

Eastern Upaniṣadic Wisdom and Western Modern Science

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Abstract - *Vedas encompass a vast range of knowledge. The Upaniṣads, regarded as the fourth part of the Vedas, are known as the "Jñāna Kāṇḍa" because they contain profound and esoteric wisdom. In the Upaniṣads, the sages have expounded knowledge on numerous subjects such as the creation of the universe, human existence, the actions performed by individuals, and the conduct expected in their interactions with others in society. By following this wisdom, human beings can contribute to the establishment of a healthy and harmonious society. Many scientists in the modern era have acknowledged that the knowledge presented in the Upaniṣads is not merely theoretical but also practical. Several contemporary scientists have accepted that, based on their experiences, the wisdom of the Upaniṣads has served as an inspiration behind many scientific principles. This research paper will examine the parallels between Upaniṣadic knowledge and modern science*

Key Words: *Jñāna Kāṇḍa, Upaniṣads, Tapasyā, Modern Science, Ātman, Sanātans*

*Vedāntavijñāna suniścitatāthāḥ
sanyāsayogāt yatayah śuddhasatvā,
Te brahma lokeśu parāntakāle
paramṛtā paramucyanti sarve.¹*

The Indian *Rṣi* tradition represents the foundation of India's ancient knowledge culture and spiritual heritage. The Rishis were not merely religious figures but enlightened philosophers, scientists, and poets too; who dedicated their lives to the pursuit of truth and wisdom. Through deep meditation (*Tapasyā*), disciplined living, and contemplation, they realized the eternal truths of existence and expressed them in the *Vedas*, the earliest known scriptures of humanity.

Their curiosity to understand the mysteries of nature, the cosmos, and the human spirit gave rise to a vast body of knowledge covering philosophy, mathematics, medicine, astronomy, linguistics, and

ethics. The *Rṣis* believed that true knowledge (*Vidyā*) is divine in origin and could be attained only through purity of thought, sincerity, and self-realization. They passed on this wisdom orally through the *Guru-Śiṣya Paramparā* ensuring its preservation for generations. Thus, the Indian knowledge tradition stands as a symbol of intellectual curiosity, spiritual depth, and the harmonious blend of science and spirituality that defines the essence of Indian civilization.

Upaniṣadic Wisdom and Modern Science

Upaniṣadic wisdom and modern science share a deep and fascinating relationship, rooted in their common quest to understand the ultimate reality of the universe. Though *Upaniṣads*, composed thousands of years ago, yet they are philosophical texts that explore the nature of existence, consciousness, and the cosmos. They proclaim that the entire universe is an expression of one underlying reality uttered as *Brahman*, (the infinite consciousness) and that the essence of the individual soul, *Ātman*, is identical with that universal truth. This profound insight, "*Tat Tvam Asi*²" (That Thou Art), mirrors the modern scientific understanding that all matter and energy in the universe are interconnected and originate from a single source. *Taittirīyopaniṣad* says this truth as

*Yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante yen jātāni jīvanti
yat prayanty abhisamviśanti tad brahma tadvijijñāsasva.³*

Many renowned scientists, including Albert Einstein, Erwin Schrödinger, Niels Bohr, John A. Wheeler, and Paul Dirac, J. Robert Oppenheimer, Werner Heisenberg expressed deep admiration for the philosophical depth of the Upaniṣads. They were aware that India has a prosperous knowledge tradition which is thousands years old and Upaniṣads consist a mystic knowledge which can solve the various scientific problems of modern era. On the basis of their scientific

¹ *Mundakopaniṣad* 3/2/6

² *Chandogyopaniṣad* 6/8/7

³ *Tattirīyopaniṣad* - 3/1/1

experiments, they provided these universal statements which are close to the Upaniṣadic wisdom.

- Naturally, all are connected to all.
- Nothing is individual in this universe.
- There is a process from man to universe and universe to man.
- If anything is individual then $e=mc^2$ fails.
- There is consciousness without this, there is no process.
- There is a fundamental base of all things.

This is deep touted fact in the Vedic studies that one supreme reality is the main cause of the origin of this world. In this phenomenal world we can see the objects and creatures; and we feel that objects can't breathe like humans and humans can't be stable like objects, while Upaniṣadic seers state that at deeper level both can cat as vice a versa. This belief brings the fact before us that one we all are the expression of one entity which is conscious.

*Eko h devo sarvabhuteṣu gūdhah, sarva vyāpi sarva bhūtāntatrātmā.*⁴

Erwin Schrödinger, one of the founders of quantum mechanics, openly stated that his ideas about unity of consciousness were inspired by the Vedāntic concept of non-duality (Advaita).

Albert Einstein also found resonance between the cosmic order described in Vedic thought and his own theory of relativity, which unites space, time, and matter in a single continuum. Einstein says that our Indian scholars also say that due to this relativity we are all 'Sanātans' as members of one universal family. All the members of this family are related to each-other. On the basis of this fact, the universal process is active. In twentieth century, scientists are inclined to accept that science is only an imperfect knowledge because we can only approximately measure the falling of the leaf from tree and speed of a train. These are not absolute, because all the objects are internally connected and mechanical tools are limited to grasp reality. Our sense-organs are

unable to see that. After knowing this fact of modern science, physicists pronounced this period as '*The age of enlightenment*'. Now, they felt that a unique power converts into various aspects and we can say its nature in '*tripuṭī prakriyā*' as which is knowable, who knows, by which knows, all this is through '*Brahman*'⁵ or '*īśanī śakti*'.

Indian epistemology is distinct in the world as it clearly divided the four components of the knowledge process. The first is knower (*pramātā*), second is knowable object (*prameya*), third is medium of knowledge (*pramāṇa*), and fourth is knowledge itself (*pramā*). This is special feature of Indian epistemology that at the stage of *pramā*, one has to get merged with the knowledge process. Then he can grasp the knowledge of any process.

*Brahmavavit brahmaiva bhavati.*⁶

In the description of the knowledge process, nuclear physicist John A. Wheeler used the word as 'participator' in spite of 'observer' for that real power. Because he saw that the power does not have any external control, and is also a part in that process. So he says:

"To describe that what has happened, one has to cross out that old world 'observer' and put in its place the new word 'participator' in some strange sense the universe is a participatory universe."⁷

Upaniṣadic seers say that the knowledge depicted in the *Upaniṣads* is mystic and beyond the reach of a common man. Thus this is uttered as mystic knowledge. Many verses of *Upaniṣads* state that a man can't know the reality of this empirical world through sense organs. These organs can only help him to deal with worldly process but at a deeper level many facts appear as a puzzle. Upaniṣad says that though the creatures are expression of that reality but they can't know that reality at macro level.

Yah sarveṣu bhuteṣu tiṣṭhan sarvebhyo bhūtebhyo antarā.

*Yam sarvāni bhūtāni na viduh yasya sarvāni bhūtāni śarīram.*⁸

⁵ In Advaita Vedānta, the supreme cause of the universe is 'Brahman'. '*Ātmānamkhilādhāramāśraye abhīṣṭasiddhaye*'.
-Vedāntāra-1

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⁷ 'The Tao of Physics' by Fritjof Capra, p. 153

⁸ Brihadāraṇyakopaniṣad 3/7/3

In 1957, a nuclear physicist Werner Heisenberg experienced in his scientific experiments that the nature is fully conscious. He saw a wonderful motion in atom and felt that man can't describe its actual nature and unable to measure its speed. If a man tries to evaluate an atom through measurement, it changes suddenly and he becomes fail to know that exactly. Heisenberg was so wondered about this reality of nature. He expressed a memory accompanied by Niles Bohr about Nature:

"I remember that discussions with Bohr which went through many hours till very late at night and almost in despair; and when at the end of the discussion I went alone for a walk in the neighboring-park, I repeated to myself again and again the question; can Nature be so absurd as it seems to be us in this atomic world."⁹

A fact that Upaniṣadic seers state that this universe is created by the supreme reality which called as *Brahman*. That reality is conscious and that is present in each object, species, sun, moon, stars, flora and fauna, galaxies in various forms. In some creature even a man can't see that power through sense organs, but its presence can't be denied. This thought is described in *praśnopaniṣad* where Ṛṣi *Paippalāda* tells his pupil *Bhārgava* as

Prājapatiḥ prajām sriṣtvā tasminprāṇam niṣasada.

*Yathā dhūmaṇi prāṇa evāgni vāyu sūryaṇi diśā candrama jalam.*¹⁰

In 1886 A.D. a famous biologist 'Earnest Hackle' has developed a term named 'Ecology' on basis of the relativity. According to this theory all the plants, animals, vegetations which grow upon earth are conscious and there is an internal relation between them with fact that man is also a component in this chain¹¹ which completes the chain. Even land is not devoid of the consciousness/living power as the flora and fauna transpires from the land. The growth of various living organism would have been impossible from a dead surface. So land also consists of that unique power. Later on, this term divided into two parts as 'shallow ecology', in which normally we can see all the parts of the nature and other is 'deep ecology' in this we can't see directly the relation between the objects of nature but

we can feel that by a natural flow between them. So this is said,

"Cyclic process is well inter-connected."¹²

Actually, Vedas and Upaniṣads also contain the seeds of scientific thinking, encouraging observation, experimentation, and logical reasoning. Concepts such as the cyclic nature of creation and destruction, the atomic structure of matter (*Anu*), and the interdependence of energy and matter appear in various ancient texts. The Rishis approached knowledge not as dogma, but as a dynamic process of discovery, much like the scientific method today.

Thus, the meeting point of Upaniṣadic philosophy and modern science lies in their shared recognition of unity amidst diversity, order within apparent chaos, and the pursuit of truth beyond surface appearances. The timeless insights of the Indian sages continue to inspire scientists and thinkers across the world, reminding humanity that knowledge and spirituality are not separate paths, but two dimensions of the same quest. The quest to know the reality of existence.

The human beings can experience this power within him. But this only comes by equality and same attitude towards all the things in world and not through any discriminating view. Those people are real learned who leave their ego and know themselves; this knowledge is labeled by physicists as 'Tao'. Fritjof Capra says: He, who pursues knowledge, will increase every day. He, who pursues 'Tao', will decrease every day.¹³

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⁹ "Hidden Connections" by Fritjof Capra

¹⁰ *Praśnopaniṣad* 2/3

¹¹ "Web of life" by Fritjof Capra.

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