions, but also by intuitive mystical experiences beyond the ken of the intellect, these experiences almost always converging to a unitive principle. No school of thought, no religious movement, of the subsequent periods in the history of India has remained untouched by their influence, if not pervaded by them. In fact, many of these schools and movements could gain respectability or acceptance only because they tread the path lighted up by the Upaniṣads.

Research scholars of Indian thought have discovered the influence of the Upaniṣads on the religio-cultural life of other nations far beyond the boundaries of India, whether it is Japan, China and Korea in the East or Central Asia in the West.

Hindu religious tradition has always accorded the Upaniṣads the status of the highest authority since it has unquestioningly been accepted as Śruti, the Revealed Word.

2 Meaning of the Word 'Upaniṣad'

The word 'Upaniṣad' is derived from the verbal root sad which has several meanings: loosening, movement and annihilation. Putting all these three senses together, the word 'Upaniṣad' refers to that divine knowledge or wisdom which loosens the bonds of saṃsāra (transmigratory existence) of a being, annihilates his ajñāna or ignorance of his real nature and leads him to Brahman or God, the Absolute. The book or the scriptural work that teaches this wisdom is also called 'Upaniṣad'.

The word may also mean 'sitting devotedly near'. Hence it represents the 'secret teaching, of spiritual wisdom' imparted in private to worthy pupils, but jealously guarded from the unworthy ones.

3 Date of Composition

The orthodox view is that the Upaniṣads are Revealed Word. They are revealed by God himself at the commencement of each cycle of creation to the worthy few. Hence they are eternal.

However, treating them as books of spiritual wisdom, can we assign any date or period, in relation to human history as known till now? Attempts in this direction have

rather been frustrating, thanks to that peculiar trait of the Hindu mind which accords much greater importance to the principle than to the person or the period.

The Upaniṣads have been an integral part of the Vedas. Hence, a date assigned to them can as well hold good for the Upaniṣads also. The date of the Ṛgveda has varied from 4500 B. C. (B. G. Tilak) and 2400 B. C. (Hang) to 1200 B. C. (Max Muller). Modern European scholars assign the period 700 B.C. - 600 B. C. to the Upaniṣads assuming a gradual evolution of the philosophical ideas from the period of the Vedic hymns to that of the Āraṇyakas and the Upaniṣads. B. G. Tilak, on the basis of an astronomical data provided in the Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad, has however, assigned 1900 B. C. as the date of that Upaniṣad. Hence, according to him and the scholars that concur with him, the Upaniṣads belong to the period 2500 B. C. -2000 B. C.

4 Nature of Composition

From among the extant Upaniṣads, only ten to fifteen are considered to be the older ones. They are the basic sources of ancient Hindu philosophy.

However, do all these Upaniṣads teach a single system of philosophy? Or, do they contain several, mutually conflicting, systems?

The orthodox Hindu tradition has always considered the entire body of the Upaniṣadic literature as one unit ('Śruti') and hence teaching one philosophy. Though this philosophy may contain several aspects, they always form a homogeneous unit.

A look at the different and divergent teachings of these Upaniṣads does not easily convince us about the soundness of the orthodox standpoint. The traditional commentators have, however, solved this problem by sticking to one view as the teaching of the Upaniṣads and explaining (explaining away?) the others in a way that suits their interpretation.

Could it be that, over the centuries, many vital links have been lost and what we now have, are only fragments of the original works leading to this dichotomy of views? Though this is a plausible explanation, there is no clinching evidence to prove it.

Or, can we say that the various sages that we come across in the Upaniṣads-like Gautama Āruṇi, Yājñavalkya, Śvetaketu or Raikva-were great thinkers and mystics in their own right, who have given independent views, based on their own logic and experience? The Truth, Brahman (the Infinite, the Absolute), is too great to be known exhaustively by anyone. One can get only a glimpse of the same, like the six blind men touching the same elephant. Hence, could it not be that the views of these sages, though apparently different, reflect the several facets of the same Brahman?

At the most, these are all intelligent guesses and may continue to remain so for quite some time!

5 Number and Classification

The number of works that go by the name 'Upaniṣad' and available in print today exceeds 200. The Muktikopaniṣad gives a list of 108 Upaniṣads. Śaṅkara (A. D. 788-820), the earliest commentator, has chosen only ten Upaniṣads to expound. He refers to a few more in his commentary on the Brahmasūtras. Rāmānuja (A. D. 1017-1137) has chosen, in addition, two more. Considering the ones chosen by them as more ancient and authoritative we can now list them (in the alphabetical order) as follows:

Aitareya Upaniṣad Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad Chāndogya Upaniṣad Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad Jābāla Upaniṣad Kaivalya Upaniṣad Kaṭha Upaniṣad Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad Kena Upaniṣad Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad Praśna Upaniṣad Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad Taittirīya Upaniṣad Vajrasūcikā Upaniṣad

As regards the classification, different scholars have adopted different methods. Some have grouped them in the chronological order, considering the Bṛhadāraṇyaka, the Chāndogya and the Taittirīya as more ancient than the Kaṭha or the Śvetāśvatara. Others have classified them according to the style of language, as Upaniṣads in prose or in poetry. Such methods of classification do not help us much in studying them.

Most of the Upaniṣads, outside the list given above, belong to a much later period in our history and were written to propagate specific cults and sects. The nomenclature 'Upaniṣad' was conveniently added to them to gain respectability, acceptance and authority in the orthodox circles or among the followers. However, it must be conceded that these Upaniṣads also, though sectarian in character, have contributed quite a lot to the propagation of popular religion and ethics as also to the maintenance of the Vedāntic spirit among the people.

These minor Upaniṣads are sometimes grouped as follows:

- a) Vedānta Upaniṣads
- b) Śaiva Upaniṣads
- c) Śākta Upaniṣads
- d) Vaiṣṇava Upaniṣads
- e) Yoga Upaniṣads
- f) Sannyāsa Upaniṣads

The Vedānta Upaniṣads follow the beaten track of the major Upaniṣads as far as the general principles are concerned. The Śaiva, the Śākta and the Vaiṣṇava Upaniṣads deal with the respective cults of Śiva, Devī and Viṣṇu. The Yoga Upaniṣads supply a lot of information about Haṭhayoga and Rājayoga based on the Yogasūtras of Patañjali and other works. The Sannyāsa Upaniṣads deal exclusively with monasticism, its ideals and practices.

6 Sanskrit Commentaries

By its very definition, an Upaniṣad is an esoteric work, recondite in nature and spirit. The language is archaic. Many of the concepts, being closely allied to the sacrificial religion of the Samhitās and the Brāhmaṇas, are unintelligible to us, removed as we are, by millennia, from those rituals or ideas.

Hence it is impossible to understand them, much less, get a consistent view of them, without an authoritative and reliable commentary. Śaṅkara is the earliest and the first to comment upon them. His bhāṣyas or commentaries, further elucidated by the ṭīkāś or glosses of Ānandagiri (13th century) are invaluable source books to unlock the wisdom of the Upaniṣads.

Rāmānuja has not commented upon any of the Upaniṣads though he has tried to amplify some of their concepts in his Vedārthasaṅgraha. Raṅga-rāmānuja (circa A. D. 1600) has completed the work by commenting on all the major Upaniṣads.

Madhva (A. D. 1197-1276) has written brief commentaries on all the ten ancient Upaniṣads upon which some like Rāghavendra Tīrtha (A. D. 1595-1671) have written glosses.

Some commentators have chosen to write only on certain Upaniṣads. The Īśāvāsyopaniṣad has attracted the attention of many scholars like Brahmānanda Sarasvatī, Śaṅkarānanda (14th cent.), Uvaṭārya (11th cent.) as also Vedāntadeśika (A. D. 1268-1370) who have not chosen to comment on the other Upaniṣads. Rāghavendra Tīrtha has commented on the Īśa, Kena, Kaṭha, Praśna, Muṇḍaka and Māṇḍūkya following Madhva's line of interpretation. A later writer, Upaniṣad Brahma Yogindra, has done remarkable work by commenting on most of the minor Upaniṣads.

7 Philosophy of the Upaniṣads

The thought current of the Upaniṣads is, in a way, a continuation of that in the Brāhmaṇas and the Āraṇyakas. However, the trend is definitely against ritualism and strongly favours upāsanā (meditation) and jñāna (knowledge).

In the more philosophical portions of the Upaniṣads, the discussions generally centre round the fundamental cause of the world, if there is one, and its nature as also its evolution into this world. This cause is usually called 'Brahman.'

As against this, there is a parallel mode of enquiry, into the existence or otherwise, of a permanent subjective entity behind the body-mind complex. This is called 'ātman' (the Self or the soul).

Is this ātman one or many? Is it finite in size or infinite? Is it identical with Brahman or different? Though the Upaniṣads discuss these questions, there does not appear to be a single answer. Different viewpoints seem to exist. However, the orthodox Vedāntic schools struggle to present only one view as the right view to the exclusion of the others.

Destiny of the living beings here and hereafter, including some eschatological questions, form another topic of the Upaniṣads.

Ignorance of one's real nature as the cause of bondage and its eradication through the practice of certain virtues like self-control and speaking the truth are also touched upon.

A brief summary of these teachings may now be given.

BRAHMAN

The basic cause of the universe, the cause of all causes, is called as 'Brahman' by the Upaniṣads. Ātman, Sat, Akṣara. Ākāśa and Bhūmā are the other appellations used for this Brahman. The world rises out of him, is supported by him and gets dissolved back into him. He is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. He is greater than the greatest, smaller than the smallest and is also the inmost Self of all. He is immanent in this world even as salt is, in saline water. He is beyond all wants and limitations. He is the lord as well as the substratum of the whole creation. He sees, hears and knows although none can see or hear or know him. He is the very personification of all the great virtues to their perfection. It is he who responds to the prayers of his votaries and grants them whatever they seek. He is the ultimate goal of all.

To facilitate meditation upon him, the Upaniṣads sometimes describe him as a Puruṣa (the divine being in the human form), bright and brilliant, of golden hue, with all parts of his body of golden colour and his eyes resembling a fully bloomed red lotus. Fire is his head, the sun and the moon are his eyes, the quarters are his ears, the Vedas are his speech and the earth is his feet. Sometimes he is also described as having thousand heads, thousand eyes and thousand feet, thereby stressing his omnipresent cosmic form. This form recommended for meditation is the Aupaniṣada-Puruṣa (the Being described in the Upaniṣads).

ĀTMAN

When a person dies, is there anything in him that survives and continues to live on? What is that, impelled by which, the senses and the mind of a living person are active? Such inquiries by the sages of the Upaniṣads have led to the establishment of the ātman, the soul or the Self, as the abiding spirit behind the body and the mind of every living being.

This ātman is neither born nor does he die with the birth and the death of the body. He is unborn and eternal. He is different from the body, the senses, the vital airs, the mind and the ego-sense and is ever free. All of them are enlivened by him, made to work by him, for him. The defects and the infirmities in them, or even their loss, can never affect him.

However, it is also a fact of experience that this ātman has been encased and bound in this corporeal frame and has lost much of his freedom. In this state, he is called as 'jīvātman' or simply as the 'jīva'. The answer to the question as to why and how he has come to such a pass is 'karma,' the inexorable consequence of his past actions. For the

question, how and when the very first karma started this chain of bondage, there is no answer, since the Upaniṣads accept creation as an eternal process, without beginning or end.

His involvement in the cycle of birth and death, and consequent suffering, has been called 'saṃsāra.' Mokṣa or liberation from this bondage of saṃsāra has been presented before him as the goal of his life. And, this can be achieved by jñāna, or knowledge and, bhakti or devotion, which includes upāsanā or meditation. Karma or action as prescribed in the scriptures is an aid to this mokṣa.

CREATION

Though Brahman is the permanent substratum of this world and ātman is our essential nature, we cannot ignore this world in which we live and move and have our being as it were. For all practical purposes it is very real to us. And, even our struggles or attempts for mokṣa have to take place only in this world. Hence, it is necessary to know about it, how it came into being, how it is sustained now and its ultimate destiny.

In the beginning, Brahman alone-also called 'Ātman' or 'Sat'-existed, as the one without a second. He decided to become many. He then created out of himself, ākāśa (sky or space or ether), vāyu (air), agni or tejas (fire), ap (water) and pṛthvī (earth). A permutation and combination of these five elements, with Brahman associated at every stage, has resulted in this world. Later, Brahman entered into this creation as the antaryāmin or the inner controlling spirit.

According to other descriptions, the original substances created were only three (tejas, ap and anna or earth) or even two, rayi (moon or anna or matter) and prāṇa (sun or fire or energy or spirit). By a combination of these, in different proportions, this world came into being. It is ever under his control. Nay, it is non-different from him.

Even after being created out of, or, emerging out of, Brahman, this world continues to be in him. It will merge back in him at the time of pralaya or dissolution.

With regard to the relationship between Brahman and the world, two views seem to exist in the Upaniṣads. According to one view-known as Saprapañcavāda-since the world is an evolute of Brahman, it is also Brahman. The other view-called as Niṣprapañcavāda-denies the world an existence of its own and asserts the existence of Brahman alone.

BONDAGE AND LIBERATION

Some Upaniṣads picture the jīvātman and the Paramātman (the Supreme Self, Brahman as the indwelling spirit) as two birds perching on the same tree (the body). The former eats the fruits of the tree (results of karma)-some sweet and some bitter-and experiences joy and sorrow. The latter is sitting majestically, ever calm and collected,

never touching those fruits. When the jīvātman realises the greatness of the Paramātman, he becomes free from all sorrow and suffering.

Though the question, how the ever free ātman became the jīva, has not been answered by the Upaniṣads, they have given several modes of sādhanā or spiritual exercises by which the jīva can recover his original state.

A sādhanaka or a spiritual aspirant should first cultivate certain moral and ethical virtues as the first step. Through discrimination he should understand that the Vedic rituals can never lead him to the eternal Truth and hence renounce them. He must be ever ready to reject the preyaṣ (the pleasant) and choose the śreyas (the good). By eschewing evil conduct and by practising self-control, he should turn back his mind from outside, into himself, the region of the heart, the seat of the ātman, and meditate on it. He should show compassion to all the living beings. He should try to give them what they need and should never be greedy. He must be vigilant forever and should always speak the truth and act according to dharma or righteousness, by following the scriptural injunctions. Study of the Upaniṣads, performing austerities and observing brahmacarya or celibacy are also invaluable aids in his sādhanā. He should approach a competent guru or spiritual teacher in all humility and learn the truth about the ātman from him, through proper questioning and sevā or service to him.

The Upaniṣads make it incumbent on the guru to teach spiritual wisdom to a worthy disciple, after testing him if necessary.

The disciple should then practise manana (reflection) and nididhyāsana (meditation) on the ātman which will result in anubhūti or realisation.

What is the nature of the spiritual experience that an aspirant gets when he realises the ātman? He sees all beings in himself and himself in all. Hence he feels neither special attraction nor repulsion for others. Behind every thought of his, he is able to feel the power of the ātman, the pure consciousness. He clearly perceives that all the bonds of his heart which had him tied down to this mundane existence, have broken down. He experiences great joy and bliss within himself. When he directs his attention outside, there too he sees the same spirit, the ātman, the Brahman.

The bliss he experiences is incomparably superior to any other happiness one can get in this world. And he will never have any type of regret for anything in life. He may even roam about the world in a joyous state, declaring his experiences for the benefit of others.

When such a one, the jīvanmukta (one who is liberated even while living here in this body), gives up his body, what happens to him?

According to one view, his physical body and the subtle body disintegrate at death and get absorbed into the five elements.

And, he gets merged in Brahman, like a river entering into the ocean. Losing his separate identity, he attains complete and perfect unity with Brahman.

However, a large body of the Upaniṣadic lore propounds the theory of the liberated soul travelling by the Arcirādimārga or the Bright Path (also called Devayāna and Uttarāyaṇa) to the Brahmaloaka (also known as Satyaloka) and reside there permanently in infinite peace and bliss. The various stations on the path are fire, day, bright fortnight, the six months of the northern solstice, the year, the sun, the moon and the lightning. All these actually represent the guardian deities of these stations. From the last station, the vidyut or lightning, an 'amānava puruṣa,' a non-human (divine) being, leads the liberated soul to the Brahmaloaka.

Is the Brahmaloaka a state of inner experience or an actual world to which the liberated soul repairs? Most of the Upaniṣads contain practically no or very scanty details. The Chāndogya (8.5.3) describes it as a world, third from this earth, wherein there are two huge lakes called Ara and Ṇya. There is also a smaller reservoir of food-juice known as Airammadīya.

Somasavana, a peepul tree and a city called Aparājitā, containing a golden hall are also there. The Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇopaniṣad (1. 3, 4 and 5) gives a more picturesque description which adds a river Virajā, two doorkeepers (Indra and Prajāpati), a throne called Vicakṣaṇa and a couch by name Amitaujas. Five hundred celestial nymphs greet the liberated soul and adorn him. The fragrance and flavour of Brahmā enters him at the appropriate state of his entrance.

Anyone reaching Brahmaloaka will not return to mundane existence.

ESCHATOLOGY

What happens to a person who dies without realising the ātman/Brahman? This question too has been discussed in the Upaniṣads.

Those who have performed sakāma-karmas (desire-motivated actions) or practised lower kinds of upāsanās get their desires fulfilled. Some of them go to svargaloka* (heaven) from where they will return to this world after exhausting the results of their good deeds. Sometimes, this movement is described as through the Dhūmādimārga (the path of smoke) (also called Dakṣiṇāyana) wherein the soul is led to the Candraloka (the world of moon) after passing through smoke, night, the dark fortnight and the six months of the southern solstice. After exhausting the result of meritorious deeds he returns again to this earth, through the sky, rain, vegetation and living beings.

Those who know neither of these two paths, return again and again and may even be reborn at the subhuman levels, as animals and worms.

As related to this topic, ideas about karma and rebirth are also found in the Upaniṣads here and there. A doer of puṇyakarma or good deeds attains good results and a doer of pāpakarma or sinful deeds gets bad results. Hence human beings are advised not to harm anyone.

VIDYĀS OR UPĀSANĀS

An important aspect of sādhanā as enunciated in the Upaniṣads is 'vidyā' or upāsanā. A man deeply devoted to-or even addicted to-the religion of yajñas or Vedic sacrifices, has got to be led gradually, first to contemplation and then to jñāna (knowledge or direct experience) of the ātman in course of time, because that is the ultimate goal of life. And, that is the only way to mokṣa.

These upāsanās have taken two forms. In the first group, the sādhanā is advised to imagine the various parts of a ritual and then superimpose certain ideas on them. For instance, the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad advises one to meditate upon the horse, to be offered in the Aśvamedha sacrifice, by thinking that it is Prajāpati, the Lord of beings. This upāsanā, which can be practised even by those who are not competent to perform the Aśvamedha sacrifice, gives the same fruits as the real Aśvamedha itself.

In the second group of upāsanās certain known objects like nāma (name), vāk (speech), bala (strength) or manas (mind) are recommended to be meditated upon as Brahman, by imagining or discovering some similarity between that object and Brahman. Such upāsanās gradually help the aspirant's mind to be raised to the highest level, Brahman, and give him the much needed spiritual experience.

The number of such vidyās or upāsanās which are spread out throughout the Upaniṣads is quite large and may be considered as 32.

The following list gives a few of the more important ones and the Upaniṣads in which they occur.

Vidyā	Upaniṣad
Akṣipuruṣa Vidyā	Chāndogya 4.15.1.
Antarāditya Vidyā	Bṛhadāraṇyaka 5.52.
Bhūma Vidyā	Dahara Vidyā
Chāndogya 7.23, 24, 25.	Chāndogya 3.12.
Chāndogya 8.1. Gāyatrī Vidyā	Chāndogya 3.1 to 11.
Madhu Vidyā	Chāndogya 5.3 to 10.
Pañcāgni Vidyā	Bṛhadāraṇyaka 6.2
Paryaṅka Vidyā	Kauṣītaki 1.
Prāṇāgnihotra Vidyā	Bṛhadāraṇyaka 5.9.
Pratardana Vidyā	Kauṣītaki 3.
Puruṣa Vidyā	Chāndogya 3.16, 17.
Sad Vidyā	Chāndogya 6.2.1, 2.
Samvarga Vidyā	Chāndogya 4.3.

Śāṅḍilya Vidyā
Udgītha Vidyā
Upakosala Vidyā
Vaiśvānara Vidyā

Chāndogya 3.14.
Bṛhadāraṇyaka 5.8.1.
Chāndogya 4.10 to 15.
Chāndogya 5.11 to 17.

These vidyās were taught privately to deserving candidates after testing them for their competence. That is why the information available either in the Upaniṣads or in their commentaries regarding them is very meagre. It is likely that they provided the basic materials for the later schools of various kinds of yoga.

8 Civilisation and Culture during the Age of the Upaniṣads

Gleaning through the various Upaniṣads it is possible to have a fairly good idea of the type of society that existed during the period of the Upaniṣads.

The country extended upto Gāndhāra (Afghanistan) in the north-west, and included several kingdoms like Madra (Sailkot), Kuru (Delhi), Kekaya (Punjab), Pāñcāla (Bareilly, Kanauj in Uttar Pradesh), Kosala (Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh), Videha (Tirhut in Bihar), Kauśāmbi (Kosam, in Uttar Pradesh) and Kāśī. The kings who ruled over these countries were all kṣatriyas who were experts in warfare and administration, as also in the Vedic lore. In fact, they were the traditional custodians of some types of esoteric sciences. They not only sheltered learned brāhmaṇas and sages but also strove to propagate the Vedic dharma. They were ruthless in enforcing the highest standards of satya (truth) and dharma (righteousness). The varṇa system was very much in vogue. As for the āśrama system, brahmacharya, gārhasthya and vānaprastha were more common, though there is enough reason to believe that sannyāsa was also being practised. Great stress was laid on the purity and integrity of personal life, irrespective of a person's station in life.

Apart from religion, ethics and philosophy, a number of secular sciences like grammar, music, dance, archery, astrology, exorcising the evil spirits, preparing of perfumes, toxicology and so on, were also well-known.

Vedic sacrifices were very common. If they provided an occasion for the kings to earn merit and show their generosity, it was also an opportunity to the scholars to display their knowledge and earn name and fame, as also some wealth.

On the whole, people seemed to be contented with whatever they could earn by right means. They believed that their sorrows and misfortunes were caused by their own karma in their previous lives and hence did not hold others responsible for the same.

9 Literary Grace

The language of the Upaniṣads is closely allied to that of the Vedas. Hence it is not only archaic but also abounds in Vedic phraseology and symbolism.

Most of the Upaniṣads are in verses composed in standard Vedic metres. Some like the Māṇḍūkya, the Taittirīya and the Aitareya are completely in prose. Some have a mixture of both.

One of the striking features of the Upaniṣadic literature is its use of beautiful similes and examples. The simile of two birds (the jīvātman and the Paramātman) perching on the same tree (the human body) occurs in several Upaniṣads: Kaṭha (1. 3. 1.); Śvetāśvatara (4. 6.) and Muṇḍaka (3. 1. 1). The Muṇḍaka gives the simile of the bow and the arrow (2. 2. 3, 4) to explain meditation on the ātman. The Kaṭha compares the world to an inverted tree (6. 1) and the human body to a city of eleven gates (5. 1). The Īśāvāsyā compares the orb of the sun to a golden disc hiding the face of the Lord (15). The Kaṭha compares the body to a chariot, the senses to horses, the mind to reins, the intellect to the charioteer and the ātman to the owner of the chariot (3. 3 and 4). The Muṇḍaka compares the evolution of the world from Brahman to a spider weaving the web and hairs growing on the body or vegetation appearing on earth (1. 1. 7). It also compares the Vedic sacrifices to a leaky raft since they are unable to give liberation (1. 2. 7). Rivers flowing into the ocean and becoming one with it is another simile given to illustrate the union of the ātman with Brahman (3. 2. 8). The Bṛhadāraṇyaka abounds in many similes: The Vedas have come out of Brahman even as smoke comes out of burning wet wood (2. 4. 10).

Just as spokes are fixed on the rim of a wheel, similarly all beings find their support in Paramātman (2. 5. 15). The jīvātman travels from the waking state to the dream state like a big fish swimming in water from one shore to the opposite shore (4. 3. 18). While dying, the jīva catches hold of the next subtle body even as a grasshopper catches hold of the leaf of the next nearby plant, before leaving the former support (4. 4. 3). A liberated soul casts off the body like a snake casting off its slough (4. 4. 7). The pitiable condition of an ordinary mortal leaving his body is compared to travelling in a heavily laden, but weak, cart (4. 3. 35).

The style of prose in the Upaniṣads is not only simple and elegant but also quite powerful.

10 Stories

Strangely enough, the Upaniṣads, though teaching recondite philosophy, also give us some interesting stories. The Kena describes how the gods in heaven, under the leadership of Indra, were taught a lesson by Brahman in the guise of a yakṣa or demigod (3.1 to 11). Major part of the Kaṭha is devoted to the story of Naciketas and Yama. The Chāndogya contains the following stories: Dogs singing the udgītha (1. 12); the king Jānaśruti learning from the sage Raikva (4.1 to 3); the story of Satyakāma Jābāla approaching Hāridrumata for knowledge (4.4 to 9); the story of Satyakāma and his disciple Upakosala (4.10 to 15); Śvetaketu the proud boy, his humble father Gautama and the king Pravāhaṇa Jaivali (5.3 to 10); Sanatkumāra teaching Nārada (7.1 to 26); Indra and Virocana approaching Prajāpati for the knowledge of the ātman (8.7 to 12).

The Brhadāranyaka too is not lagging behind. Its stories and legends are: the struggle between the devas (gods) and asuras (demons) to supersede each other (1.3); the proud Bālāki and the wise king Ajātasatru (2.1); Maitreyī seeking spiritual wisdom from her husband Yājñavalkya (2.4 and 4.5); King Janaka and the great sage Yājñavalkya (chapters 3 and 4).

11 Ṛṣis or Sages of the Upaniṣads

We come across a good number of ṛṣis or sages in the Upaniṣads. Some like Yājñavalkya are extraordinarily great geniuses. Others like Gautama Āruṇi are excellent teachers. A few others like Śvetaketu are hard task-masters. Sacrifices conducted by rich and powerful-but noble-kings provided opportunities to these sages not only to exhibit their skills but also earn wealth and fame.

A selected list of sages that occur in the major Upaniṣads may now be given just for the sake of information:

Āṅgiras, Bhṛḡu, Gārgī, Ghora Āṅgirasa, Hāridrumata, Mahidāsa Aitareya, Nārada, Pippalāda, Raikva, Sanatkumāra, Śāṅḍilya, Satyakāma Jābāla, Uddālaka Āruṇi, Vāmadeva and Varuṇa.

Yama, the god of death, Prajāpati, the creator, great kings like Janaka, Ajatāsatru and Pravāhaṇa Jaivali also appear in the role of teachers.

One thing that strikes us is that these teachers were revered for their knowledge and excellence, irrespective of their birth, caste or sex.

A Résumé of the Principal Upaniṣads

A brief summary of the more ancient and important Upaniṣads can now be given here. For the sake of convenience and ready reference, they have been arranged in the English alphabetical order. The details of the Veda to which they belong, the number of chapters, sections and mantras are given in brackets to facilitate better understanding.

AITAREYA UPANIṢAD (R̥gveda; 4 chapters; 6 sections; 33 mantras)

One of the more enigmatic of the Upaniṣads, this small work gets its name from Mahidāsa Aitareya, the son of Itarā. He is the ṛṣi of the Aitareya Āraṇyaka of which, this Upaniṣad is a part.

Ātman or Paramātman, the supreme Lord, alone existed in the beginning. He desired to create the world and did it without the aid of any other thing, by himself, out of himself. He also entered into that creation. This is the gist of the first chapter.

The second chapter describes the birth, the metamorphosis, the death and the rebirth of the jīvātman in order to awaken vairāgya or detachment in our minds. It is only

by realising our real nature as ātman that we become free from the shackles of saṁsāra or transmigration. The sage Vāmadeva succeeded in getting that spiritual wisdom even while in the womb of his mother and became free.

The last section of the Upaniṣad distinguishes manas or the mind from prajñāna or pure consciousness and declares that it is this prajñāna that is the real ātman or Brahman, by realising which Vāmadeva became free.

BRHADĀRANYAKA UPANIṢAD (Śuklayajurveda; 6 chapters; 47 sections; 435 mantras)

Considered to be an integral part of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa of the Śuklayajurveda, this Upaniṣad is the biggest (as its very name suggests) and is quite ancient. It is in prose and contains quotations from other ancient sources which are all in verses.

The first two chapters aim at describing the ātman who is beyond the various Vedic deities. He is the inmost Self of all and is nearest and dearest. A living body is able to function only because of his presence inside. To realise him one has to give up worldly desires, take to the life of a monk or a mendicant and practise meditation on his true nature. Realising him is the same as realising Brahman, the cosmic Spirit.

In the third and the fourth chapters we find Yājñavalkya, the genius of a sage, at his best. He not only vanquishes all his opponents but also establishes the fundamental teachings of Vedānta very effectively. A very brief summary of these teachings is as follows: The life of a being here and hereafter is determined by the karma he has done, good karma producing good results and bad karma, bad ones. Even ritualistic karmas, in spite of their being coupled with upāsanās, cannot give mokṣa or freedom. Only the realisation of the ātman, who is really Brahman, who transcends the body-mind complex, can give freedom from transmigratory existence. To realise this ātman, the wise brāhmaṇas renounce their family, wealth and the desire for heaven, and take to the life of a mendicant.

Yājñavalkya describes that, which has pervaded everything in creation, has also transcended it and is also its antaryāmin or the inner-controller, as Akṣara (the Indestructible). He gives a long list of its characteristics which appear to be rather self-contradictory or confusing since it is an attempt to describe the indescribable.

He also establishes the true nature of the ātman, by an analysis of the three states of consciousness, as the ever free blissful Self.

A description of the jīva suffering at the time of his death and his transmigration also find a place in these teachings, to induce vairāgya.

The last two chapters contain a number of upāsanās, as on the praṇava or Om, the need to cultivate the virtues like self-control, compassion and giving gifts to the needy,

the Pañcāgnividyā (the doctrine of five fires) and some rituals connected with the birth of a son.

The Upaniṣad ends with a long list of the line of the Vedic teachers.

CHĀNDOGYA UPANIṢAD (Sāmaveda; 8 chapters; 154 sections; 628 mantras)

Considered to be the oldest of the Upaniṣads, the Chāndogya begins with the upāsanā on Om̐ as the udgītha, the part of the Sāmaveda sung by the udgātṛ priest, Meditation on Om̐ as prāṇa (the life-force) and as the person in the sun are the other topics dealt with in the first chapter.

There are various types of sāmans (mantras of the Sāmaveda). The second chapter recommends several upāsanās on sāmans. There is also a reference to the four āśramas (stages of life) and to the fact that one who is established in Brahman attains immortality.

The third chapter starts with the Madhuvidyā, meditation on the sun as madhu or honey since he gives joy to the gods. Meditation on Brahman through the Gāyatrī mantra is also mentioned here.

The famous Śaṅḍilyavidyā is also a part of this chapter. It consists of meditating on the ātman as the creator and sustainer of the universe, in one's own heart. How a human being can live long is also described by considering one's life as a long yajña. The example of Mahidāsa Aitareya is quoted as the model for such a meditation.

The next chapter starts with the story of the King Jānaśruti Pautrāyaṇa and his attaining wisdom, from the sage Raikva. Upāsanā on the vāyu (air) outside and the prāṇa (vital air) inside as the power that absorbs everything into itself is his teaching. It has been called Saṁvargavidyā.

A description of the jīva travelling by the Arcirādimārga to the Brahmaloḳa as a result of meditation on the akṣipuruṣa or the 'person in the eye', who is Brahman, also finds a place here.

The fifth chapter delineates the process by which the dead return to this world again. This, as taught by the king Pravāhaṇa Jaivali to Gautama, is known as Pañcāgnividyā. Meditation on the supreme ātman, living inside the body as Vaiśvānarātman, makes one the enjoyer of all food through all beings. This is the next teaching, given by the king Aśvapati to the five sages who had approached him for knowledge.

The sixth chapter is, by far, the most interesting and instructive. Finding that his son Śvetaketu was puffed up with egoism even after his education at the guru's house, Uddālaka Āruṇi questions him about that by knowing which everything else becomes known. Since Śvetaketu was ignorant in this regard, Āruṇi starts teaching him in various ways. Before its creation, this world was one with Sat (the, self-existent Truth). This Sat willed to become many. The world was created out of it in stages. Sat also entered into

this world as the jīvātman. Āruṇi traces the true nature of the Self through an analysis of the three states of consciousness. His final teaching is that Śvetaketu in his essential nature is that Sat itself.

The next chapter is in the form of a long dialogue between Sanatkumāra and his disciple Nārada. Though Nārada had mastered several sciences and arts, he had no peace of mind since he had not known the ātman. Sanatkumāra takes him step by step through several modes of upāsanās, finally to Bhūman or Brahman.

The last chapter starts with the Daharavidyā, meditation on the Self within the small ākāśa of the heart. Major part of this chapter is devoted to the teaching of Prajāpati to Indra, the king of gods, about the ātman, the true Self within. The Upaniṣad concludes with the statement of a liberated soul about his being free from all sins and attaining the world of Brahman.

ĪŚĀVĀSYA UPANIṢAD (Śukla-yajurveda; 18 verses)

Though the smallest of the ten major Upaniṣads, the Īśāvāsya has attracted the attention of several savants who have chosen to comment upon it. Some of its terms like vidyā and avidyā, as also sambhūti and asambhūti, have proved to be elusive or vague, thus giving rise several conflicting interpretations.

It teaches that the whole world is pervaded by Īśa or God. It advocates the performance of karma or one's duties and encourages human beings to desire to live the full span of life, viz., one hundred years. After describing the nature of the ātman, it declares that one who has realised this ātman in himself and sees the same in others, transcends sorrow and delusion. It advises the practice of a balanced combination of vidyā (meditation) and avidyā (karma, sanctioned by the scriptures and helpful to meditation) as also sambhūti (meditation on Brahman) and asambhūti (duties to be performed in the world). There is also a beautiful description of Paramātman and a prayer for God-vision by the sage at the time of his death.

JĀBĀLA UPANIṢAD (Atharva-veda; 6 chapters; 6 passages)

This is a small Upaniṣad in prose. All the six chapters contain long passages. A description of Vārāṇasī (the famous place of pilgrimage) and upāsanā on the space between the eyebrows as Vārāṇasī is the first teaching given in this Upaniṣad. The japa of the Śatarudrīya-mantra also finds a place in this upāsanā.

This is followed by a discourse on sannyāsa (monkhood) by Yājñavalkya in reply to a query by the king Janaka. It includes some details of the procedure also. It concludes with a beautiful description of the way of life of some great men of realisation like Saṁvartaka, Āruṇi, Ṛbhu, Jaḍa-bharata, Dattātreya and others.

KAIVALYA UPANIṢAD (Kṛṣṇa-yajurveda; 2 chapters; 24 mantras)

This small work is in the form of a dialogue between the sage Āśvalāyana (the disciple) and the creator Brahmā (the teacher).

It stresses the importance of tyāga or renunciation in the path of knowing Brahman. Some details of meditation on Brahman in one's own heart, sitting in a clean and secluded place, are given. This meditation is compared to the production of fire by the mutual rubbing of the two pieces of araṇi (wood), normally used to generate fire in Vedic sacrifices. This is then followed by the usual description of Brahman (as given in other Upaniṣads) and the state of realisation of ātman-Brahman attained by the aspirant.

KATHA UPANIṢAD (Kṛṣṇa-yajurveda; 6 chapters; 119 mantras)

Also known as Kāthaka Upaniṣad, it is an extremely readable and interesting work. It starts with the story of the sage Vājaśravas performing a sacrifice. Seeing the famished and useless cows kept apart by him to be gifted away during the sacrifice, Naciketas, his young son, tries to draw his attention to this lacuna. Vājaśravas gets annoyed, and in a fit of anger, curses his son, 'I give you to Death!' Naciketas goes straight to the world of Yama, the god of death. Finding him absent, he patiently awaits his return, for three days, not touching food or water. When Yama returns, he feels great remorse for having kept a guest outside the house denying even elementary comforts. Of the three boons he grants to Naciketas as atonement, the third is utilised by Naciketas for seeking ātmajñāna or knowledge of the Self. After thoroughly testing the boy with many a tempting offer, Yama finally teaches him spiritual wisdom.

Two choices offer themselves before every human being-preyas (the pleasant) and śreyas (the good). Ordinary mortals choose the former and get into endless trouble leading to bondage. The wise ones however, forsake preyas, the immediately pleasant, for śreyas, the path of spiritual good, which alone can give permanent happiness, peace and bliss.

Realising the ātman is the highest aspect of śreyas. Though the nature of the ātman, the true Self of man, is too subtle to be grasped, it can be properly understood when taught by a competent guru or preceptor. Self-control on the one hand, and grace of God on the other, are aids in realising this ātman.

Yama describes the ātman or the jīva as the master of the chariot, the chariot being the body itself. Just as the master sitting in a good chariot drawn by good horses and an expert driver reaches his destination, so also the jīva reaches the abode of Viṣṇu if the body and the senses are in good condition and controlled by a wise intellect.

Drawn by the attraction of the senses, a person lets his mind go outwards. However, if he can withdraw it from the outward objects and direct it within himself, he can realise his ātman.

Yama also declares that the destiny of a being, after his death, is determined by his karma or actions done in this life. He compares the created world to an inverted tree, Brahman being the root that sustains it. If taught by a competent teacher and through the conquest of desires, one can know this Brahman.

Comparing the jīvātman to a person of the size of the thumb and that the exit through the crown of the head at the time of death leads to the abode of Brahman, as also comparing the jīvātman and Paramātman to two birds perching on the same tree (the body) are the other special aspects of the teaching of this Upaniṣad.

KAUṢĪTAKI UPANIṢAD (Ṛgveda; 4 chapters; 51 mantras)

Also called Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇopaniṣad, it is a fairly long Upaniṣad and is entirely in prose.

The first chapter deals with the two well-known paths-Devayāna and Pitryāna. There is a fairly detailed description of not only the journey to the world of Brahmā, by the Arcirādimārga or Devayāna, but also of the Brahmaloaka itself (See page 17).

The second chapter gives a detailed account of Prāṇavidyā, upāsanā of prāṇa as Brahman. There is also a rite recommended to be performed by anyone coveting 'ekadhana', interpreted as the 'highest wealth'.

The third chapter contains a long discourse by Indra (who has realised the Supreme Being and hence identified with him) to the King Pratardana, the son of Divodāsa. Indra advises Pratardana to meditate on him as prāṇa. Prāṇa is also identified with prajñā (consciousness).

The last chapter which is in the form of a dialogue between the King Ajātaśatru and the learned Gārgya Bālāki is almost a repetition of Bṛhadā-raṇyaka Upaniṣad (2.1.).

KENA UPANIṢAD (Sāmaveda; 4 chapters; 35 mantras)

Also known as Talavakāra Upaniṣad, this small work gets its name by its very first word 'kena' ('by what'). The first half is in verses and the second half in prose.

The Upaniṣad begins with a description of the ātman in the body as the spirit behind the sense- organs and the mind. It has been identified with Brahman. Though it cannot be known as an object, since it is the subject, its presence is felt in and through every thought. When this real seer is realised, a person becomes immortal.

The second section gives the parable of the gods in heaven. Under the leadership of Indra they had met to celebrate their victory over the asuras or demons forgetting that it was due to the grace and power of Brahman and not to their own valour.

Brahman appeared on the scene as a yakṣa (a demi-god) and taught them a lesson after humiliating them. Then Umā Haimavatī (the personification of Brahmanvidyā) came on the scene and taught Indra, spiritual wisdom.

The Upaniṣad specially mentions that tapas (austerity), dama (self-control) and karma (actions ordained by the scriptures) are the basic disciplines needed to attain knowledge of Brahman. It concludes with a eulogy of this knowledge.

MAHĀNĀRĀYAṆA UPANIṢAD (Kṛṣṇa-yajurveda; 80 sections; 259 mantras)

The Taittirīya Āraṇyaka of the Kṛṣṇa-yajurveda contains two well-known Upaniṣads: the Taittirīya Upaniṣad and the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad. The latter is also known as the Nārāyaṇa Upaniṣad and as the Yājñikī Upaniṣad.

Two recensions are available now: the Āndhrapāṭha and the Drāviḍapāṭha, the former being the longer one.

This Upaniṣad seems to be a composition of many varied subjects, almost like an appendix or an addenda to some other work. There is no systematic treatment of any major doctrine. Each section seems to be an independent unit. It deals with all the three aspects of Vedic religion viz., karma (rituals), jñāna (knowledge) and upāsanā (meditation).

Some of the most popular of the Vedic sūktas which are chanted even now during religious ceremonies-like the Nārāyaṇasūkta, the Durgāsūkta and the Medhāsūkta-find a place here.

The mantras commonly used during the sandhyā rituals, mantras used during sannyāsadīkṣā (taking to the monastic order), several gāyatrī hymns on different deities and some famous mantras like the trisuparṇamantras also find a prominent place.

Various aspects of spiritual life like satya (truth), tapas (austerity), dama (sense-control), dāna (giving gifts), dharma (righteous living) and śama (mental peace) have been greatly stressed.

A beautiful description of the Cosmic Person in the orb of the sun, contemplation on the various parts of a yajña or sacrifice in a symbolical way and the journey to the Brahmaloaka are also included among the topics dealt with by this Upaniṣad.

MĀṆḌŪKYA UPANIṢAD (Atharva-veda; 12 mantras)

Comprising only 12 mantras-all in prose-this small Upaniṣad delves straight-away into the philosophy of praṇava (Om), ātman and Brahman. Praṇava is the best symbol of the eternal truth, Brahman. The ātman inside this body-whose existence and real nature are established by this Upaniṣad through the analysis of the three states of consciousness,

viz., jāgrat (waking state), svapna (dream state) and suṣupti (deep sleep state)-and Brahman, the Cosmic Truth are, in the ultimate analysis, one and the same. He is called as the Turīya (the Fourth, beyond the three states described). It is impossible to describe his nature since he is acintya (beyond thought) and alakṣaṇa (beyond characteristics). He alone has to be known. Meditation on the praṇava (Om̐), especially its last part, results in the realisation of the ātman.

A long commentary called kārikā (in verses) attributed to Gauḍapāda (circa A. D. 700), generally goes with it and is studied deeply by the students of Vedānta.

MUNḌAKA UPANIṢAD (Atharva-veda; 3 chapters; 6 sections; 64 mantras)

The word `muṇḍa' means a shaven head. This Upaniṣad might have derived its name from the fact that the spiritual wisdom contained in it can shave off all the illusions and delusions of one who studies it and understands it. Or, it could be that it was specially meant for the sannyāsins with shaven heads.

Cast in excellent poetry, this Upaniṣad is a delight to read and enjoy.

It divides all knowledge into two groups-the parā (higher) and the aparā (the lower). Except the knowledge of the Akṣara, the indestructible Brahman, all other branches of knowledge-including the Vedas themselves-are only aparāvidyā, lower or inferior knowledge! Then comes a nice description of this Akṣara-Brahman and the creation of the world out of it.

Though Vedic rituals were considered as necessary and sacred, this Upaniṣad points out their limitations and advises the aspirant after spiritual wisdom to eschew them like leaky rafters, take to a life of renunciation and approach a competent guru for brahmavidyā or knowledge of Brahman. The method of meditation on Brahman with the help of praṇava (Om̐) is picturesquely described with the simile of a bow and arrow. This ends in the realisation of the ātman-Brahman inside oneself, thereby resulting in the destruction of all the knots of ignorance that bind one's heart or being.

The work compares the jīvātman and the Paramātman to two birds perching on the same tree, which is this body. The former is bound whereas the latter is ever free. However, when he realises this Paramātman he goes beyond good and evil and attains union with him.

The famous declaration that Truth alone triumphs and not falsehood, belongs to this Upaniṣad.

This ātman can be realised only when taught by an enlightened preceptor and never by merely listening to discourses or intellectualism. However, grace of God plays a very important part in this realisation.

Both types of liberation-the gradual one by going to the Brahmaloaka and the instantaneous one, at the fall of the body-have been mentioned towards the end of this Upaniṣad.

PRAŚNA UPANIṢAD (Atharva-veda; 6 chapters; 67 mantras)

Since the Upaniṣad is in the form of praśnas or questions and their answers, it has been named as Praśnopaniṣad.

Six sages like Kabandhi Kātyāyana, Bhārgava Vaidarbhi and others, come to the great teacher Pippalāda with their questions. After they undergo the disciplines of student-hood for one year-as per his command-they approach him again, with six questions. The answers provided by Pippalāda form the main body of this work.

The first section deals with the question: What is the origin of all the beings? Pippalāda describes it as Prajāpati (God, as the Lord of all beings), who creates the universe through the combination of rayi (Soma or matter) and prāṇa (Agni or Āditya or Spirit). There is also a mention of the two paths: Uttarāyana (the Northern Path) and Dakṣiṇāyana (the Southern Path).

The second section describes the mukhyaprāṇa (the main life force) as the sole support of the body and the sense-organs.

The third section says that this mukhyaprāṇa emerges out of the Paramapuruṣa or the Cosmic Person (God). He works inside this body in five forms. At the time of death, the udānavāyu (one of the five forms of mukhya-prāṇa) carries the jīva through one of the nāḍīs (a tabular path for the flow of prāṇic energy) originating in the heart to heaven or hell or this world of human beings, depending upon his karma.

The fourth section gives an account of the deep sleep state of a being. In that state, the jīva is merged in Paramātman or the Supreme Self.

The next section delineates the method of meditation on the praṇava (Om) and the results one obtains from it. Highest meditation leads to the attainment of Brahmaloaka.

The last section, the sixth, deals with the ṣoḍaśakalapuruṣa, 'the person with sixteen parts'. He is the jīvātman. When these so-called parts get destroyed, the jīvātman becomes immortal.

ŚVETĀŚVATARA UPANIṢAD (Kṛṣṇa-yajurveda; 6 chapters; 113 mantras)

This Upaniṣad starts with a discussion by some sages on the jagatkāraṇa or the ultimate cause of this world, and comes to the conclusion, in the very first chapter, that the Devātmaśakti or the Paramātman (God) with his inherent power, is that cause. This truth is discovered by them through dhyānayoga or meditation. This is followed by a description of jīvātman and Paramātman through various elegant phrases.

The second chapter deals with the yoga of meditation, various aids to meditation like control and concentration of the mind, the right posture, prāṇāyāma or regulation of the prāṇic energy through breath-control and some results of the practice of yoga.

The third chapter contains several mantras found in other Vedic sections like the Rudrādhyāya and the Puruṣasūkta. The descriptions, again, centre round the jīvātman and the Paramātman.

Continuing the same subject, the next chapter declares that those who realise the truth, Brahman, will attain immortality.

The fifth chapter deals with the emergence of Hiranyagarbha (the Golden-egg or the Cosmic Person) (called 'Kapila' here) from Parameśvara, the Supreme Lord. Descriptions of several aspects of creation are also there. That the ātman (Brahman) can be known through the secret parts of the Veda and that the knowers of the same, attain immortality is again repeated here.

The sixth and the last chapter declares Parameśvara or the Supreme Lord as the lord of the karmas of the individual souls and also his greatness. The teachings of such Upaniṣads as this are revealed only to those who have devotion not only to Parameśvara but also to the guru or spiritual teacher -is another important declaration of this Upaniṣad.

TAITIRĪYA UPANIṢAD (Kṛṣṇa-yajurveda; 3 chapters; 31 mantras)

The three chapters of this Upaniṣad are respectively called Śīkṣāvallī, Brahmānandavallī and Bhṛguvallī, based on the first words used in them.

The first chapter starts with the science of śīkṣā or phonetics. This is then followed by certain meditations on such subjects as jyotis or light and a few homas (ceremonial oblations into fire) meant for persons desirous of wealth and intelligence. Meditation on Brahman within oneself, through the vyāhṛtis like bhū etc., is also touched upon. The last part gives the parting message of the Vedic teacher to his student who is about to leave the institution.

The second chapter describes the five kośas or sheaths that cover the ātman, like the annamaya (the sheath of food, viz., the body), the prāṇamaya (the sheath of sense-organs) and so on. There is also an interesting attempt to show that the bliss of realising Brahman is infinitely superior to the pleasures one gets at the lower levels (in this world or in heaven) by taking the ideal human happiness as the basic unit.

The last chapter extols tapas or austerity as the means of realising Brahman and also describes some upāsanās on anna or food. That one should not despise food in any way, that one should honour guests with food and shelter, is another idea prominently taught here. The Upaniṣad ends with the declaration that one who transcends the five sheaths and realises the ātman, who is also in the sun, attains eternal joy.

VAJRASŪCIKĀ UPANIṢAD (Sāmaveda; 9 mantras)

This is a small Upaniṣad in prose, except for the first mantra. It asks the question, 'Who is a brāhmaṇa?' and answers it.

The body, the individual soul, birth, knowledge, work, religious duties-none of these makes one a brāhmaṇa. It is character that makes a person a real brāhmaṇa.

One who has realised the Self, the one without a second, who is therefore free from all faults and defects, is a real brāhmaṇa.

Peace of mind, absence of desire, jealousy and delusion, as also egoism, are his characteristics.

The text closes with the exhortation to one and all to become a true brāhmaṇa by realising Brahman.

13 Conclusion

The Upaniṣads contain the quintessence of Vedic religion and philosophy. The Ṣaḍdarśanas or the six systems of Indian Philosophy derive their strength and inspiration from them. The Vedānta systems are entirely an outcome of their study. The idea of mokṣa as the primary goal of life, which has permeated the Indian religions and culture of the succeeding centuries, owes its origin entirely to the Upaniṣads. And, they are the basis of the prasthānatraya (the three foundational scriptures), the other two being the Bhagavadgītā and the Brahmasūtras.

The depth as well as the catholicity of their thought has attracted the attention of the savants of other religions and societies also, resulting in their being translated into other languages too.

An earnest study of the Upaniṣads, without preconceived notions and prejudices, is bound to inspire one to aspire for the life of the spirit.

Key to Transliteration and Pronunciation – sounds like

अ, a-o in son,	ठ ṭh-th in ant-hill
आ , ā-a in master,	ड ḍ-d in den
इ i-i in if,	ढ ḍh-dh in godhood
ई ī-ee in feel,	ण ṇ-n in under
उ u-u in full,	त t-t in French
ऊ ū-oo in boot,	थ th-th in thumb
ऋ ṛ-somewhat between r and ri,	द d-th in then
	ध dh-the in breathe
ए e-ay in May,	न n-n in not
ऐ ai-y in my,	प p-p in pen
ओ o-o in oh,	फ ph-ph in loop-hole
औ au-ow in now,	ब b-b in bag
क k-k in keen,	भ bh-bh in abhor
ख kh-ckh in blockhead,	म m-m in mother
ग g-g (hard) in go,	य y-y in yard
घ gh-gh in log-hut,	र r-r in run
ङ ṅ-ng in singer,	ल l-l in luck
च c-ch in chain,	व v-v in avert
छ ch-chh in catch him,	श ś-sh in reich (German)
ज j-j in judge,	ष ṣ-sh in show
झ jh-dgeh in hedgehog,	स s-in sun
ञ ñ-n (somewhat) as in French,,	ह h-in hot
ट ṭ-t in ten,	
• ṁ-m in sum,	:ḥ-h in half