

Upaniṣads-10

Upaniṣads and the later philosophical schools

Prof. K.S. Arjunwadkar

Of the later major Indian philosophical schools, Sāṃkhya and Yoga, besides Vedānta, can undoubtedly claim to have their roots in the Upaniṣads. Vedānta is of course in the direct line with the Upaniṣadic thought, -- in fact, the term Vedānta stands for the Upaniṣadic literature (*veda+ anta*)¹. Next in order is Yoga, mentioned in Kaṭha. VI.10-11, where it is succinctly defined and is referred to as if an extensive corpus of it existed at the time². We have to wait till the emergence of the comparatively later Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad for a clear reference to the Sāṃkhya school combined with Yoga³. There is much more than that: it makes a specific reference to Kapila (V.2), traditionally regarded as the originator of the system. The typical Sāṃkhya terms, *pradhāna* and *prakṛti*, are found for the first time in this Upaniṣad, although the terms *mahat* and *avyakta* (the latter equated with *prakṛti*) occur as early as in Kaṭha. VI.7. The term *puruṣa* is so common in the Upaniṣads in the sense of the Self that it cannot be considered as an element of the Sāṃkhya school. Vaiśeṣikas have no base in this literature; and Mīmāṃsā (the science of interpretation) and Nyāya (epistemology) are no philosophical systems in the strict sense of the term.

Although, thus, the Sāṃkhya school can make a claim to be as old as the Upaniṣads, the typical theory of evolution of the world from *prakṛti* and the theory of *prakṛti* being the ultimate Reality along with *puruṣa* propounded by the Sāṃkhya school is nowhere to be found in this literature. On the contrary, most of the references to the creation of the world are in favour of its creation from a conscious principle, the *brahman*, which is the sole Reality. In other words, Upaniṣads are in favour of a monistic, and not a dualistic, philosophy. There is also no ground to presume in this literature the later coupling of the Yoga system with Sāṃkhya; Yoga in Upaniṣads is an aid to the realisation of the Ultimate by controlling mental faculties to prepare conditions conducive to deep meditation. It appears that the three systems were not separated at the time of the Upaniṣads, thus justifying Shankara's claim that Sāṃkhya and Yoga in Upaniṣads stand for knowledge and meditation in Vedic tradition, and not for the later distinct systems known by these names⁴.

Of the heterodox systems, there is no question of Buddhist and Jaina schools, as they are decidedly later and are centred round historical personalities. The Cārvāka or Lokāyata system, however, has definite references in Upaniṣadic literature, though it occurs there as just *āsura* or demonic outlook, and not by its later name/s. In the story of Indra and Virocana approaching Prajāpati (Chāndogya VIII.8-12) for acquiring knowledge of the Self, the Upaniṣad makes a clear reference to a school of thought which has hedonistic characteristics. 'People call him demonic,' it says, 'who does not give, does not have faith and does not perform sacrifices. This is the way of thinking of the demons to decorate a dead body with offerings of food (*bhikṣā*), clothes and ornaments.' (Chāndogya. VIII.8.5)⁵.

Beginnings of the later theistic schools are, however, found in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, with a bias for the Śaiva phraseology. Rudra figures as a deity in ṣgveda with three full hymns addressed to him. He assumes greater importance in the Atharva-veda and Yajur-veda, and occurs several times in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad as the sole god in supreme command (III.2)⁶. Some lines in praise of Rudra (III.5-6) are physically taken from a panegyric to this deity occurring in the Yajur-veda⁷.

NOTES

- 1 It is actually used in Muṇḍaka. III.2.6: *vedānta-vijñāna-suniścītārthāḥ*... From a historical point of view, the term Vedānta may mean the end or concluding part of the Vedic literature. The word *anta* is used in two more meanings: division/settlement (Bṛhad. II.4.1), verdict (Bhagavad-gītā [BG] II.16) Accordingly, some would like to take the term *anta* to mean verdict, conclusion, and regard the Vedānta philosophy as the final message of the Vedas.
- 2 Cf. *tām yogam iti manyante sthirām indriya-dhāraṇām* / (Kaṭha. VI.11) 'That is considered to be Yoga which is sustained control of the organs.' Again, *mṛtyu-proktām naciketo 'tha labdhvā vidyām etām yoga-vidhiṃ ca kṛtsnam* (Kaṭha. VI.18).
- 3 Cf. *tat kāraṇam sāmkhya-yogādhigamyam jñātvā devaṃ mucyate sarva-pāśaiḥ* / (Śvetāśvatara. VI.13) Having realised that cause, the resplendent one, known through Sāmkhya and Yoga, one gets release from all bonds.
- 4 Cf. Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya II.1.3. An attempt to reconcile technical terms from Sāmkhya and Vedānta schools of philosophy is found even in the Bhagavad-gītā from an advaitic-theistic point of view. It is to be noted that BG uses the Sāmkhya term *prakṛti* but not *pradhāna*. In a way, the BG may be regarded as a revised version of the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, except that the BG displays a bias for Vaiṣṇavite, in place of the Upaniṣad's bias for the Śaivite, phraseology.
- 5 Shankara adds unguents, flowers under food (*bhikṣā*), and explains ornaments as banners etc. Such practices prevail in India even today among some sects, and dead bodies are taken to the cemetery in a procession in carriers made of precious metals -- of course by some who can afford.
- 6 Rudra occurs in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad also under the names Hara (II.10), Giriśanta (III.5, 6), Śiva (III.11), Īśāna (III.12) and Maheśvara (IV.10).
- 7 Taittirīya-saṃhitā, IV. It is also known as Rudrādhyāya or Śata-rudrīya, and forms part even today of rituals connected with the deity. Apart from its religious importance, it contains significant data (such as names of grains, metals, numerals, trades and professions etc. known and in vogue at that time) for the study of human culture.