

Exploration of the Ultimate Reality in the *Katha Upanishad*

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Abstract: This research paper attempts to explore the proclamations of the ultimate reality postulated by the *Katha Upanishad* with the tenets of transcendental philosophy. The *Katha Upanishad*, which is one of the principal Upanishads, crystallizes the concept of the ultimate truth that remains beyond the realm of senses and reasons. Therefore, this article aims to interpret the dimensions of the fundamental truth that the Upanishad exposes in vivid ways. The entire dialogues between Yama, the Lord of Death, and the inquirer of knowledge, Nachiketa, in this Upanishad lead us from this world to make out the point that ultimate reality lies beyond the frontiers of mind and experience. The manifested phenomenal world, which we perceive, is just a play. Thus, to realize the truth as divinity, one should transcend the realm of logic and senses. The concepts of the Western transcendental philosophy propounded mainly by Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Spinoza, and Kant also make the same proclamations about the nature of absolute reality. This article provides the new insights to view the speculations of the *Katha Upanishad* and the Western Philosophy of transcendence about the nature of the genuine reality as they both disseminate the same tunes, showing the unity in diversity.

Keywords: *atman*, *brahman*, Eternal Self, *purusa*, Transcendental, Ultimate Reality

1. Introduction

There are mainly eleven principal Upanishads in the Hindu philosophy, and the *Katha Upanishad* is one of them. The Hinduism considers all Upanishads as the *shruti*, direct revelation of knowledge from God. A general agreement is that as Navlakha [1] states, “they were composed between 900 and 600 BC” (X). The *Katha Upanishad* belongs to Sama Veda, one among the four Vedas of Hinduism, and the Upanishad has been originally composed in the Sanskrit language. It consists of four sections, and the first two are in verse whereas the last two are in prose. The word “Upanishad” itself suggests the elimination of ignorance with the light of knowledge. In this way, this Upanishad remains as the jewel of the Vedanta, which is known as the philosophical and theoretical part of the Veda. For this reason, this great work deals with the multidimensional insightful discussions about death and the ultimate reality even beyond the space time dimension. The entire Upanishad centers round the dialogues between the Lord of Death, Yama, and a curious boy, Nachiketa. The great discussion then leads us from this mundane world to the world beyond—the world of

transcendence. The word “Na-chiketa” resembles a deeper meaning. Mehta [2] describes that it “means something unperceived—something that is beyond the normal range of perception” (53), which transcends the sensationalistic or rationalistic realm. The dialogues between the Yama and Nachiketa are so splendid that they unravel the mystery not only beyond the reason and senses but even beyond the death. Thus, this remains the main proposition of the study.

2. Statement of the Problem

Death has often become the most discussed subject, and it remains perennially a mysterious one. Humans have conquered the space, but death is still a mystery. However, the mystical dialogues between Nachiketa and Yama bring out some fundamental quests about the death and the eternal reality that has remained even fresh and jubilant even in the multiple cross roads of the time. Their philosophical discussions lead the readers beyond this phenomenal existence. Death always demands in full from the human. It does not take only part of us. Until and unless there is the shadow of the death and decay, one is not in full swing, enjoying the earthly joys. In the same way, the entire

development of the transcendental philosophy of the West also centers on the reality beyond this phenomenal existence. The main quest then would be to speculate on the mystery beyond death. And the starkest question would be who knows the mystery of death than the death itself? What is the nature of absolute reality? How can we compare the proclamations of absolute reality in the *Katha Upanishad* with the basic tenets of the transcendental philosophy of the West? As such, this article explores the mystery beyond the reason, senses, and even death.

3. Objectives of the Study

The study intends to interpret the concepts, themes, and ideas of the transcendental philosophy while unraveling, expounding, and exploring the truth beyond the reason and senses in the *Katha Upanishad*. The speculations about the truth remain the same in its underlying pattern though the dimensions of time and space differ. The article thus has revealed the confluence between the basic proclamations of the philosophy of transcendence in the East and West because they bear the same tunes. It also aims to qualify the mystery beyond death. Great ideas flow when the two lines schools of thought meet. In the human history of the development of thought and knowledge, amalgamation bears a great significance. This present study also attempts to crystallize how the ideas remain the same no matter they may be expressed in different ways, forms, and languages.

4. Review of the Literature

The *Katha Upanishad* becomes the center of attraction because of the multi-dimensional ways it deals with various subject matters. Easwaran highlights how the Upanishad encompasses the different dimensions of ideas and concepts. He writes [3]:

Virtually all the fundamental ideas of Indian spirituality are found there, not presented systematically but fully developed; and since these are really the cornerstones of the perennial philosophy, the *Katha* might be said to contain the fundamentals of mysticism anywhere. In it we find elements of theory and practice that are elaborated later in the Bhagavad Gita and sometimes even reminiscent of the compassionate Buddha. (15-16)

The Upanishad, no doubt, as claimed above, deals with the varied subject matter. However, it needs a systematic exploration of the nature of the absolute reality with the tenets of the transcendental philosophy propounded in the West.

Olville claims the *Katha Upanishad* is a very challenging text because it has many complex and equivocal terms. Because of this reason, its meanings might suffer from the misinterpretation. He [4] says that it contains difficult and unique terms whose meanings are far from clear interpretations. For this reason, its thoughts and expressions are curt and even elliptic. Thus, it has been subject to textual corruption, and also suffered from the biasness of each scholar (372). As such, this Upanishad needs a thorough and unbiased

reading with a new perspective to reveal the real message. In this regard, the theoretical approach of this study is justifiable. Scholars like Keith [5] notes that *Katha Upanishad* bears the fundamentals of the religion in India, and “shows itself in the theism which begins to be clearly marked in the *Katha Upanishad* and which is expressed in the doctrine of predestination there enunciated, in the form that saving knowledge is not a matter of learning, but is revealed to the fortunate man by the highest power itself” (511). Keith’s remark also proves this great book contains the knowledge of the absolute reality beyond the realm of senses and logic. The Upanishad also illustrates the theme of “the ordinary knowledge aims at pleasure, real knowledge at salvation, and it must be accorded through teacher, and by the favor of Atman, a doctrine which develops into the express declaration that the favor of the creator is essential” [5] (ibid 516). These ideas also produce the echoes of the philosophy of the transcendence in the Upanishad that need to be explored systematically. Mehta hails the *Katha Upanishad* because it handles the subject matter in a unique way. He [2] views that many Western scholars describe it as the perfect specimen of the mystic philosophy and poetry of the ancient Hindus. The theme of the Death that the Upanishad deals has elicited great respect for its teachings both in the East and the West (50). The varied aspects of subject matter, in this way, have proved the Upanishad a storehouse of the knowledge. The tendencies of mysticism and the subject matter of Death have intensified the depth of the Upanishad.

The above commentaries on the Upanishad prove its worth. The review has detected the tunes of various themes, concepts, and ideas of various schools of philosophy. However, the Upanishad has not been explored and interpreted systematically with the tenets of transcendental philosophy as systematically propagated in the West. In this way, this study becomes a landmark to view the new zenith of this great Upanishad from a new perspective. The new perception germinates a concept that only the process of descriptions and exemplifications differ, but in essence, the tunes of the transcendental philosophy vibrate equally throughout the all corners of the world.

5. Methodology and Methods

The present article is descriptive and exploratory. Mainly concerned with the themes and ideas from the *Katha Upanishad*, it provides the new interpretations, descriptions, and the exploration of the concepts and ideas with the new perspectives, relating with the basic ideas of philosophy of the transcendence that the great philosophers mainly like Anaxagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Spinoza, and Kant have propounded in the West. The research paper correlates the basic ideas of transcendental philosophy with the concepts and phenomena from the Upanishad whenever they become contextual. As such, the *Katha Upanishad* remains the primary source of concepts and phenomena. The dialogues, symbols, and ideas from the Upanishad have been interpreted and explored. Related criticisms of the book, its

reviews, and other library and online resources have been considered as the secondary sources to explain the themes and concepts of the reality that the Upanishad postulates. To attain this purpose, the ideas of transcendental philosophy become the theoretical modality to explore and interpret the concepts and ideas from the Upanishad. Thematic and content analysis become the important methods to interpret the concepts.

In the subsequent sections, it would be wonderful to interpret, explain, and explore the ideas and concepts of transcendental philosophy in the Upanishad. It needs to view how this great work becomes the rendezvous of the tenets of the philosophy of the transcendence.

6. The Great Journey Beyond the Reason and Senses

The *Katha Upanishad* presents a contrasting situation at the beginning between Nachiketa and his father, Vajasravasa, who from the very beginning, believes in the importance of sacrifices and Vedic rites as the means of earthly achievements. He provides cows for the charity, but those cows cannot provide milk and calves. The perishable quest of Vajasravasa here contrasts with Nachiketa's imperishable search because he does not think the earthly achievements as the ultimate one. It means the main drive of this Upanishad is beyond the perishable realm of sensationalistic and rationalistic doctrines. Nachiketa says:

"These (cows) who have drunk water and eaten who have been milked off, and are lame (feeble) in their loins!

Ah! Joyless are those worlds into which, he who gives away such cows, enters." [6] (Deussen 275)

Nachiketa here points out "the joyless are these worlds," where mere soulless ritualism holds the value. Doubtlessly, he is not interested in *apara* (perishable) aspect of the world. His main quest is to go beyond the perishable (*apara*) world of phenomenal existence. From the very beginning, Nachiketa's quest in the *Katha Upanishad* is the transcendent reality—the reality that crosses the domain of logic and experience, where everything merges and becomes One fundamental truth. Zimmer [7] beautifully describes the nature of transcendent reality as he says:

For what "transcendent" means is the transcending (among other things) of the bounding and basic laws of the human mind.

"Transcendent" means that a principle is in effect that comprehends the identity of apparently incompatible elements, representing a union of things which on the logical level exclude each other. Transcendent truth comprehends an ever-recurrent "coincidence of opposites" (*coincidentia oppositorum*) and is characterized, therefore, by an everlasting dialectical process. The secret identity of incompatibles is mockingly disclosed through a constant transformation of things into their antitheses—antagonism being but the screen of a cryptic identity... for where the One and the Many are identical, eternal Being is known, which is at once the source and the force of the abundant diversity of the world's perpetual

Becoming. (313)

This beautiful and splendid definition of transcendent summarizes the whole philosophy and the nature of the absolute reality. In the Upanishad, Nachiketa wants to realize this nature of reality by going beyond the pair of duality where every antagonism merges, vanishes, and solidified into the One. For this, a great awareness must be attained, and it is possible only with the mystical insightful perception of the transcendent reality which Yama, the lord of Death, can only unravel.

Nachiketa deliberately rejects the sacrificial rites of his father. He then asks his father, "Dear father, to whom would you give me away?" [6] (Deussen 275). It shows that he voluntarily wants to transcend this phenomenal world, and land into the *para* world—the higher beyond the domain of logic and senses. This is the journey of self-evolution, self-realization through self-reliance, which are the fundamental aspects of the transcendental philosophy of the West. His father then replies, "To Death, I give you away" [6] (*ibid*). What would be a much greater achievement to a person than this who is in the mission to cross the limitations of experience and reason? Then the whole quest for the self-illumination and final realization opens the way for him.

This act of Nachiketa also shows that he wants to discard the traditional rituals, and even more than that, he wants to cross this world and find the reality of the ultimate truth. The entire following dialogues between the Lord of Death, Yama, and Nachiketa show that death is just a bridge. The moment one knows its knowledge, then one realizes the ultimate reality—the *Brahman*, the *Purusha* that the Upanishad postulates as the mystery of the Great Beyond. The Upanishadic notion of *Brahman* transcends each and everything. Navlakha [1] beautifully summarizes its encompassing nature:

Brahman as the absolute reality is purely impersonal, and is not to be confused with a personal God. The significance of *brahman* is metaphysical, not theological. *Brahman* is the featureless absolute, which unless a contextual necessity otherwise demands, is most appropriately referred to as 'It'.... Thus *brahman* is the one and only cause of the coming into existence of the universe. *Brahman* is whole and unfolds itself out in the form of the universe, out of its own substance, and as a means of knowing itself. Does this self-expression bring about any change in the nature of *Brahman*? The *Brahman* remains constant, untouched, unsullied, undiminished. (XVIII- XIX)

Perhaps the *Brahman* bears one of the loftiest and mystical concepts in the entire religious philosophy of the transcendence. When the boundary of reason and sense of this phenomenal existence ends, and the mentation comes to a halt, then the domain of *Brahman* flickers. It is immeasurable and fathomless and beyond description. Its stage is to be realized. Yama in the *Katha Upanishad* projects it in the same way as he describes: "He, the highest person, who is awake in us while we are asleep, shaping one lovely sight after another, that indeed is the radiant, that is *brahman*, that alone is called the immortal. All worlds are contained in it, and nothing goes

beyond. This is that" [8] (Muller 13). In this way, it remains the mystery beyond transcendence. Heraclitus proclaims the same tunes of transcendent reality as he says, "There is unity in the world, but it is a unity formed by the combination of opposites. 'All things come out of the one, and the one out of all things'" [9] (qtd. in Russell 48). So far the transcendental reality is concerned, it intersects the concepts where echoes from the East and the West merge and become a unified voice.

Nachiketa waits for Yama for three nights at the entrance because Yama has gone somewhere else. Therefore, Yama provides him three boons as compensation for making him stay there at his gate without any hospitality for three nights. The three boons have significant meanings. Nachiketa asks his first boon for his father who is there in the mortal world. He asks, "May my father's anger be appeased and may he be happy and free from anxiety" [2] (Mehta 55), which proves that he is concerned with the situation after death. The second boon that Nachiketa asks for is the important one. Then, it becomes another quest beyond the realm of senses and reasons, "Thou Knowest, O Death, that fire (sacrifice which is) the air to heaven. Describe it to me, full of faith how the dwellers in heaven gain eternity. This I choose, as my second boon" [10] (Radhakrishnan 600). Here, Nachiketa's quest is to know about the secrecy of immortality. His journey crystallizes a transformation from time to timelessness, from mortality to immortality, from *apara* to *para*, from phenomenal existence to the transcendental reality. He walks on the path where he could merge this personal energy into the cosmic One. But even Nachiketa, when realizes that heaven is just a long continuity and not an eternity; he needs for the third boon.

Nachiketa's self-evolution is not only just to know the after death condition. He does not only long for a long continuity. No matter how long the continuity is, it has to come to an end at a certain point in time. That is why; he wants to cross the limits of worldly experiences of feelings and emotions. He aims to cross the boundary and limitations of mind and perceptions. He says:

"A doubt prevails, when man departs this life, "He is"—some say; "he is not" say others. Instructed by you, I would like to fathom it, Let this be the third gift, which I choose." [6] (Deussen 279)

Nachiketa's question is whether there the existence or non-existence after death. He asks the answer of this question as the third boon. This is the most important question that seeks to expound the reality not only beyond the rationalistic realm, but also the mystery beyond the transcendence. It points out that the real truth always transcends the senses and ordered thoughts. This question attempts to dazzle out the heart of the matter—the illumined reality of truth.

Yama, the Lord of Death, wants to remain astray from this question because the answer to this question is not even given to God. He lures Nachiketa to leave this question and offers him material glories and the earthly perfections. Nachiketa, whose main aim is to know the Great Beyond, simply replies that until and unless there is the shadow of death, there is confinement. He says, "Man is not to be contended with wealth. Shall we enjoy wealth when we have seen thee? Shall

we live as long as thou art in power?" [10] (Radhakrishnan 606). This perception proves that he is searching for the truth beyond the earthly limitations of logic and senses. He wants to know the reality of being beyond. He realizes that death is just to cross over the sensory world into another world of perfection. When Yama believes the intense passion of Nachiketa to be really beyond the limits of the human mind, logic and, sensory perceptions, Yama then goes onto expound the ultimate truth about the transcendental. The entire dialogues then between the two lead us into the abode of transcendence beyond the limitations of mind and senses. Crossing these frontiers is one of the fundamental conceptual stages of the philosophy of transcendence as proclaimed in the East and the West.

Nachiketa quests for *Atmajnana* (the knowledge of self) that even transcends the death and merges oneself into eternity. Then Yama, step by step, makes him aware of the ultimate truth that is beyond everything. Yama says [10]:

Different is good, and different, indeed is the pleasant. These two, with different purposes, bind a man. Of these two, it is well for him who takes hold of the good; but he who chooses the pleasant, fails of his aim.

Both the good and the pleasant approach a man. The wise man, pondering over them, discriminates. The wise chooses the good in preference to the pleasant. The simple minded, for the sake of worldly well-being, prefers the pleasant. [10] (Radhakrishnan 607-8)

When Yama believes that Nachiketa has an intense passion for realizing the *Brahman*, the ultimate One, he at first discriminates the two categories. He leads Nachiketa from the paradigm of materialistic glory and the earthly glory (*apara* knowledge) to the *para* knowledge (the knowledge to know the ultimate reality). The *Atmajnana* (the knowledge of self) only makes quests for the good, not pleasure, because pleasure ultimately brings pain, but the good is always beneficial and remains unhooked even in the many upheavals of the time. If there is pleasure, pain is intermixed with it. One who is on the path of pleasure must be ready to face the pain as well. But the good remains the same perpetually. It clarifies that pain is related to the matter and the phenomenal world because pain is the outcome of transitory situation. The same echoes reverberate in Plato when he views that this phenomenal world goes "perpetual change, that the senses are deceptive and cannot yield us truth," and the ultimate reality "does not exist in the world of senses, but in the world of ideas" [11] (qtd. in Weber and Perry 57). The idea that is real is related to the good that is beyond the senses. It clarifies that we cannot know the mystery of the creation; however, we can realize the eternal truth through inner evolution. It is only possible when we cross the name and forms of outer reality, and realize inner essence that makes us move. Yama identifies this as the spark of *Brahman*, the supreme reality.

Yama does not take good in polarized view; rather he takes it as an integrated form of a whole. Here he "speaks of Good as Absolute Good—not the good which is the product of mind's opposites"[2] (Mehta 61). The idea of absolute goodness transcends the mind's polarities and opposites. Yama

is talking about the great beyond the realm of mind and senses. Yama also praises Nachiketa for selecting the path of this Absolute Good to realize the truth. In this way, after creating a demarcation between the pleasure and the Absolute Good, Yama then leads Nachiketa to the discussion of the gist of the basic reality that is beyond the phenomenal experience and senses as Yama says: "Not by reasoning is this apprehension attainable" [10] (Radhakrishnan 611). Only beyond the realm of the reason, the absolute reality prevails, and that is always the transcendental.

7. The Absolute Reality in Transcendence

Yama, while talking about the absolute reality, suggests Nachiketa to transcend the material cognition because it is "Not through the transient things is that abiding (one) reached" [10] (Radhakrishnan 611). On the other hand, one can reach it by the realization. The framework of time and space cannot confine it. He is the first mover, who is himself unmoved as Aristotle views, "God is both *in* the things, apart from the world or transcendent" [11] (qtd. in Weber and Perry 87). In the same way, Yama takes supreme self (*Brahman*) as the eternal truth and reality, the first mover that is itself unmoved. It is immanent, and yet transcendent. The supreme self or the prime mover is eternal that transcends every cause. Yama discloses this truth:

The knowing self is never born; nor does he die at any time. He sprang from nothing and nothing sprang from him. He is unborn, eternal, abiding and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain.

If the slayer thinks he slays or if the slain thinks that he is slain, both of them do not understand. He neither slays nor is he slain.

Smaller than the small, greater than the great, the self is set in the heart of every creature. The unstriving man beholds Him, freed from sorrow. Through tranquility of the mind and the senses (he sees) the greatness of the self. [10] (Radhakrishnan 616-17)

These powerful lines from the Upanishad show the nature of the ultimate reality as a mystery beyond transcendence. Yama here discloses the mystery of the supreme self as the basic truth. He also talks that the imperishable One is really beyond the grasp of one's thoughts and senses and yet rules everything. The Western Transcendental Philosophy also speculates that human beings always cling to the pseudo-reality that always obstructs the path to the realm of optimum reality that is transcendental. Plato's concept of idea and Aristotle's concept of God also clarify the same projection about the absolute reality, which remains as the archetype that is eternal and rules the entire creations. Plato views in his *Laws* that "all things are full of Gods" [12] (qtd. in Tarnas 13). If so, the absolute reality, in this sense, is the transcendental. Likewise, it is related to ideas, forms, or Archetypes that are eternal and uncreated too. The ultimate reality must be the first cause and an inner controller of all its effects. Plato's concepts about reality also find their insights in the above given verses from Yama.

Yama views that the supreme self is not created nor destroyed. This idea also reverberates in the "first law of thermodynamics or the law of conservation of energy" [13] (Rosen 9). The first law of thermodynamics makes out the point that no energy is ever created, and no energy is ever destroyed. Energy only goes on transformation—that is it goes from one stage to another. It clarifies that only the form goes on changing, but the self never changes. Yama also postulates the idea as Epicurus has noted that "nothing is born out of what does not exist. Nothing dissolves into what does not exist. The universe has always been and will always be the same" [14] (qtd. in Srinivasan 53), and Anaxagoras also hears the same tunes as he says, "nothing comes into being nor perishes, but is rather compounded or dissolved from things that are" [14] (qtd. in Srinivasan 48). Therefore, the beautiful expression of the eternal reality that Yama expounds reverberates in the fundamental quest of scientists and philosophers that nothing is ever created or destroyed; rather there is only redistribution or transformation of energy or a level of quantum consciousness from one stage to another. Navlakha [1] rightly notes: "As a matter of fact, the ultimate reality is integral, encompassing both the ends, the formless and the formed, the changeless and the changing, the imperishable and perishable. It cannot be apprehended without 'accepting the reality of both (the invisible *brahman* and the visible world) coming from *Brahman*' (Katha Upanishad 2.3. 13)" (XIV). The concept of ultimate reality finds its crux here.

The human understanding passes from different stages like the stage of sensation, perception, and compassion. But the eternal self, which is only form of truth, remains the same. It is the conscious energy which "is the thinker of thoughts and the feeler of feelings" [13] (Rosen 8). Only, the intuitive knowledge can realize the essence of things. Our thoughts can continually observe an object that is distinct and can attain it in gradual stages. The absolute reality is the final cause of the universe and is only the intelligence without any attributes. Things with forms are the derivatives. Aristotle rightly views in his *Metaphysics*: "for there must be some nature either one or more than one from which the things come into being while it is preserved" [15] (qtd. in Tola & Dragonetti 180). All that we see, feel, and perceive in the whole creation is well organized, harmonized by that single One—the self, *Brahman*. Thus, the supreme self is subtler than subtle and greater than the great. This projection finds its coalescence in Aquinas when he views the supreme reality "is 'be-ing' itself—unlimited, absolute, beyond definition" [12] (qtd. in Tarnas 183). The supreme reality is the existence. To be participated within this ultimate existence, we need to have communion with the eternal self because as Aquinas believes every creature is compound of essence and existence (ibid). It proves that the ultimate reality and the beings that are to be known the derivatives are the same. Thus, every creature becomes a part of existence and essence. To perceive this reality, one needs to go beyond the confinements of reason and senses. This confluence between tenets of transcendental philosophy and Yama's speculations in the *Katha Upanishad*

about the dimensions of the ultimate reality is mesmerizing.

The Eternal Self, known as the *Brahman* that the Upanishad projects, is the transcendental because it has the opposite characteristic. The transcendental always rejects the parameters of logical laws laid down by the human mind and experience. In its realm, every opposite dimension of the superficial level merges and becomes one. The two incompatible elements, which on the superficial level do not go together, are united in the transcendental. This is the nature of *Brahman*, the eternal self. Beyond the screen of these phenomenal manifestations, even the two diverse irreconcilable antitheses are merged, united, and become one. Furthermore, Yama describes the eternal self, *Brahman*:

Sitting, he moves far; lying he goes everywhere. Who, save myself, is fit to know that god who rejoices and rejoices not?

Knowing the self who is the bodiless among bodies, the stable among the unstable, the great, the all-pervading, the wise man does not grieve. [10] (Radhakrishnan 618)

The self, which is the spark of eternal *Brahman*, has the paradoxical attributes. But the eternity lies beyond these paradoxes. This eternal reality represents "the truth-beyond-the-pairs of opposites" [7] (Zimmer 313). The absolute resides in the transcendental supreme self. That is the fundamental truth to be realized, and so the "Transcendental... is the truth directed" [16] (Peacocke 12). Therefore, the quest for the absolute good is forever to rise to perceive the reality beyond the mask of reason and sense where antagonism merges. In that eternal self, the perfect harmony dwells. The absolute *Brahman* that can be described is not the absolute truth, but that which is devoid of qualities is the essential one. The same proclamation has been made by Tzu [17] about the Tao (the ultimate path) when he says:

Looked at but not seen:

Its name is formless.

Listened to but not heard:

Its name is soundless.

Reached for but not obtained:

Its name is intangible. (14)

The truth lies beyond the pair of opposites. In the transcendental, every antagonism merges and becomes one. The contradictory nature of absolute reality shows the starkest truth that *Brahman*, the ultimate reality, is all in all, the eternal.

The eternal self is the source of consciousness. This concept remains as a metamorphosis in the philosophy of Descartes when he identifies himself with the thinking "I" that transcends the matter. In his philosophical treatise *Meditation Seconde*, he remarks: "... consequently, speaking with precision, I am only a thinking thing, i.e. a spirit, or a soul, or an intellect or a reason" [15] (qtd. in Tola & Dragonetti 98). It speculates that consciousness is the binding force of the entire creation. The radiance of consciousness from the single source is distributed throughout the universe. Because of that, his "I" finds its existence. And he again puts the transcendental question: "But what then am I? A thinking thing. And what is that [a thinking thing]?" [15] (ibid 99). No doubt that thinking thing is no other than the spark of absolute good—the

transcendental consciousness or the *Brahman*. The ideation of the eternal self as a source of cosmic consciousness finds its crux in Descartes philosophy. Spinoza supports this concept as he says: "Thinking is an attribute of God, or God is a thinking thing" [15] (ibid). This philosophy finds its confluence in the Upanishad as Yama also says: "The one, controller (of all), the inner self of all things,... The one eternal amid the transient, the conscious amid the conscious, the one amid many, who grants their desires..." [10] (Radhakrishnan 640). As such, the existence of the eternal self holds the value as Descartes thinking "I" exists, and the perfect entity would not have been supreme and eternal had not it been existed. Therefore, the eternal self is everywhere. All is in IT, and IT is in all.

The eternal self exists in itself which is very nearer to the concept of Kant. He separates "the thing in itself" from the "thing from me" [18] (Gaarder 327). The "thing" for me can be seen and touched, but "thing in itself" transcends the law of causes, space, and time. This is the quality of eternal self that is projected in the *Katha Upanishad*. The eternal self in the transcendence finds its immanent form when it is conjoined in creatures. This concept points out that the Upanishad leads a seeker from the exoteric knowledge to the esoteric one. Kant also goes to a higher plane to discuss the nature of absolute reality, and about whether the man has an immortal soul. These ideas are the most debated subject matters in the entire Eastern and Western intellectual tradition. Kant says: "[15] It is absolutely necessary to be convinced of the existence of God; but it is not necessary to demonstrate it" [15] (qtd. in Tola & Dragonetti 247). God, as the final truth, is to be realized not to be defined and demonstrated within a fixed framework. The Upanishad also holds the similar concept for the realization of absolute reality—the transcendental *Brahman*. The concept of pure existence of one single truth also finds its voice in Spinoza when he holds the same proclamation of the eternal reality that he calls "substance." He describes the nature of substance as: "By substance I understand that which exists in itself, and is conceived by itself: i.e. that whose concept does not need the concept of another being, by help of which it has to be formed" [15] (qtd. in Tola & Dragonetti 92). Thus, the eternal self is without a second. The above lines reverberate the Yama's voice that there is only one substance, the ultimate reality on which everything exists. The interesting coalescence finds a way when Spinoza speaks Yama's voice: "From the infinite nature of Gods all things... follow by the same necessity... from eternity to eternity" [19] (qtd. in Durant 173). The world is a mere play, but beyond it, there is the infinity of the eternal self.

The *Katha Upanishad* projects the eternal reality as transcendental and at the same time as unifying one. It projects the idea that the multitude of changes and plays that go around is in the domain of ration and senses of this manifested world. And this whole manifestation is derived out of the single reality. The *Katha Upanishad* projects this reality as *Brahman*. This *Brahman* "is understood as the 'soul,' or the inner essence of things. It is infinite and beyond all concepts" [20] (Capra 99). It is beyond intellect and senses. Only the yoga,

which is the way of merging and integrating this consciousness into the cosmic one, can comprehend it. Going beyond the passions and *gunas* (attributes) can lead us onto the domain of transcendence, where there is no difference between You and Me because all incompatible logics and antitheses merge there. Yama splendidly expresses this truth in the following verses:

Higher than the senses stands things (objects of sense), higher than the objects of sense stands *Manas* (mind), higher than *Manas* (mind) stand *Buddhi* (intellect), higher than latter (*Buddhi*), 'the great self.'

Higher than that ('the great self ') stands *avyakatam* (unmanifest) higher than that (*avyaktam*) stands Purusa (the highest Being); Higher than this (*Purusa*), there is nothing anymore; he is the final goal and the highest point (of the process).

In all beings, dwells this (Purusa) as Atman, invisible, concealed from view; he is only seen by the keenest thought, by the subtlest (intelligence) of those thinkers who see into the subtle. [6] (Deussen 288-89)

The catholicity of Vedanta is expressed here. The *Purusa*, the supreme being of the *Sankhya* system, is identified with the *Brahman* or *Atman* of the Upanishad and Vedanta system in the above lines. Likewise, the gradation from this world of sense and logic to the realm of transcendence is very beautifully exposed. The quoted verses also explore how one can start the journey from the domain of outwardness to inwardness to the world of transcendence. This notion also clarifies that the eternal self—*Brahman*—dwells as *Atman* in every being. It is the unifying force that Capra has already stated about the concept of *Brahman*. This view is also very much related to the quantum theory which, sees the world as a single unity. This theory finds its insight in the above given lines. Quantum theory "forces us to see the universe not a collection of physical objects, but rather as a complicated web of relations between the various parts of a unified whole" [20] (Capra 150). Only the yogic experience can assimilate this with this situation. Rising beyond the pair of opposites, one can perceive the subtler than the subtle and the greater than the great that dwells within us is the inner controller, prime mover, the self, and the *Atman*. This cosmic power rules us being the spark of unfathomable, indefinable *Brahman*. This *Atman* becomes a unified whole in the subatomic level.

The ultimate reality which is beyond can be realized by unifying this personal consciousness with the cosmic consciousness, the seeker can realize the transcendental. Yama also beautifully sums up the way of transcending the phenomenal world, and it proves to be the final path to cross beyond the sensationalistic and rationalistic realm. He concludes:

When all desires that dwells within the human heart are cast away, then a mortal becomes immortal, and (even) here he attaineth to *Brahman*.

When all the knots that fetter here the heart are cut asunder, then a mortal becomes immortal. Thus far is the teaching. [10] (Radhakrishnan 646-47)

The entire teaching of Yama to Nachiketa comes to a

conclusion here. He expounds the greater truth that unmanifested reality is the genuine one, and the manifested one is simply the shadow of it. To realize that ultimate reality, one needs to go beyond the realm of logic and senses. The moment one transcends the passions, reasons, logic, then the eternal self and the ultimate truth is realized.

8. Conclusion

The *Katha Upanishad* projects that the ultimate reality always crosses the boundary and the limitations of logic and senses. The unmanifested reality is the ultimate One, and the phenomenal reality is just the reflection of the final basic reality. The framework of earthly category cannot confine the eternal self which is the fountain of the cosmic energy. Yama proclaims to Nachiketa that the realization and evolution within can perceive this perpetual process. He also projects the idea that supreme *Brahman* is a unifying force. The moment when we understand that the world and its concerns are simply the reflections of the same ultimate reality, we realize that there is another level of knowledge that is beyond in the realm of pure transcendence. Likewise, the beautiful dialogues between Yama and Nachiketa lead us into a height that is beyond space and time. The tenets of the philosophy of transcendence, propounded by Anaxagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Spinoza, and Kant, find their fundamental expression and exposition in the Upanishad. More than that, this Upanishad exposes the points of coalescence between the diverse fields of knowledge, proving that whatever goes in the superficial level is just a show. In the underlying pattern, the truth remains the same. The entire study reveals that when the limitations and boundaries of determined conditions of this phenomenal world are transcended, the liberation and the realization of the ultimate reality are played out. This paper fulfills the research gaps by exploring the dimensions of the ultimate reality in the Upanishad from the perspective and the tenets of the transcendental philosophy of the West. The Upanishad still needs to be explained, interpreted, and explored from the perspective of mysticism, revealing how one can move from the stage of phenomenal existence to another realm of divinity.

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