



SNS COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY
An Autonomous Institution
Coimbatore-35



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DEPARTMENT OF AUTOMOBILE ENGINEERING

III YEAR/ VI SEMESTER

19HST105 ESSENCE OF INDIAN TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

UNIT 2 INDIAN LITERATURE, CULTURE, TRADITION, AND PRACTICES
the Upanishads.



Nature of Upanishads

The Vedas are generally considered to have two portions viz., *Karma-Kanda* (portion dealing with action or rituals) and *Jnana-Kanda* (portion dealing with knowledge). The Samhita and the Brahmanas represent mainly the *Karma-Kanda* or the ritual portion, while the Upanishads chiefly represent the *Jnana-Kanda* or the knowledge portion. The Upanishads, however, are included in the *Shruti*. They are at present, the most popular and extensively read Vedic texts.

The Upanishads are often called *_Vedanta_*. Literally, *Vedanta* means the end of Veda, *Vedasya antah*, the conclusion (*Anta*) as well as the goal (*Anta*) of the Vedas. Chronologically they came at the end of the Vedic period. As Upanishads contain difficult discussions of ultimate philosophical problems, they were taught to the pupils at about the end of their course. The chief reason why the Upanishads are called the *_end of the Veda_* is that they represent the central aim of the Veda and contain the highest and ultimate goal of the Veda as they deal with Moksha or Supreme Bliss.



Meaning of the word „Upanishad’

The word ‘Upanishad’ has been derived from the root Sad (to sit), to which are added two prefixes: *Upa* and *Ni*. The prefix *Upa* denotes nearness and *Ni* totality. Thus, this word means ‘sitting near by devotedly’. This no doubt refers to the pupil’s sitting down near his teacher at the time of instruction. The word in course of time gathered round it the sense of secret teaching or secret doctrine (*Rahasya*) which was imparted at such sittings. Upanishads are frequently spoken of as *Rahasya* (secret) or *Guhya* (mystery) also. We find in Upanishads, that due to secrecy and mystery of the teachings, a teacher refuses to impart instruction to a pupil who has not proved his worthiness to receive the instruction. Through another definition, the word primarily signifies knowledge, yet by implication it also refers to the book that contains that knowledge.



Number of the Upanishads

There is a good deal of speculation concerning the number of Upanishads. Traditionally, the old Upanishads had their place in the Brahmanas and Aranyakas. There is only one instance of a Samhita containing Upanishad – the Vajasaneyi Samhita comprises the Ishavasya Upanishad forming the 40th Book.

In later times, the Upanishads obtained a more independent position but still they professed to belong more particularly to one or the other of the four Vedas.

It is difficult to ascertain the exact number that should be regarded as authentic Upanishads. A religious system is considered valid in India only when it is supported by *Shruti*, hence the founders of religious sects have sometimes written books and called them Upanishads in order to give their views scriptural authority. The *Allah* Upanishad, for instance was composed in the sixteenth century, at the time of Emperor Akbar.

Different estimates of their number have been given by scholars and they have been put by some scholars at as many as 200.



One hundred and eight Upanishads are enumerated in the Muktikopanishad and a popular edition contains them. However, among these Upanishads, ten Upanishads, the names of which have been mentioned in the Muktikopanishad, are considered the most important Upanishads from the point of view of Vedantic Philosophy.

Ten Principal Upanishads known as ‘_Dashopanishad’ are : Isha, Kena, Katha , Prashna , Munda , Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Chandogya and Brihadaranyaka.

Besides, Shvetashvatara, Kaushitaki and Maitrayaniya Upanishads are often listed in old Upanishads.

Division of the Upanishads

According to the Muktikopanishad 108 Upanishads are divided according to four Vedas are as follows:

10 Upanishads from the Rigveda

19 Upanishads from the Shukla-Yajurveda

32 Upanishads from the Krishna-Yajurveda

16 Upanishads from the Samaveda and

31 Upanishads from the Atharvaveda.



The Principal thirteen Upanishads, related to the Vedas are:

(A) Upanishads of the Rigveda :

- (1) Aitareya Upanishad,
- (2) Kaushitaki Upanishad

(B) Upanishads of the Shukla-Yajurveda:

- (3) Brihadaranyaka Upanishad,
- (4) Isha Upanishad

(C) Upanishads of the Krishna-Yajurveda:

- (5) Taittiriya Upanishad,
- (6) Katha Upanishad,
- (7) Shvetashvatara Upanishad,
- (8) Maitrayaniya Upanishad

(D) Upanishads of the Samaveda:

- (9) Chandogya Upanishad,
- (10) Kena Upanishad

(E) Upanishads of the Atharvaveda:

- (11) Mundaka Upanishad,
- (12) Mandukya Upanishad,
- (13) Prashna Upanishad.



Importance of the Upanishads

- 1) The Upanishads occupy a unique place in the development of Indian philosophical thought. They contain the highest authority on which the various systems of philosophy in India rest. So Vedanta Philosophy is directly related to the Upanishads. Not only the Vedanta philosopher professes his faith in the ends and objects of the Veda, but the Sankhya, the Vaisheshika, the Nyaya and Yoga philosophers, all pretend to find in the Upanishads some warranty for their tenets.
- 2) The Upanishads are associated with the Vedas and make the entire range of Vedic knowledge as complete. _The Upanishads generally mention the Vedas and their study with respect. Certain verses from the Vedas, such as the *Gayatri*, form the subject of meditation here.
- 3) *Brahmavidya* or the knowledge of Brahman, the Supreme Reality is the great kingdom of the principal Upanishads. They give importance to _Knowledge' alone. Anyone having knowledge may be Guru or Acarya. Even kings approached to them for the attainment of knowledge. The story of Satyakama Jabala, who though unable to give his father's name, was yet initiated into spiritual life, shows this fact. In the Chandogya Upanishad (4.1-3) Raikva a Brahmana not by caste but by his knowledge, instructed king Janashruti. In the same Upanishad (5.3), the king Pravahana instructed the Brahmana Gautama in the new doctrine of transmigration. This story together with the one in which king Ashvapati kaikeya instructed five Brahmanas in the doctrine of Atman (Chan. Up. 5.11)



shows that for Upanishads knowledgeable person is the most important and not the Brahmana, Kshatriya or anyone else.

- 4) Each of the Vedas has many *Mahavakyas* or great sayings. But four *Mahavakyas* found in the Upanishads related to four Vedas are very important, thought-provoking and powerful. These spell out the non-duality of the *Jiva* and the Brahman-*Prajnanam Brahma*- –*Rigveda Aham Brahmasmi* – *Yajurveda Tattvamasi* – *Samveda Ayamatma Brahma* – *Aharvaveda*
- 5) Without understanding the Upanishads, it is impossible to get an insight into Indian history and culture. Every subsequent development of philosophy and religion in India has drawn heavily on the Upanishads.



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