

Linking Upanisads to Life

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Abstract

Upanisads present the ways of joyful life. Competition, fear, pain, suffering, failure, tragedy, decay and destruction make the life horrible and unbearable. *Upanisads* provide solace and peace of mind in such situation. When we understand the significances of the texts, we become full of kindness, empathy, compassion, cooperation and harmony, for we identify ourselves with all the beings and things of the universe. Some of the principal statements of *Upanisads* affirm the oneness of the individual self and the universe (*Brahma*). The statement *Aham Brahmasmi* means that I am *Brahma* (universe). Next statement *Sarvaṃ Khalvidam Brahma* means that all this is *Brahma*. This is *Brahma*. That is *Brahma*. Both the subject and object are the one. This is the awareness and realization of oneness of all beings and all things in the universe. Furthermore, next expression in *Upanisad* is '*Tattvamasi (Tat tvam asi)* which means that 'that you are'. The statement suggests that 'you are that (thing) which you are in the quest of.' The subject itself becomes the object. The searcher of the essence is itself the essence (*tatva*). These statements suggest the oneness of *Brahma* including all conscious beings and non-beings. We all are within the *Brahma*. I am within you. You are within me. You and I are one. When we realize this, there is no comparison, hierarchy and judgment. Since everything is indestructible infinite *Brahma*, there is no fear of loss, failure and death. The causes of pain and suffering disappear since all the things are the expressions of same entity (*Brahma*). This state is called *Satchitanand (Sat-chit-anand)*. This means that realization of the truth (essence) provides absolute bliss. The life is full of perpetual joy. Such outlooks in *Upanisads* give immense strength to face all sorts of difficulties in life. The life becomes celebration.

Keywords: *Aham Brahmasmi, Naad Brahma, Tattvamasi, Sarvaṃ Khalvidam Brahma, Satchitanand, Upanisad*



Introduction

Upanisads are some of the important texts of ancient times that explore the relationship of the self and the universe. Significant parts of *Vedas* have been extracted, simplified and presented in these seminal texts. Thus, they are also called *Vedanta*, the concluding remarks of *Vedas*. *Upanisads* are considered as spiritual and religious texts. Of course, they have such aspects. Nevertheless, they enhance the life, society, culture and civilization. They teach the way of life. They suggest how we can tackle the problems, adjust ourselves with the context and surroundings and go on living in balanced manner (Zimmer, 1960). There can be the debate in their spiritual values but they have pragmatic values to a great extent. In the state of confusion, dilemma, conflicts, contradictions, clash and disillusionment, they sustain empathy, cooperation, compassion and peace. The life becomes worth living. In this sense, *Upanisads* are linked to the real everyday life of individuals.

Let's suppose we are unaware of *Brahma*, the essence the universe and *Upanisads*. There are various problems in life, and we are sad, troubled, tortured, terrified and trembling with fear of loss, sickness, tragedy, decay and death. Freezing cold, scorching heat, insects, cobra, landslide, earthquake, flood, disability, old age, hunger, anger, jealousy, competition, envy, hypocrisy and lust bring pain and suffering. How can we tackle these issues and problems? How can we make our journey of life smooth? How can we adjust ourselves in the world? How can we achieve the peace of our mind? Some key statements from *Upanisads* like *Tattvamasi* (That you are), *Aham Brahmasmi* (I am *Brahma*), *Sarvaṃ Khalvidamṃ Brahma* (Everything is *Brahma*) and *Prajnanam Brahma* (Consciousness is *Brahma*) imply the way how we can address such issues in our life. *Upanisads* convey such messages like: 'Everything is *Brahma* (essence); self or individual (consciousness) is *Brahma* (universe); you are *Brahma*, and I am *Brahma*. You are within me and I am within you. I identify myself with you. Your problem is my problem.' This attitude toward life and the world is supposed to address most of the conflicts and problems in our life and the world.

Research Methodology

Upanisads include the area of this research. *Upanisads* are primary sources, for some key statements of the texts are analyzed and interpreted. The argument is *Upanisads* are connected to everyday life of individuals and society. Critiques on *Upanisads* are secondary sources. This research takes qualitative approach for the analysis and interpretations of the texts. The critics and readers' perspectives and points of view impacts the significance and meaning of the texts. The theories in the texts has been linked to the real life of the people as seen and experienced by the researcher.

Analysis, Interpretation and Discussion

Principal statements of *Upanisads* suggest the ways toward pleasure (*anand*) and peace of mind in human life. They give strength to accept the situation in life happily and go on living with joy (Khadka, 1995). The realization of the significance of the texts works as a sort of therapy against depression, anxiety, fear, paranoia, phobia, failure, frustration, tragedy and disillusionment. The maddening race for material gain, luxury, post, power and fame puts fire in one's body and mind. It begins to burn and it goes on until one turns into ashes. Throughout the life, one suffers from the burning pain. Some of them end their life in the middle. Reading, appreciation and assimilation of *Upanisads* provide coolness and solace. The greed, selfishness, lust and hypocrisy gradually decline, and they are replaced with renunciation, compassion, altruism and cooperation, for one realizes the oneness of all the beings and things (*Sarvaṃ Khalvidam Brahma*). The individual realizes the statements: 'I am *Brahma* (*Aham Brahmasmi*), you are *Brahma* (*Tattvamasi*). I am within you, and you are within me. You and I are the same entity.' When we accept this argument, the competition, hypocrisy and fame become irrelevant. Why should I run? Why should I tell lie? Why should I use power over other? The journey of life becomes smooth. We work with comfort. Terror and nervousness vanish. Failure does not give us so much pain, and success does not make us proud. This is the way of life that *Upanisads* suggest.

'*Tatwamasi*' is one of the most important arguments of the *Vedānta*. It is the combination of three words: '*tat* (that)', '*tvam* (you)' and '*asi* (are)'. It means 'that you are'. When we rephrase it- 'you are that'. What is that? That means *Brahma*. In other words, 'you are *Brahma*' (Dash & Dash, 2020). You are moving. You are seeking something. You are restless. You want something. You think it is somewhere else. It is new. It is strange. It is difficult to find what you think. But *Chandogya Upanisad* says 'do not go anywhere, for what you are seeking is you yourself.' That is you. You find it within yourself. You are the essence. You are the universal soul. *Tattvamasi*, the philosophical statement, signifies the unity of self and universal consciousness (Bhatta, 2021). We are not detached from the universe or the ultimate reality. When we find our need, destination and goal within ourselves, the conflicts, contradictions and problems of life are resolved. This provides a sense coolness and comfort in life.

Ayam Atma Brahma, the statement from *Vedanta* means this self (individual) is *Brahma*. This consciousness *Brahma*. You are the ultimate reality. Why do you worry? You are the essence. You are the goal. We are always already complete. Everyone is complete. The need is only to realize this (Bhatt, 2003). The realization is likely to transform the

individual from inferiority complex to self-sufficiency. This is the broader outlook toward life and the world.

Upanisads attempt to unite the microcosmic individual human existence with the macrocosmic universe. All the parts including living beings and non-living things are intimately inter-connected to the universe. Parts cannot be disconnected from the whole entity. Each particle in the universe impacts all the other particles irrespective of distance. I and you are one entity. I feel your pain and suffering. I understand you. The subject and the objects are the same. This attitude brings a sense of coherence, coexistence and social harmony in the community. The hierarchy of superiority and inferiority is dissolved. The duality and binary oppositions are questioned. The statements intend to lead the *sadhakas* toward the recognition that all beings and things are within *Brahma*. Realization of this leads toward compassion and empathy. All the beings are the parts of the same whole.

The principal statements like *Prajnanam Brahma* (Consciousness is *Brahma*) and *Aham Brahmasmi* (I am *Brahma*), the statement from *Brihadaranyaka Upanisad* (1.4.10), takes us toward self-exploration in relation to our surroundings and the context. The ontology is realization of *Brahma*, the epistemology of this awareness includes reasoning, meditation and contemplation upon the texts in relation to life and context, and axiology is the perpetual bliss (satchitanand—sat-chit-anand). Such realization resolves the existing conflicts and contradictions of life. The individual self mirrors the universe. Similarly, the self is reflected upon the world. *Tattvamasi* implies that the object of the quest (energy and essence) is not very far. You yourself is this.

Chandogya Upanisad and *Sama Veda* argue that *Brahma* is beyond the beginning and the end. It is *ananta* (infinite). Its shape is not fixed (*nirakar*). It is only one and alone (*niranjan*). The universe is *Ananta* beyond definition (Bhatta, 2021). Scientific researches also state that trillions of galaxies and stars exist in the visible space. Nobody knows the border of the universe. The features of universe and *Brahma* are similar. When we go for the search of our existence, we move toward the universe including stars and galaxies. When we follow our source, we move towards apes, mammals, amphibians, fish, single cell organism, water, oxygen, hydrogen and carbon, clay, dust and other minerals. The life dissolves into earth. As we follow the origin of earth, we move toward space, solar system, galaxies and black holes. At one time, the elements of our body were in the distant stars and planets as the scientists argue. With creation and dissolution of the universe, we have travelled the entire universe. The matter and energy are never destroyed but change their form. We change our form, but we are never destroyed. We return to water, clay and

insect. The earth returns to universe as the space expands and contracts. As we realize that we are immortal and infinite, we gain liberation from the anxiety, suffering and enmity. We come in the state of bliss (*anand*).

We are part of *Brahma* (universe). We are inside *Brahma*. I am within you, and you are within me. Such feeling is supposed to enhance the way of our life. Being aware of consciousness, universe and *Brahma*, we become ourselves *Brahma* beyond past and present. *Naad Brahma*, the eternal subtle musical vibration of the cosmos, suggests that the entire universe is the single entity having its own divine melody. All the voices and sounds including things and beings are the integral parts of *Naad Brahma*. The creation and destruction takes place within it as the rising and falling tunes of the music. The meditating sadhakas, sages and yogis perceive and realize this eternal melody and music. Different expressions in *Upanisads* reinforce the oneness of the self and the universe. In broader view, they have been projected to enhance life.

The statement *Aham Brahmāsmi* (I am the *Brahma*) is coherent to the sense of *Tattvamasi* (You are that *Brahma*). Despite the difference in denotation, the connotation of the statements is the same. In other words, they signify, 'I am *Brahma*. You are *Brahma*. You and I are the same.' The next statement from *Mandukya Upanisad* (1.2) is *Ayam Ātmā Brahma* which means, 'This self (atman) is *Brahma*'. The consciousness is *Brahma*, the universe (Chinmayananda, 2017). We are conscious of the world and our surroundings. Thus, we say it exists. Both consciousness and matter are *Brahma*. The statement further reinforces the oneness of all the things in the world, universe and space. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (3.14.1) states, '*Sarvaṃ Khalvidaṃ Brahma* (All this is *Brahma*). Realization of these expressions from *Vedanta* takes us to the state of *Satchitanand* (*Sat- chit- anand*). Our consciousness understands the truth (essence), and this understanding leads toward bliss (*anand*). The individual self (*sadhaka*) is supposed to dissolve oneself into *Brahma*. When the distinction in subject and object, traveler and the destination, consciousness and matter, you and I disappears, all the conflicts of the life and world are supposed to be resolved (Purushothaman & Kumaran, 2014). This is the state of perpetual bliss. *Upanisads* present the universal messages in concise form.

Chhandogya Upanisad (6.8.7) presents the dialogue between [Uddalaka](#) and his son Śvetaketu. The dialogue reveals ontological discourse on the union of the self and the universe. The universe (*Brahma*) is the root of all the manifestations like matters and creatures. They appear and disappear within it. Despite the difference on the surface, the essence is the same. *Brahma* is the source of all things. The individual self emerges out

of the *Brahma* (universe). That is how we all are one. You are the origin, root and essence of all that exists. *Advaita Vedanta* asserts the oneness of the self and the other. This is the ultimate reality. *Aham Brahmāsmi*, one of the key statement in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanisad* (1.4.10) implies that our identity is universal and cosmic. *Brahma* is infinite entity. The awareness of non-dual existence paves way for the enlightenment.

Aitareya Upanisad (3.3) states, ‘*Prajñānam Brahma* (Consciousness is *Brahma*)’. The knowledge (awareness) of the existence is *Brahma*. We realize *Brahma* through knowledge. Without consciousness and knowledge, one cannot be aware about the universe or *Brahma*. The intellect determines the *sat* (essence). The enlightened individual is known as *Prajna* who is considered to have attained *Brahmahood*.

Mandukya Upanisad mentions, ‘*Ayam atma Brahma* (This self (soul) is *Brahma*.)’ In other words, *Brahma is this self*. Next statement, *Sarvam hyetad Brahma*’, means that this universe (*Brahma*) is the Whole. ‘*Brahma sah ayam atman* means that *Brahma* is this self. You are *Brahma*. I am *Brahma*. This is *Brahma*. That is *Brahma*. Thus, everything is *Brahma*. *Mundaka Upanisad* states that all the things and beings originate from *Brahma*, and dissolve into *Brahma* (Rama, 1990). All the things like mind, air, senses, space, water, light and earth emerge from *Brahma*. The things like fire, the moon, the sun, rain, seeds, herbs, *Vedas*, verses, music, stars, gods, men, birds, cattle, corn, rice, truth and law come from *Brahma* (*Mundaka Upanisad*, 2.1.4 - 2.1.7). The Big Bang explodes and expands unfolding the universe. The universe and its manifestations collapse into a condensed mass like *Brahmanda* (*Brahma- anda*). *Anda* means an egg-like mass. *Mundaka Upanisad* (2.2.2) states that *Brahma* is in the state of anand (perpetual bliss). *Brahma* is one, indestructible and infinite. Through contemplation, knowledge, reasoning and meditation, the self becomes one with *Brahma* (*Mundaka Upanisad*, 2.2.2 - 2.2.4). Then, greed, jealousy, restlessness, depression, anxiety, failure and enmity vanish.

All the things come from the universe or space, and they go back to the universe. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* mentions, *Ekam eva advitīyam Brahma*. The statement means that *Brahma* is one, without a second. *Isha Upanisad* states, “*So ‘ham*”. This means, ‘I am that (*Brahma*).’ While we are moving about, resting, eating, talking or working, we experience that we are infinite *Brahma* if we remember these key statements of *Upanisads*. The universe is my own body. Such realization makes jealousy, hatred and anger irrelevant.

The statements in *Upanisads* can be used as profound tools for self-realization and liberation. The process begins from the quest of the self, ‘Who am I?’ (Dutta, 1950). The research, study and exploration leads us to origin of life, earth, stars, space, galaxy and



the universe, Big Bang and beyond. Earth is like a sand particle in our galaxy. Our galaxy is like a sand particle in the space. The universe is infinite (*Ananta*). All the particles are moving in the space as the clay particles when we blast a piece of dry clay on the floor. As compared to the universe, we are within an invisible dust particle, yet, we are fighting for our land, post, power and money. This is the futile struggle. Let's see the world beyond horizon. Let's have wider world view. Both *Upanisads* and science provide us such insights. The universe (*Brahmanda*) maintains the organic whole. Each particle is connected to other particles. The products are the results of chemical reactions. Our thinking affects things in even other side the universe as argued by quantum mechanics. Such understanding brings a shift in our outlook and the way of life. The argument is not based on the faith and belief but reasoning, evidence and objective observation.

We see *Brahma* even in a tree, an animal, a stone, sand or the sky. The need is not to attain *Brahma*, for none has been separated from it. Everyone is already always *Brahma*. The realization and understanding is needed.

Realization of *Tattvamasi*, *Aham Brahmasmi* and *Sarvam khalvidam Brahma* does not mean that we withdraw ourselves from *karma* (action) and life. We work in cool and smooth manner, for we are not hurried to win, to achieve more, to earn more and to dominate others. The action is supposed to be full of compassion and empathy. This creates the real human civilization. This is use of full human potential. We move beyond anxiety and illusion. The act is without attachment. Our existence is full of epiphany emerging out of the union of you and I, object and subject, the self and the universe (Sharma, 2009). *Isopanishad* states that the self identifies itself with the world and the universe (Das, 2014).

Both science and *Upanisads* indicate that all the things arise from a common source. All the things in the world are the parts of the whole (Sharma, 2003). The understanding of the principal statements of the *Upanisads* makes us see the universe, world and the self in a new light. The perspective changes the way we live and work. When I identify myself with you, the compassion comes forth. There is cooperation and coexistence in harmony. The energy and matter change the form, but they are never destroyed. We are never destroyed. We only change the form (Das, 2014). We are immortal. We are free from the fear of death. This paves the way toward peace and harmony.

Rig Veda mentions, “*Ekam sat* (truth is only one).” There is nothing but only one existence, the *Brahma*. This suggests the oneness of existence (Paramahansa, 2007). Some statements of *Upanisads* and modern science signify the identical sense. The difference is that *Upanisads* use more metaphors and analogy than the language of science. These two



fields of study are not on collusion.

Upanisads encourage tolerance for different perspectives, beliefs and world views, for there is no difference in ‘this’ and ‘that’, ‘you’ and ‘I’ (Swami, 1993). Thinking, feeling, believing and sensing are possible due to our consciousness (Mahadeven & Saroja, 1981). Reasoning, yoga and meditation are supposed to elevate an awareness and paves the way for the union of individual consciousness with the infinite *Brahma* (Swami, 1963).

The statement *Prajnanam Brahma* (Consciousness is *Brahma*) in *Aitareya Upanisad* 3.3 suggests that consciousness is a singular. Reality is only one. The individual identifies with the essence. All the things like matters, life and seeds emerge from it. *Sarvam khalvidam Brahma* means that all of this is *Brahma*. This is the realization of ultimate reality (Keerthi, 2017). *Brahma* is real (*tat sat*). Things come from space, keep on moving and return into space again (*Chandogya Upanisad* chapter 1.9.1). The cycle and wheel keeps on moving.

Isha Upanisad says: “*Om Purnamadah Purnamidam Purnat purnamudachyate; Purnasya Purnamadaya Purnamevavashisyate.*” This means that *Brahma* is complete (whole), and this creation is complete. The complete thing comes from complete entity. When we take out the complete thing from the complete thing, the complete (whole) thing remains there. The realization of this statement gives a sense that you are complete, I am complete and everything is complete (Purushothaman & Kumaran, 2014). Then, what is the use of your anxiety, fear and worry? We are already always complete. The need is only to realize this. The realization provides perpetual bliss (Cohen, 2017).

Holistic interconnectedness of all beings and things is presented in *Upanisads* as “*Sarvam khalbidam Brahma.*” The unity of the self and the other is realized through consciousness. In the absence of mind, we are unaware of the universe. Consciousness makes sense of the existence. Matter and energy, living and non-living, mind and matter, observer and observed are not different from each other (Swami, 1997). We are here in this space, and we are everywhere at the same time (*Bhagavat Gita* 10/42).

Greed, competition, lack of tolerance and compassion have degraded the human civilization in contemporary time (Purushothaman & Kumaran, 2014). The sense of oneness of the self and the other, subject and object, I and you leads us toward peace, harmony and humanity in the society. The oneness of the self and the universe and interconnectedness of all particles in the universe have not been only stated in *Upanisads* but also accepted by quantum mechanics and modern science.



Conclusion

Some of the key statements in *Upanisads* have close connection to human life, culture and civilization. They encourage us to live in smooth, cool and blissful manner. They teach to face problems and tackle them in comfortable and cool manner. Learning, understanding and realization of message of the texts equips one to handle life with harmony, cooperation and compassion. *Upanisads* summarize the significances of philosophical discourses in concise form. The statements hold the authority.

The statements like *Aham Brahmasmi* (I am *Brahma*), *Ayam Ātmā Brahma* (This self is *Brahma*), *Tattvamasi* (That is you), *Sarvam Khalvidam* (All of this is *Brahma*) and *Prajnanam Brahma* (Consciousness is *Brahma*) signify that this is *Brahma* (universe), that is *Brahma*, you are *Brahma*, I am also *Brahma* and everything is *Brahma*. This matter is *Brahma*, and this consciousness is *Brahma*. This is the oneness of self and the universe. Furthermore, next statement says: *Om Purnamadah Purnamidam Purnat purnamudachyate; Purnasya Purnamadaya Purnamevavashisyate*. This means that everything is complete, whole and self-sufficient. You are already always complete *Brahma*. Realization of these ideas is supposed to bring the state of *satchitananda* (*satchit-anand*). This means that the realization of essence is supposed to provide us bliss.

Since we are whole *Brahma*, consciousness, and universe, we need not worry about failure, success, earning, competition, fear and enmity. We are one and we have everything within us. This provides a sense of completeness, coolness and perpetual peace in life. This gives the way to compassion and cooperation among fellow beings.

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