

Review Article

Construction of ‘Self’: An *Upanishadic* Interpretation

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Abstract

As the cornerstones of later Indian philosophical thinking, the *Upanishads* are collections of Indian philosophical writings written in late Vedic *Sanskrit*. In contrast to earlier writings of the *Vedas* that mostly concentrate on *mantras* (hymns), blessings, sacraments, sacrifices and rites, this section represents the most recent part of *Hinduism's* ancient texts. The fields of meditation, consciousness, philosophy, and ontological examinations are all explored in these complex *Upanishads*. As they explain a wide range of subjects like rituals, incarnations, and esoteric knowledge, they have a central place in the history of Indian faiths and culture. Significantly, the *Upanishads* depart from the older *Vedic* traditions' emphasis on rituals, opening the door for a variety of interpretations in later commentarial traditions. In order to comprehend human existence and personality development, the *Taittiriya Upanishad* describes the *Pancha Kosha*, or five sheaths of the self. By nurturing and understanding the idea of *Koshas* (sheath), individuals can accomplish a more holistic and balanced personality development, moving towards a state of self-realization and higher-level consciousness. This article focuses on the personality development of human in a very subtle way through the model of five sheaths as described in various *Upanishads*.

Keywords

Upanishad, *Vedas*, Knowledge, Mind, Philosophy

1. Introduction

Written in Sanskrit language between 700 and 300 BCE, the *Upanishads* are ancient Indian scriptures that were initially passed down orally. These are works of philosophy and spirituality that were composed in the *Vedas*, a broader body of writings that are essential to Indian philosophy. The *Upanishads* signal a shift towards a more logical analysis of basic issues pertaining to the nature of reality, the self, the meaning of life, death, ethics, and interpersonal relationships. They are therefore considered to be the foundational works of later Indian intellectual systems and schools. There are thirteen major *Upanishads* that exhibit stylistic distinction and are credited to numerous writers. *Upanishads* were written in a ceremonial context, but also explore philosophy and spirit-

uality [9].

Atman (the individual soul/self), *Brahman* (the ultimate reality), the doctrine of *karma*, *yoga*, notion of *samsara* or awaking state of mind (the recurring cycle of life and death), idea of *moksha* (spiritual salvation or liberation), *purusha* (the individual being), and the *prakriti* (the phenomenal creation) are among the central philosophical thoughts introduced in the various *Upanishads* that are still significant in Indian thought [3].

The four *Vedas* (ancient Indian scriptures) namely—The *Rig*, *Sama*, *Yajur*, and *Atharva*—have connected *Upanishads* that expound on their fundamental concepts of existence (*sat*), consciousness (*chit*), and liberation / bliss (*anandam*). It is

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worth to mention that the *Atharva Veda* integrates numerous viewpoints covering the way of life, whereas the oldest is the *Rig Veda* based on high moral integrity, upon which both the *Sama* and *Yajur Vedas* are based [6].

The following are the thirteen major *Upanishads*: *Taittiriya Upanishad*, *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, *Kausitaki Upanishad*, *Aitareya Upanishad*, *Isha Upanishad*, *Kena Upanishad*, *Chandogya Upanishad*, *Katha Upanishad*, *Prashna Upanishad*, *Mundaka Upanishad*, *Mandukya Upanishad*, *Maitry Upanishad*, *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* [11].

2. Key Ideas in the *Upanishads*

The highest form of *Vedic* literature is represented by the intellectual and spiritual works known as the *Upanishads*. Often referred to as "*Vedanta*" (literally means "end of the *Veda*"), they represent the end of the Vedic era both ideologically and historically, and because of their intricate concepts, they are presented last in the course of study. The proclamation of the *Upanishads*, *moksha* (liberation), or perfect serenity of mind, attainment via self-realization, is indeed encapsulated in various *Upanishads*. They examine the idea that the soul (*Atman*) comes from *Brahman*, the unfathomable divine essence and origin of all existence [8]. The goal of life is to unite one's *Atman* with this global *Brahman*, which is within every being but beyond intellectual comprehension. For the individual soul to reconnect with the divine after death, the objective is to pursue self-actualization, which is the complete knowledge of one's true nature by the cosmic order [13]. Suffering occurs in this life or the next when *karma* (action) is not appropriately resolved. The results of one's actions are predictable, but fate is not strict. Rebirth provides further chances to carry out one's responsibilities that cannot be completed in a lifetime. The fundamental *Hindu* doctrine of a global soul connected to God, the journey to enlightenment via self-realization, the ideas of *karma* and reincarnation, and the ultimate goal of *moksha*—being released from the doctrine of rebirth—is essentially defined by various *Upanishads* [7].

3. The Significance of the *Upanishads*

Since they serve as the foundation for many of India's intellectual traditions, the *Upanishads* are extremely significant in Indian thought. The *Upanishads* have a tight relationship with *Vedanta* philosophy, and they also provide support for other philosophies like as *Sankhya*, *Vaisheshika*, *Nyaya*, and *Yoga*. The various *Upanishads* connect the four *Vedas* with these profound philosophical and spiritual scriptures, completing the scope of the Vedic domain of knowledge. They read the *Vedas* and talk about them a lot. One example is the *Vedic Gayatri* hymn. There are numerous significant sayings known as Mahavakyas in every *Veda* [10]. Four of these great sayings, one from each *Veda*, are important equally in the

Upanishads because they pinpoint the unity or oneness of the individual being (*Jiva*) and the collective consciousness (*Brahman*). Studying the *Upanishads* is essential to comprehending Indian history and culture. These writings have a significant influence on Indian philosophy and religion, influencing local thought processes and spiritual ties.

4. *Taittiriya Upanishad* Revisited: A Journey of the Development of 'Self'

To comprehend human existence and personality development, the *Taittiriya Upanishad* describes the *PanchaKosha* (five sheaths) layers of the self (Goswami, 2018). *Annamaya* (gross or physical), *Pranamaya* (vital energy), *Manomaya* (mental), *Vigyanamaya* (intellectual), and *Anandamaya* (bliss) are these sheaths, arranged from outer to inner. Self-realization and comprehensive well-being can result from recognising and harmonizing these *Koshas* [1].

Brahman is the Infinite Knowledge, the Truth, and the one who has that knowledge rejoices in all that *Brahman* (supreme) does. Even though *Vayu* arises from *Akasha*, this *Brahman* is found within one's Self, the origin of *Akaasha*. *Agni* (fire) is the primary source of water in the chain of creation of existence, which then gives rise to the universe. Herbs then help produce food and, ultimately, humans. Therefore, "*Anna*", the food is essentially the source of humans and other creatures in the Lord's Creation: *Annaad reto rupena parinataat purushah*: Food and the resulting semen are the main ingredients of *purusha* [13]. In addition to a stabilising "puccha" or tail that represents the earth, that being has a head balanced by a southern or right side and a northern or left side. Here are two analogies, one about *Atma* and the other about the tail. The primary is that the *Antaratma* (inner-soul) is in a "guhaa," or secret location, according to the very idea of Inner Consciousness. Now, the Self, which is also known as the ego or *Jeevatma*, has the Five sheaths or *Pancha Koshas*, *Annamaya* (based on food), *Pranamaya* (based on life), *Manomaya* (based on perception or instinct), *Vigyanamaya* (based on knowledge or intelligence), and finally *Anandamaya* (based on sheer bliss, the climactic state of Supreme consciousness) [3]. The nexus of *Pancha Pranas*, or the vital forces altogether poured as though into a crucible, is symbolised by the second analogy concerning the tail, which is based on a reference to a cow's tail. After explaining the concept of *Antaratma* (inner self), or the Individual Self, which includes, among other things, the unity factors of Earth, water, Space, Fire, and Air, as well as the relativity of *Pancha Koshas* and *Pancha Pranas* on the one hand, and that of *Paramatma* (Supreme) on the other, a parallel illustration would be ten men crossing a river in a vessel [2]. As one counts the others, they forget to count themselves, so only nine are counted; in fact, the tenth is the Self, and the tenth is also the *Paramatma* ! *Satyam jnaanam anantam Brahman* is the same as it is. Or the Infinity, the Truth, and the Subtle Knowledge. *Pancha tanmatra*, namely

hearing, Smell, vision, language, thinking or mindset-and the faculty of understanding are different because of the apparent dualism brought about by ignorance. However, everything falls into place when the cover of ignorance is lifted, and as the absolute Self (supreme reality) is neither dual nor numerous, one begins to recognise the qualities or perceptibility to think, see, touch, hear, taste, and react in the same unmistakable and characteristic uniformity. In that blueprint, the Self—whether it be hearing, vision, sensation, or thought—is supreme. Furthermore, *Brahman* is everywhere [1]. He is in front, behind, above, and every direction. Anyone who examines him from the inside would see his reflection. He cannot think, move, see, speak, touch, and hear. Thus, the idea of duality is out of place, while the idea of unity is timeless.

5. Annamaya Kosha: Food Sheath

Life starts in the womb of the mother, yet to be manifested as a full-fledged personality. The tendency of eating food by a new born baby is due to satisfy the hunger to foster the gross body. This is the gross or physical body. We are aware that the mother's womb is where the physical body begins. In the womb, it develops from a single cell to a complex physical body. Recent studies shows that the *Taittiriya Upanishad* provides a thorough examination of the fetus's development inside the womb. It provides a detailed schedule of when the various body parts appear [8]. It's very incredible. If the medical community could confirm the schedule stated in this *Upanishad*, that would be great.

Food is the foundation upon which all living things on Earth are built, maintained, and ultimately amalgamated. Food is specifically referred to as *Praana*, or the Life Force, for everyone, since it is born before, preceded by, worshipped constantly, and consumed by all Beings [12]. The latter is a branch of Vayu, the Air of the *Pancha Bhutas*, or the Five Elements of "*Prithivi* (earth)-*aapas* (water)-*tejas* (fire)-*vaayu* (air)-*akashas* (space)," since the Inner Self is composed of this Life Energy, which is the substance of food. Of this Vaayu (air), a Being's head is *Praana* (vital energy), its right side is *Iyana*, and its left side is *Apaana*; the Self of a Being is Akasha, or the Space, and the stabilising tail is Earth. Life continues to exist as a subtler form of food all-pervading throughout the body [10].

5.1. Pranamaya Kosha: Vital Sheath

The former sheath becomes even more subtle helping the body in existence. The *Pranamaya Kosha*, which links the soul to the *Annamaya Kosha*, is composed of vital energy. The *Annamaya Kosha*'s five senses—eyes, ears, tongue, nose, and skin—are linked to the *Manomaya Kosha*. Additionally, the *Annamaya Kosha* and the three *Koshas* are related to the organs of action, such as the hands, legs, and voice. The ease with which these connections are established is quite remarkable. Therefore, connecting the three *Koshas* from the

pixel of ignorance with the *Annamaya Kosha* is the primary function of the *Pranamaya Kosha* [13]. Finding out from the *Upanishad* that the seed only enters the body during the seventh month is fascinating. The foetus in the womb is merely a bit of flesh, similar to any other limb of the body, before that. Hence, the foetus has a soul but does not have personality until the tenth month of the life cycle [11]. It is a bodily portion inside the womb before that. The process by which the selection is made is intriguing and unknown. Which body will be inhabited by which soul? There is no doubt that a logical process governed by natural principles must exist.

A human person is made up of two "divides": the physical self and the more important internal self. Both the corporeal self and the inner awareness, or the consciousness of all entities, including humans and *Devas*, share *Praana*. Food-based *Prana* maintains the vital body in the context of all humans, animals, and other species, as well as the embodied Self. The mind sustains the inner consciousness [12]. The *Vedas* make up the latter, or mental body, in contrast to the vital body; the *Atharva mantras*, as indicated by *Angirasa Maharshi*, are of the stabilizing tail, symbolized by Earth; the *Yajur mantras* are of the head; the *Rig mantras* are of the right side; the *Saama mantras* are of the left; and the *Brahmana* portion is of the body trunk [11]. Thus, the comparison between the inner and physical selves is ideal: While the inner consciousness in the celestial sense is based on the vital force arising from the *Vedas* and their unity of the mental body, as the *Vedic* texts affirm that "all the *Vedas* get united in the Self in the mind" according to the "*Adesha*" or "Commands" Portions of each *Veda* i.e. Once more, the *Brahmana* part of "*Atharvaangirasa*" alludes to "*puccham pratishtha*," or the stabilizing tail; the pertinent *mantras* relate to the ceremonies carried out that call for stability, peace, and prosperity for everyone in their mental environment [10].

5.2. Manomaya Kosha: Mental Sheath

Another most profound and powerful state of existence is the realm of the mind. When the *Pranamaya Kosha* gets developed within it gets transformed into the mind. The emotional state of life can be felt, and one starts growing with emotional intelligence. The personality traits of human beings mostly get developed at this point in life. The *Manomaya Kosha*, or mental sheath, has the following layers. It includes not just the mind but also the five organs of knowledge and the subconscious. The eyes, nose, ears, tongue, and skin are the actual sense organs, or *jnana indriyas*. Information enters the mind through the sensory organs. Desires also emerge through these sense organs [9].

The subconscious mind, memories, imagination, sentiments, and thoughts are all part of the *Manomaya Kosha*. Negative emotions, bad decisions regarding wellbeing, and destructive choices might result from an uncontrolled mind. Following the *yamas* and *niyamas*, as well as practicing *karma* yoga or selfless service, helps strengthen it [8].

"Manas" means "mind." This *Kosha*, which includes our memories, imagination, feelings, ideas, and emotions, is the body's mental shell. This *Kosha* is where we process our feelings and experiences and is in charge of our cognitive processes, including memory, perception, and reasoning [7].

5.3. *Vijnanamaya Kosha: Intellectual Sheath*

The fourth sheath, *vijnanamaya Kosha* or intellectual sheath, is even subtler than the mental sheath. Here in this stage, humans begin start developing the cognitive ability and moral faculty to discriminate between right with wrong. It is very often referred to as the wisdom (*gyana*) or knowledge sheath. This sheath is what distinguishes humans from animals. Only man can distinguish between what is real and what is not, even though both may have memories, thoughts, sentiments, and emotions [6].

The ego is part of the *vijnanamaya Kosha* along with the intellect. It possesses an I-am-ness, a sense of self and identity. The path of wisdom, or jnana yoga, can help to strengthen this, *Kosha*. I gain a correct understanding of who I am by studying spiritual writings and traditions, practicing meditation, and asking myself this question [5].

Vijnanamaya, which means wisdom or knowledge, is the veil that distinguishes humans from other creatures. Although we are both capable of feeling emotions and forming close relationships, only humans possess the mental capacity to distinguish between what is real and what is not.

Since the *Vijnanamaya Kosha* encompasses our intellect, intuition, and inner wisdom, it plays a crucial role in our spiritual development [4]. We also feel a sense of oneness with the universe and connect with our innermost selves at this *Kosha*. Knowledge, or *vigjnaanam*, makes it possible to carry out *Yagnas* and other responsibilities assigned to each Varna. According to their knowledge, the *Devas*, including *Indra*, always worship *Mahat Brahman Hiranyagarbha* because *Vigjnaanam* is *Brahma* [2]. Anyone can feel all the bliss after the mountain of ignorance gradually evaporates. It is widely held that the Inner Self is fundamentally the form of bliss, which would have assumed a human form with the head representing joy, the right-side representing satisfaction, the left side representing complete fulfilment, the body trunk representing the source of bliss itself, and the tail serving as stability and balance. The five sheaths—*Annamaya Kosha*, *Praanamaya Kosha*, *Manomaya Kosha*, *Vijnanamaya Kosha*, and ultimately *Anandamaya*—thus comprise the human body. The sheath of happiness is *Anandamaya Kosha* [3]. Also referred to as the soul's level, it is the thinnest and finest veil that envelops the Self (*Atman*). It is indeed the pleasant sheath that allows us to experience love, happiness, and bliss. It is also the source of our spiritual freedom and fulfilment, as well as the place where we recognise how intertwined everything is [1].

5.4. *Anandamaya Kosha: Blissful Sheath*

After realizing Bliss, which is *Brahman*, an enlightened person never fears difficult circumstances. Even in a human being's physical body, mental strength leads to this circumstance; this is especially true when knowledge supports the internal self. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* appropriately pronounces intelligence as the diverse form of Truth as the inner heart (*hridaya*). In this state, morality is represented by the right side of the body, truth by the left, faith by the head, and focus by the body. The stabilising tail is *Mahat*, also known as the First-Born Intellect or the all-pervading depth of absorption known as *Satya Brahman (Prajapati)* [12]. *Prajapati Brahman*, also known as his (*Hridaya*) intellect, is the object of meditation practice; furthermore, the condition of that *Hridaya-Intellect-Brahman* also applies to (*Satya*) Truth [12]. The words "tat" and "that" are repeated because *Hridaya*, Intellect, *Brahman*, and now the Truth all relate to the same thing. *Satya Brahman* is that, Truth. "*Satyameva*" also alludes to the *Sat* or *Tyat* idioms, specifically *Amurta* (subtle) and *Murtha* (gross). Adversaries like "*Arishadvargas*" or *Kaama-Krodha-Lobha-Moha-Mada Matsaras* cannot defeat the gross body, "*Pancha bhutaatmikaa*," or the Five Elements; in actuality, *Satya Brahman* is all-pervading, invincible, and the firstborn. At this stage of life, the personality becomes fully developed and soaked [13].

6. Concluding Remarks

One of the most important aspects of health is psychological well-being, which includes a feeling of bliss for the mind, soul, and sensory organs. According to *Ayur Veda*, the human body, with its seat in the centre, is a container of the true self or pure awareness. Various layers of sheaths, known traditionally in *Taittiriya Upanishad* as *Koshas*, envelop the everlasting inner self and organises the different aspects of the human being through personality development. As these sheaths extend outward, their density increases. This article explains the idea of *Panch Kosha* (five sheaths), our very existence is divided into five sheaths, which extend from *Annamaya Kosha* to *Anandamaya Kosha*, pervading one after another. Salvation is gradually attained by cleansing the five cells with the use of impurities [14]. Thus, these five sheaths (firstly *Annamaya Kosha*, secondly *Pranamaya Kosha*, thirdly *Manomaya Kosha*, fourthly *Vijnanamaya Kosha*, and finally *Anandamaya Kosha*) have knowledge-science and action-effects. The denser sheath known as *Manomaya* (mental) *Kosha* contains our mind. Meditation, *Pranayam*, and *yoga* all aid in balancing the *Koshas*. Like *Manomaya Kosha*, *Vigyanmaya Kosha* is the sheath or layer of discernment and can be attained by consistent *yoga*, *pranayam*, and meditation practice [13]. The subtlest layer of *Anandmaya Kosha* is inexplicable. It is the essence of ultimate self-knowledge. It has a spiritual component too. The personality traits are developed unknowingly from the womb of

the mother to extinction of life. One can experience happiness after these *Koshas* are awakened through the journey of life. We can attain the condition of immortal bliss with the help of meditation. This article is an attempt to bring to light the tremendous intelligence intrinsically written in ancient Indian scriptures. Above article shows how human personality of covered by very subtle subjects and reveals themselves over a period of time in human life.

Abbreviations

BCE Before Current Era

Conflicts of Interest

Authors declare no conflicts of Interest.

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