

Upanishads

The **Upanishads** (Sanskrit: Upaniṣad; IPA: [upəniʃəd]) are a collection of texts which contain some of the central philosophical concepts of **Hinduism**, some of which are shared with **Buddhism** and **Jainism**.^{[1][note 1][note 2]} The Upanishads are considered by Hindus to contain utterances (*śruti*) concerning the nature of ultimate reality (*brahman*) and describing the character of and path to human salvation (*mokṣa* or *mukti*).

The Upanishads are commonly referred to as *Vedānta*, variously interpreted to mean either the “last chapters, parts of the *Veda*” or “the object, the highest purpose of the *Veda*”.^[3] The concepts of **Brahman** (Ultimate Reality) and **Ātman** (Soul, Self) are central ideas in all the Upanishads,^{[4][5]} and “Know your Ātman” their thematic focus.^{[5][6]} The Upanishads are the foundation of Hindu philosophical thought and its diverse traditions.^{[7][8]} Of the Vedic corpus, they alone are widely known, and the central ideas of the Upanishads are at the spiritual core of Hindus.^{[7][9]}

More than 200 Upanishads are known, of which the first dozen or so are the oldest and most important and are referred to as the principal or main (*mukhya*) Upanishads.^{[10][11]} The *mukhya* Upanishads are found mostly in the concluding part of the *Brahmanas* and *Aranyakas*^[12] and were, for centuries, memorized by each generation and passed down verbally. The early Upanishads all predate the Common Era, some in all likelihood pre-Buddhist (6th century BCE),^[13] down to the **Maurya period**.^[14] Of the remainder, some 95 Upanishads are part of the **Muktika** canon, composed from about the start of common era through **medieval Hinduism**. New Upanishads, beyond the 108 in the **Muktika** canon, continued to being composed through the early modern and modern era,^[15] though often dealing with subjects which are unconnected to the Vedas.^[16]

Along with the **Bhagavad Gita** and the **Brahmasutra** the *mukhya* Upanishads (known collectively as the *Prasthanatrayi*),^[17] provide a foundation for the several later schools of **Vedanta**, among them, two influential monistic schools of Hinduism.^{[note 3][note 4][note 5]}

With the translation of the Upanishads in the early 19th century they also started to attract attention from a western audience. **Schopenhauer** was deeply impressed by the Upanishads and called it “the production of the highest human wisdom”.^[21] The 19th century **transcendentalists** noted the influence of the Upanishads in western philosophy.^{[22][23]}

1 Etymology

The Sanskrit term *Upaniṣad* (u = at, pa = foot, nishat =sitting down) translates to “sitting at the foot/feet of”, referring to the student sitting down near the teacher while receiving **esoteric** knowledge.^[24] **Monier-Williams'** *Sanskrit Dictionary* adds that, “According to native authorities Upanishad means 'setting to rest ignorance by revealing the knowledge of the supreme spirit.’”^[25]

Shri Adi Shankara explains in his commentary on the **Kaṭha** and **Brihadaranyaka Upanishad** that the word means *Ātmavidyā*, that is, “knowledge of the Self”, or *Brahma*vidyā “knowledge of **Brahma**”. Other dictionary meanings include “esoteric doctrine” and “secret doctrine”. The word appears in the verses of many Upanishads, such as the fourth verse of the 13th volume in first chapter of the **Chandogya Upanishad**. **Max Muller** as well as **Paul Deussen** translate the word *Upanishad* in these verses as “secret doctrine”,^{[26][27]} **Robert Hume** translates it as “mystic meaning”,^[28] while **Patrick Olivelle** translates it as “hidden connections”.^[29]

2 Development

2.1 Authorship

The authorship of most Upanishads is uncertain and unknown. **Radhakrishnan** states, “almost all the early literature of India was anonymous, we do not know the names of the authors of the Upanishads”.^[30] The various philosophical theories in the early Upanishads have been attributed to famous sages such as **Yajnavalkya**, **Uddalaka Aruni**, **Shvetaketu**, **Shandilya**, **Aitareya**, **Balaki**, **Pippalada** and **Sanatkumara**.^{[30][31]} Women, such as **Maitreyi** and **Gargi** participate in the dialogues and are credited in the early Upanishads.^[32]

There are exceptions to the anonymous tradition of the Upanishads and other Vedic literature. The **Shvetashvatara Upanishad**, for example, includes closing credits to sage *Shvetashvatara*, and he is considered the author of the Upanishad.^[33] Scholars believe that early Upanishads, were interpolated^[34] and expanded over time, because of the differences within manuscripts of the same Upanishad discovered in different parts of South Asia, differences in non-Sanskrit version of the texts that have survived, and differences within each text in terms of the meter,^[35] the style, the grammar and the

structure.^{[36][37]} The texts as they exist now is believed to be the work of many authors.^[38]

2.2 Chronology

Scholars are uncertain about the exact centuries in which the Upanishads were composed.^[39] The chronology of the early Upanishads is difficult to resolve, states philosopher and Sanskritist Stephen Phillips,^[10] because all opinions rest on scanty evidence and analysis of archaism, style and repetitions across texts, and are driven by assumptions about likely evolution of ideas, and presumptions about which philosophy might have influenced which other Indian philosophies. Indologist Patrick Olivelle says that “in spite of claims made by some, in reality, any dating of these documents [early Upanishads] that attempts a precision closer than a few centuries is as stable as a house of cards”.^[13] Some scholars have sought to analyse similarities between Hindu Upanishads and Buddhist literature to establish chronology for the Upanishads.^[14]

Patrick Olivelle gives the following chronology for the early Upanishads:^{[39][13]}

- The Brhadaranyaka and the Chandogya are the two earliest Upanishads. They are edited texts, some of whose sources are much older than others. The two texts are pre-Buddhist; they may be placed in the 7th to 6th centuries BCE, give or take a century or so.^{[40][14]}
- The three other early prose Upanisads—Taittiriya, Aitareya, and Kausitaki come next; all are probably pre-Buddhist and can be assigned to the 6th to 5th centuries BCE.
- The Kena is the oldest of the verse Upanisads followed by probably the Katha, Isa, Svetasvatara, and Mundaka. All these Upanisads were composed probably in the last few centuries BCE.^[41]
- The two late prose Upanisads, the Prasna and the Mandukya, cannot be much older than the beginning of the common era.^{[39][13]}

Stephen Phillips places the early Upanishads in the 800 to 300 BCE range. He summarizes the current Indological opinion to be that the Brhadaranyaka, Chandogya, Isha, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Kena, Katha, Mundaka, and Prasna Upanishads are all pre-Buddhist and pre-Jain, while Svetasvatara and Mandukya overlap with the earliest Buddhist and Jain literature.^[10]

2.3 Geography

The general area of the composition of the early Upanishads was northern India, the region bounded on the west

by the upper Indus valley, on the east by lower Ganges region, on the north by the Himalayan foothills, and on the south by the Vindhya mountain range.^[13] There is confidence about the early Upanishads being the product of the geographical center of ancient Brahmanism, comprising the regions of Kuru-Panchala and Kosala-Videha together with the areas immediately to the south and west of these.^[42] This region covers modern Bihar, Nepal, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, eastern Rajasthan and northern Madhya Pradesh.^[13]

While significant attempts have been made recently to identify the exact locations of the individual Upanishads, the results are tentative. Witzel identifies the center of activity in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad as the area of Videha, whose king, Janaka, features prominently in the Upanishad.^[43]

The Chandogya Upanishad was probably composed in a more Western than an Eastern location in Indian subcontinent, possibly somewhere in the western region of the Kuru-Panchala country.^[44] Compared to the Principal Upanishads, the new Upanishads recorded in the Muktikā belong to an entirely different region, probably southern India, and are considerably relatively recent.^[45] In fourth chapter of the Kaushitaki Upanishad, a location named Kashi (modern Varanasi) is mentioned.^[13]

3 Classification

3.1 Muktika canon

There are more than 200 known *Upanishads*, one of which, *Muktikā* Upanishad, predates 1656 CE^[46] and contains a list of 108 canonical Upanishads,^[47] including itself as the last. The earliest ones such as the Brihadaranyaka and Chandogya Upanishads date to the 1st millennium BCE,^[48] and the latest to the Mughal period.^{[10][13]} Various schools of Hinduism recognize the first 10, 11, 12 or 13 *Upanishads* as “principal” or *Mukhya* Upanishads. The remainder is further divided into Upanishads associated with Shaktism, Sannyasa (asceticism), Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Yoga, besides 21 Upanishads known as *sāmānya* (“common”, or “general”) which, while not part of the *mukhya* canon are still accepted as *shruti* by all schools of Vedanta.^[49] The newer Upanishads mentioned in the Muktikā probably originated in southern India.^[45] They are also categorized as “sectarian” since they reflect the emergence of the various Hindu sects in medieval Hinduism which sought to legitimize their texts by claiming for them the status of *Śruti*.^[50] The Upanishads of the Muktika canon are also all associated with a specific Brahmana and by extension with one of the four Veda.

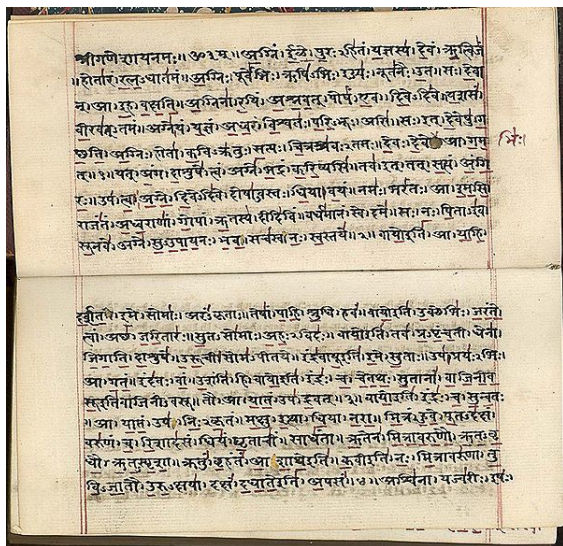
3.2 Mukhya Upanishads

Main article: Mukhya Upanishads

The *Mukhya Upanishads* can be grouped into periods. Of the early periods are the *Brihadaranyaka* and the *Chandogya*, the oldest.^{[51][note 6]}

The *Aitareya*, *Kauṣītaki* and *Taittirīya Upanishads* may date to as early as the mid 1st millennium BCE, while the remnant date from between roughly the 4th to 1st centuries BCE, roughly contemporary with the earliest portions of the *Sanskrit epics*. It is alleged that the *Aitareya*, *Taittirīya*, *Kausitaki*, *Mundaka*, *Prasna*, and *Katha Upanishads* show Buddha's influence, and must have been composed after the 5th century BCE, but it could just as easily have been the other way around. It is also alleged that in the first two centuries A.D., they were followed by the *Kena*, *Mandukya* and *Isa Upanishads*, but other scholars date these earlier.^[53] Not much is known about the authors except for those, like *Yajnavalkya* and *Uddalaka*, mentioned in the texts.^[12] A few women discussants, such as *Gargi* and *Maitreyi*, the wife of *Yajnavalkya*,^[54] also feature occasionally.

Each of the principal *Upanishads* can be associated with one of the schools of exegesis of the four Vedas (*shakhas*).^[55] Many *Shakhas* are said to have existed, of which only a few remain. The new *Upanishads* often have little relation to the Vedic corpus and have not been cited or commented upon by any great *Vedanta* philosopher: their language differs from that of the classic *Upanishads*, being less subtle and more formalized. As a result, they are not difficult to comprehend for the modern reader.^[56]



An early 19th-century manuscript of the Rigveda

The *Kauṣītaki* and *Maitrāyaṇī Upanishads* are sometimes added to the list of the *mukhya Upanishads*.

3.3 New Upanishads

There is no fixed list of the *Upanishads* as newer ones have continued to be discovered and composed.^[58] On many occasions, when older *Upanishads* have not suited the founders of new sects, they have composed new ones of their own.^[59] 1908 marked the discovery of four new *Upanishads*, named *Bashkala*, *Chhagaleya*, *Arsheya* and *Saunaka*, by *Friedrich Schrader*,^[60] who attributed them to the first prose period of the *Upanishads*.^[61] The text of three, the *Chhagaleya*, *Arsheya* and *Saunaka*, was reportedly corrupt and neglected but possibly re-constructible with the help of their *Perso-Latin translations*. Other texts including *Devadeva-rahasya* and *Subakshana* have also ascribed as *Upanishads*. Several texts under the title of “*Upanishads*” originated right up to the first half of the 20th century, some of which are not to be included in the *Vedas*, since they did not deal with subjects of *Vedic philosophy*.^[16]

The main *Shakta Upanishads* mostly discuss doctrinal and interpretative differences between the two principal sects of a major *Tantric* form of *Shaktism* called *Shri Vidya upasana*. The many extant lists of authentic *Shakta Upanishads* vary, reflecting the sect of their compilers, so that they yield no evidence of their “location” in *Tantric* tradition, impeding correct interpretation. The *Tantra* content of these texts also weaken its identity as an *Upanishad* for non-*Tantrikas* and therefore, its status as *shruti* and thus its authority.^[62]

4 Association with Vedas

All *Upanishads* are associated with one of the four Vedas—*Rigveda*, *Samaveda*, *Yajurveda* (there are two primary versions or *Samhitas* of the *Yajurveda*: *Shukla Yajurveda*, *Krishna Yajurveda*), and *Atharvaveda*. The *Muktikā Upanishad*'s list of 108 *Upanishads* groups the first 10 as *mukhya*, 21 as *Sāmānya Vedānta*, 23 as *Sannyāsa*, 14 as *Vaishnava*, 14 as *Shaiva*, 9 as *Shakta* and 17 as *Yoga*.^[63] The 108 *Upanishads* as recorded in the *Muktikā* are shown in the table below.^{[64][65]} The *mukhya Upanishads* are highlighted.

5 Philosophy

Main article: Vedanta

The *Upanishadic* age was characterized by a pluralism of worldviews. While some *Upanishads* have been deemed 'monistic', others, including the *Katha Upanishad*, are dualistic.^[66] The *Maitri* is one of the *Upanishads* that inclines more toward dualism, thus grounding classical *Samkhya* and *Yoga* schools of *Hinduism*, in



Impact of a drop of water, a common analogy for Brahman and the Ātman

contrast to the non-dualistic Upanishads at the foundation of its Vedanta school.^[67] They contain a plurality of ideas.^{[68][note 7]}

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan states that the Upanishads have dominated Indian philosophy, religion and life ever since their appearance.^[69] The Upanishads are respected not because they are considered revealed (*Shruti*), but because they present spiritual ideas that are inspiring.^[70] The Upanishads are treatises on Brahman-knowledge, that is knowledge of Ultimate Hidden Reality, and their presentation of philosophy presumes, “it is by a strictly personal effort that one can reach the truth”.^[71] In the Upanishads, states Radhakrishnan, knowledge is a means to freedom, and philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom by a way of life.^[72]

The Upanishads include sections on philosophical theories that have been at the foundation of Indian traditions. For example, the *Chandogya Upanishad* includes one of the earliest known declaration of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) as an ethical precept.^{[73][74]} Discussion of other ethical premises such as *Damah* (temperance, self-restraint), *Satya* (truthfulness), *Dāna* (charity), *Ārjava* (non-hypocrisy), *Daya* (compassion) and others are found in the oldest Upanishads and many later Upanishads.^{[75][76]} Similarly, the Karma doctrine is presented in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, which is the oldest Upanishad.^[77]

5.1 Development of thought

While the hymns of the Vedas emphasize rituals and the Brahmanas serve as a liturgical manual for those Vedic rituals, the spirit of the Upanishads is inherently opposed to ritual.^[78] The older Upanishads launch attacks of increasing intensity on the ritual. Anyone who worships a divinity other than the Self is called a domestic animal of the gods in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. The *Chāndogya Upanishad* parodies those who indulge in the acts of sacrifice by comparing them with a procession of dogs chanting *Om! Let's eat. Om! Let's drink.*^[78]

The *Kaushitaki Upanishad* asserts that “external rituals such as *Agnihotram* offered in the morning and in the evening, must be replaced with inner *Agnihotram*, the ritual of introspection”, and that “not rituals, but knowledge should be one’s pursuit”.^[79] The *Mundaka Upanishad* declares how man has been called upon, promised benefits for, scared unto and misled into performing sacrifices, oblations and pious works.^[80] *Mundaka* thereafter asserts this is foolish and frail, by those who encourage it and those who follow it, because it makes no difference to man’s current life and after-life, it is like blind men leading the blind, it is a mark of conceit and vain knowledge, ignorant inertia like that of children, a futile useless practice.^{[80][81]} The *Maitri Upanishad* states,^[82]

The performance of all the sacrifices, described in the *Maitrayana-Brahmana*, is to lead up in the end to a knowledge of Brahman, to prepare a man for meditation. Therefore, let such man, after he has laid those fires,^[83] meditate on the Self, to become complete and perfect.

— *Maitri Upanishad*^{[84][85]}

The opposition to the ritual is not explicit in the oldest Upanishads. On occasions, the Upanishads extend the task of the *Aranyakas* by making the ritual allegorical and giving it a philosophical meaning. For example, the *Brihadaranyaka* interprets the practice of horse-sacrifice or *ashvamedha* allegorically. It states that the over-lordship of the earth may be acquired by sacrificing a horse. It then goes on to say that spiritual autonomy can only be achieved by renouncing the universe which is conceived in the image of a horse.^[78]

In similar fashion, Vedic gods such as the *Agni*, *Aditya*, *Indra*, *Rudra*, *Visnu*, *Brahma* and others become equated in the Upanishads to the supreme, immortal and incorporeal Brahman-Atman of the Upanishads, god becomes synonymous with Self, and is declared to be everywhere, inmost being of each human being and within every living creature.^{[86][87][88]} The one reality or *ekam sat* of the Vedas becomes the *ekam eva advitiyam* or “the one and only and sans a second” in the Upanishads.^[78] Brahman-Atman and Self-realization develops, in the Upanishad, as the means to *moksha* (liberation, freedom in this life or after-life).^{[88][89][90]}

5.2 Brahman and Atman

Main articles: *Ātman* (Hinduism) and *Brahman*

Two words that are of paramount importance in grasping the Upanishads are *Brahman* and *Atman*.^[4] The Brahman is the ultimate reality and the Atman is individual self. Differing opinions exist amongst scholars regarding the etymology of these words. Brahman probably

comes from the root *brh*, which means “The Biggest ~ The Greatest ~ The ALL.” Brahman is “the infinite Spirit Source and fabric and core and destiny of all existence, both manifested and unmanifested and the formless infinite substratum and from whom the universe has grown”. Brahman is the ultimate, both transcendent and immanent, the absolute infinite existence, the sum total of all that ever is, was, or shall be. The word *Atman* means the immortal perfect Spirit of any living creature, all beings, including animals and trees. *Ātman* is a central idea in all the Upanishads, and “Know your *Ātman*” their thematic focus.^[5] These texts state that the inmost core of every person is not the body, nor the mind, nor the ego, but *Atman* – “Soul” or “Self”.^[91] *Atman* is the spiritual essence in all creatures, their real innermost essential being.^{[92][93]} It is eternal, it is the essence, it is ageless. *Atman* is that which one is at the deepest level of one’s existence.

Atman is the predominantly discussed topic in the Upanishads, but they express two distinct, somewhat divergent themes. Some state that Brahman (Highest Reality, Universal Principle, Being-Consciousness-Bliss) is identical with *Atman*, while others state *Atman* is part of Brahman but not identical.^{[94][95]} This ancient debate flowered into various dual, non-dual theories in Hinduism. The *Brahmasutra* by Badarayana (~ 100 BCE) synthesized and unified these somewhat conflicting theories, stating that *Atman* and Brahman are different in some respects particularly during the state of ignorance, but at the deepest level and in the state of Self-realization, *Atman* and Brahman are identical, non-different.^[94]

The idea put forth by the Upanishadic seers that *Atman* and Brahman are One and the same is one of the greatest contributions made to the thought of the world.^{[96][97][98][99]}

5.3 Aum

The Upanishads also contain the first and most definitive explications of the divine syllable *Aum*, the cosmic vibration that underlies all existence. The mantra *Aum Shānti Shānti Shānti*, translated as “the soundless sound, peace, peace, peace”, is often found in the Upanishads. The path of *bhakti* or “Devotion to God” is foreshadowed in Upanishadic literature, and was later realized by texts such as the *Bhagavad Gīta*.^[100]

5.4 Illusion

Main article: *Maya* (illusion)

Two different types of the non-dual Brahman-*Atman* are presented in the Upanishads, according to Mahadevan.^[101] The one in which the non-dual Brahman-*Atman* is the all inclusive ground of the universe and another in which empirical, changing universe

is a form of *Maya*, often translated as “illusion”.

The Upanishads describe the universe, and the human experience, as an interplay of *Purusha* (the eternal, unchanging principles, consciousness) and *Prakṛti* (the temporary, changing material world, nature).^[102] The former manifests itself as *Ātman* (Soul, Self), and the latter as *Māyā*. The Upanishads refer to the knowledge of *Atman* as “true knowledge” (*Vidya*), and the knowledge of *Maya* as “not true knowledge” (*Avidya*, Nescience, lack of awareness, lack of true knowledge).^[103]

Hendrick Vroom explains, “the term *Maya* [in the Upanishads] has been translated as ‘illusion,’ but then it does not concern normal illusion. Here ‘illusion’ does not mean that the world is not real and simply a figment of the human imagination. *Maya* means that the world is not as it seems; the world that one experiences is misleading as far as its true nature is concerned.”^[104] According to Wendy Doniger, “to say that the universe is an illusion (*māyā*) is not to say that it is unreal; it is to say, instead, that it is not what it seems to be, that it is something constantly being made. *Māyā* not only deceives people about the things they think they know; more basically, it limits their knowledge.”^[105]

In the Upanishads, *Māyā* is the perceived changing reality and it co-exists with Brahman which is the hidden true reality.^{[106][107]} *Maya*, or “illusion”, is an important idea in the Upanishads, because the texts assert that in the human pursuit of blissful and liberating Self-knowledge, it is *Maya* which obscures, confuses and distracts an individual.^{[108][109]}

6 Schools of Vedanta

Main article: *Vedanta*

The Upanishads form one of the three main sources for all schools of Vedanta, together with the *Bhagavad Gīta* and the *Brahmasutras*.^[110] Due to the wide variety of philosophical teachings contained in the Upanishads, various interpretations could be grounded on the Upanishads. The schools of Vedānta seek to answer questions about the relation between *atman* and Brahman, and the relation between Brahman and the world.^[111] The schools of Vedanta are named after the relation they see between *atman* and Brahman:^[112]

- According to *Advaita Vedanta*, there is no difference.^[112]
- According to *Vishishtadvaita* the *jīvātman* is a part of Brahman, and hence is similar, but not identical.
- According to *Dvaita*, all individual souls (*jīvātman*s) and matter as eternal and mutually separate entities.

Other schools of Vedanta include Nimbarka’s *Dvaitadvaita*, Vallabha’s *Suddhadvaita* and Chaitanya’s *Acintya*



Adi Shankara, expounder of Advaita Vedanta and commentator (bhashya) on the Upanishads

Bhedabhedā.^[113] The philosopher Adi Sankara has provided commentaries on 11 mukhya Upanishads.^[114]

6.1 Advaita Vedanta

Advaita literally means non-duality, and it is a monistic system of thought.^[115] It deals with the non-dual nature of Brahman and Atman. Advaita is considered the most influential sub-school of the *Vedanta* school of Hindu philosophy.^[115] Gaudapada was the first person to expound the basic principles of the Advaita philosophy in a commentary on the conflicting statements of the Upanishads.^[116] Gaudapada's Advaita ideas were further developed by Shankara.^{[117][118]} King states that Gaudapada's main work, *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā*, is infused with philosophical terminology of Buddhism, and uses Buddhist arguments and analogies.^[119] King also suggests that there are clear differences between Shankara's writings and the *Brahmasūtra*,^{[117][118]} and many ideas of Shankara are at odds with those in the Upanishads.^[120] Radhakrishnan, on the other hand, suggests that Shankara's views of Advaita were straightforward developments of the Upanishads and the *Brahmasūtra*,^[121] and many ideas of Shankara derive from the Upanishads.^[122]

Shankara in his discussions of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy referred to the early Upanishads to explain the key difference between Hinduism and Buddhism, stating that Hinduism asserts "Atman (Soul, Self) ex-

ists", while Buddhism asserts that there is "no Soul, no Self".^{[123][124][125]}

The Upanishads contain four sentences, the *Mahāvākyas* (Great Sayings), which were used by Shankara to establish the identity of Atman and Brahman as scriptural truth:

- "Prajñānam brahma" - "Consciousness is Brahman" (Aitareya Upanishad)^[126]
- "Aham brahmāsmi" - "I am Brahman" (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad)^[127]
- "Tat tvam asi" - "That Thou art" (Chandogya Upanishad)^[128]
- "Ayamātmā brahma" - "This Atman is Brahman" (Mandukya Upanishad)^[129]

Although there are a wide variety of philosophical positions propounded in the Upanishads, commentators since Adi Shankara have usually followed him in seeing idealist monism as the dominant force.^{[130][note 8]}

6.2 Dvaita

The Dvaita school was founded by Madhvacharya.^[131] Dvaita is regarded as the best philosophic exposition of theism.^[132] Madhva, much like Adi Shankara claims for Advaita, states that his theistic Dvaita Vedanta is grounded in the Upanishads.^[133]

6.3 Vishishtadvaita

The third school of Vedanta is the Vishishtadvaita, which was founded by Ramanuja. Ramanuja strenuously refuted Shankara's works.^[134] Visishtadvaita is a synthetic philosophy bridging the monistic Advaita and theistic Dvaita systems of Vedanta.^[132] Ramanuja, just as Madhva claims for Dvaita sub-school, states that Vishishtadvaita is grounded in the Upanishads.^[133]

7 Similarities with Platonic thought

See also: Proto-Indo-European religion, Satya, Ṛta, Asha and Form of the Good

Several scholars have recognised parallels between the philosophy of Pythagoras and Plato and that of the Upanishads, including their ideas on sources of knowledge, concept of justice and path to salvation, and Plato's allegory of the cave. Platonic psychology with its divisions of reason, spirit and appetite, also bears resemblance to the three *gunas* in the Indian philosophy of Samkhya.^{[135][136][note 9]}

Based on these common features some scholars, most notably E.J. Urwick and M.L. West, have argued that the Ancient Greek philosophy was influenced by, and borrowed some core concepts from, the Upanishads. Various mechanisms for such a transmission of knowledge have been conjectured including Pythagoras traveling as far as India; Indian philosophers visiting Athens and meeting Socrates; Plato encountering the ideas when in exile in Syracuse; or, intermediated through Persia.^{[135][138]}

However other scholars, such as Arthur Berriedale Keith, J. Burnet and A.R. Wadia, believe that the two systems developed independently. They note that there is no historical evidence of the philosophers of the two schools meeting, and point out significant differences in the stage of development, orientation and goals of the two philosophical systems. Wadia writes that Plato's metaphysics were rooted in *this* life and his primary aim was to develop an ideal state.^[136] In contrast, Upanishadic focus was the individual, the self (atman, soul), self-knowledge, and the means of an individual's moksha (freedom, liberation in this life or after-life).^{[139][6][140]}

8 Translations

The Upanishads have been translated into various languages including Persian, Italian, Urdu, French, Latin, German, English, Dutch, Polish, Japanese, Spanish and Russian.^[141] The Moghul Emperor Akbar's reign (1556–1586) saw the first translations of the Upanishads into Persian,^{[142][143]} and his great-grandson, Dara Shikoh, produced a collection called *Sirr-e-Akbar* (The Greatest Mysteries) in 1657, with the help of Sanskrit Pandits of Varanasi. Its introduction stated that the Upanishads constitute the Qur'an's "*Kitab al-maknun*" or *hidden book*.^[144] But Akbar's and Shikoh's translations remained unnoticed in the Western world until 1775.^[142]

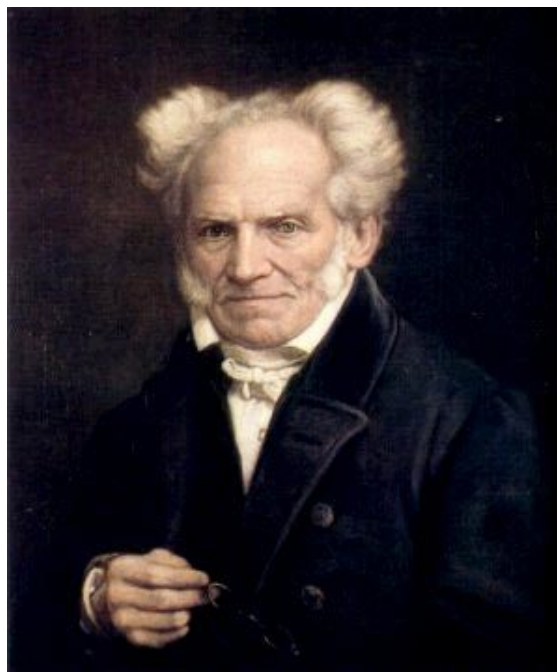
Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron, a French Orientalist who had lived in India between 1755 and 1761, received a manuscript of the Upanishads in 1775 from M. Gentil, and translated it into French and Latin, publishing the Latin translation in two volumes in 1802–1804 as *Oupneck'hat*.^[145] The French translation was never published.^[146]

The first English translation of the Aitareya Upanishad was made by Colebrooke,^[147] in 1805 and the first English translation of the Kena Upanishad was made by Rammohun Roy in 1816.^{[148][149][150]} Colebrooke was aware of 170 Upanishads. Sadhale's catalog from 1985, the *Upaniṣad-vākya-mahā-kośa* lists 223 Upanishads.^[151]

The first German translation appeared in 1832 and Roer's English version appeared in 1853. However, Max Mueller's 1879 and 1884 editions were the first systematic English treatment to include the 12 Principal Upanishads.^[141] After this, the Upanishads were rapidly

translated into Dutch, Polish, Japanese and Russian.^[152]

9 Reception in the West



German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, impressed by the Upanishads, called the texts "the production of the highest human wisdom".

The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer read the Latin translation and praised the Upanishads in his main work, *The World as Will and Representation* (1819), as well as in his *Parerga and Paralipomena* (1851).^[153] He found his own philosophy was in accord with the Upanishads, which taught that the individual is a manifestation of the one basis of reality. For Schopenhauer, that fundamentally real underlying unity is what we know in ourselves as "will". Schopenhauer used to keep a copy of the Latin *Oupnekheth* by his side and commented,

It has been the solace of my life, it will be
the solace of my death.^[154]

Another German philosopher, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, praised the mystical and spiritual aspects of the Upanishads.^[155] Schelling and other philosophers associated with German idealism were dissatisfied with Christianity as propagated by churches. They were fascinated with the Vedas and the Upanishads.^[155] In the United States, the group known as the Transcendentalists were influenced by the German idealists. These Americans, such as Emerson and Thoreau, were not satisfied with traditional Christian mythology and therefore embraced Schelling's interpretation of Kant's Transcendental idealism, as well as his celebration of the

romantic, exotic, mystical aspect of the Upanishads. As a result of the influence of these writers, the Upanishads gained renown in Western countries.^[156]

One of the great English-language poets of the 20th century, T. S. Eliot, inspired by his reading of the Upanishads, based the final portion of his famous poem *The Waste Land* (1922) upon one of its verses.^[157] Erwin Schrödinger, the great quantum physicist said,

The multiplicity is only apparent. This is the doctrine of the Upanishads. And not of the Upanishads only. The mystical experience of the union with God regularly leads to this view, unless strong prejudices stand in the West.^[158]

Eknath Easwaran, in translating the Upanishads, articulates how they

...form snapshots of towering peaks of consciousness taken at various times by different observers and dispatched with just the barest kind of explanation.^[159]

Juan Mascaró states that the Upanishads represents for the Hindu approximately what the *New Testament* represents for the Christian, and that the message of the Upanishads can be summarized in the words, “the kingdom of God is within you”.^[160]

Paul Deussen in his review of the Upanishads, states that the texts emphasize Brahman-Atman as something that can be experienced, but not defined.^[161] This view of the soul and self are similar, states Deussen, to those found in the dialogues of Plato and elsewhere. The Upanishads insisted on oneness of soul, excluded all plurality, and therefore, all proximity in space, all succession in time, all interdependence as cause and effect, and all opposition as subject and object.^[161] Max Muller, in his review of the Upanishads, summarizes the lack of systematic philosophy and the central theme in the Upanishads as follows,

There is not what could be called a philosophical system in these Upanishads. They are, in the true sense of the word, guesses at truth, frequently contradicting each other, yet all tending in one direction. The key-note of the old Upanishads is “know thyself,” but with a much deeper meaning than that of the *γνώθι σεαυτόν* of the Delphic Oracle. The “know thyself” of the Upanishads means, know thy true self, that which underlines thine Ego, and find it and know it in the highest, the eternal Self, the One without a second, which underlies the whole world.

— Max Muller^[6]

10 See also

- 100 Most Influential Books Ever Written
- Bhagavad Gita
- Hinduism

11 Notes

- [1] These include rebirth, karma, moksha, ascetic techniques and renunciation.^[1]
- [2] The Upanishadic, Buddhist and Jain renunciation traditions form parallel traditions, which share some common concepts and interests. While Kuru-Panchala, at the central Ganges Plain, formed the center of the early Upanishadic tradition, Kosala-Magadha at the central Ganges Plain formed the center of the other shramanic traditions^[2]
- [3] *Advaita Vedanta*, summarized by Shankara (788–820), advances a non-dualistic (*a-dvaita*) interpretation of the Upanishads.”^[18]
- [4] “These Upanishadic ideas are developed into Advaita monism. Brahman’s unity comes to be taken to mean that appearances of individualities.”^[19]
- [5] “The doctrine of advaita (non dualism) has its origin in the Upanishads.”^[20]
- [6] These are believed to pre-date Gautam Buddha (c. 500 BCE)^[52]
- [7] Oliville: “In this Introduction I have avoided speaking of ‘the philosophy of the upanishads’, a common feature of most introductions to their translations. These documents were composed over several centuries and in various regions, and it is futile to try to discover a single doctrine or philosophy in them.”^[68]
- [8] According to Collins, the breakdown of the Vedic cults is more obscured by retrospective ideology than any other period in Indian history. It is commonly assumed that the dominant philosophy now became an idealist monism, the identification of atman (self) and Brahman (Spirit), and that this mysticism was believed to provide a way to transcend rebirths on the wheel of karma. This is far from an accurate picture of what we read in the Upanishads. It has become traditional to view the Upanishads through the lens of Shankara’s Advaita interpretation. This imposes the philosophical revolution of about 700 C.E. upon a very different situation 1,000 to 1,500 years earlier. Shankara picked out monist and idealist themes from a much wider philosophical lineup.^[120]
- [9] For instances of Platonic pluralism in the early Upanishads see Randall.^[137]

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15 External links

- Complete set of 108 Upanishads and other documents
- Complete set of 108 Upanishads with Sanskrit Commentaries of Upanishad Brahma Yogin
- Upanishads at Sanskrit documents site
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