



The Principal Upanishads

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (Translator/Editor)

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Believed to hold the secrets of unseen reality, The Upanishads are the most ancient of the Hindu texts. They hold the secrets of the divine and have inspired generations of devotees by their vision and inexhaustible spiritual powers. Now everyone, from serious scholars to spiritual seekers, can glimpse into the texts that have shaped a vital spiritual history.

The Principal Upanishads Details

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Balakumar says

This is my impression about the famous book by Sarvepalli Dr. Radhakrishnan, a great exponent of philosophy, especially of Indian philosophy and the 2nd President of the India. My self trying to write up a 'review' of the book authored by such a great thinker is like a bird trying to drink up the entire ocean. I know I am a simpleton when compared to the stature of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. Therefore, I try to record my impressions about 'The Principal Upanishads', as a guide to the new aspirants to understand the teachings of the Vedas/Upanishads of Indian philosophy.

Any work of a great poet or writer should be studied in the original language in which the author has brought it out. Only his own mother tongue would be good enough to really understand the feeling of the author. As such, it would be better to study the Upanishads in Sanskrit, to understand not only the meaning of the verses, but also to enjoy the poetic beauty of the language. If that is not possible, we must look for one 'who combines the acuteness and originality of the thinker with the learning and caution of the scholar, and who has also made such a study of the present thoughts to meet his readers on common ground,' as rightly pointed out by Mr. Edmond Holmes in his Introduction to this book. Dr. Radhakrishnan was well versed in Sanskrit and in English; and thus he could bring out the contents of Upanishads in a simple and beautiful English so that every reader could easily understand.

The Introduction itself runs to about 120 pages. This is very elaborate that it took about a month for me to complete the introduction. Unlike the other subjects, the philosophy of Indian thoughts requires slow study, since we can pass on to the next step only after reading, re-reading, come to an understanding, and then proceed further. If I am permitted to place my impression about that here, I would suggest the reader to complete the text first, starting from Brhad-aranyaka Upanishad and concluding with Vajrasucika Upanishad and then start reading the Introduction. This will enable the new reader to get a synopsis of what all he has read and to dwell on the subject once again.

Similarly, The fore-words by Sri Rabindranath Tagore and Edmond Homes could be read first, which provide a prelude of the subject, before we can go in for a detailed study.

Going into the text, the Upanishads are perhaps taken up for commentary based on their 'popularity' and the subject matter they deal with. The lengthy Brahmad-aranyaka Upanishad is taken first and the little-known of Pingala Upanishad and Vajrasucika Upanishad are placed at the conclusion.

It could be seen from the upanishads that they do not only deal with philosophic subjects, but lay down instructions or guidance for the proper living of the humans. It is explained that how the Universe was created by the God by his will from a complete darkness or from nothing. 'In the beginning this world was only the self in the shape of a person (purusha). Looking around he saw nothing else. He became as large as woman and man in close embrace. From that arose husband and wife.' and thus goes Fourth Brahmana of Brahmad-aranyaka Upanishad in explaining the creation of the world.

The dialogue between sage Yagnavalkya and his wife Maitreyi is a classic example of discourse on the absolute philosophy about the Self. The simple truth explained by him is that ' verily, not for the sake of the husband is the husband liked; not for the sake of the child, the child is liked...but they all are dear only for the sake of the ones self'. That is just because everything gives happiness to oneself, he likes or dislikes the relatives etc. It is also stated that there may be many gods, but there is only one Brahman, who controls all

activities in the world.

It lays down the life cycle of a man as of Brahmacharya or student-hood, Grahastha or a worldly or married life where he goes on to earn a lively hood, protects, relatives, saints and performs sacrificial rites to gods, then comes the vanaprastha or leaving for the forest with his wife handing over the reigns to his children to lead a calm, meditative life and finally sanyasa or renunciation, where he quits everything and awaits final departure to his heavenly abode. This crates an impressive imagination of a happy and content life.

Taittiriya Upanishad, interestingly contains a convocation address to the students who are about to leave their teacher on completion of their education and training. The advises delivered are, satyam vadha, (Speak the truth), Dharmam chara (Practice virtue), svaadyaayan maa pramadha (Never stop learning), and so on. These preaching are applicable to all, for ever, from age immemorial to the present day, to the unending future of course. These are universal truths.

The volume contains about 1000 pages. Though the reading of this valuable book was time consuming since a quick-reading is not possible, it was never boring since this talks of never ending truths.

I strongly recommend this book for those interested in living the life in a proper way, irrespective of the caste, creed, religion. I understand that my write up is not conclusive, but hope that it would kindle an interest in the reader to take up the reading.

By the way, I appreciate the publishers Harpercollins for bringing out this valuable book of enormous volume in a weightless print, that I could hold it in my hand without any effort or pain.

Sumit says

Too much to digest in one book. Take your time to get most of it.

Sandeep says

A detailed account of all the upanishads in their essence.

Rylan says

Joseph Campbell name drop

Krishna Vijayan says

Nice overview for people who are a bit aware of principals of Hindu.

Aarthi Doll says

Absolutely fabulous book! Professor Sarvepalli Radhakrishnaia is my academic, political and literary icon!

Vijay Peddada says

My favourite book which gives complete picture of 108 Upanishads.....

Chetan Desai says

The best book for anyone interested in Upanishads and eastern spirituality. Radhakrishnan related verses with literature from Christian mysticism and Sufi Islam, making the book a one shop stop to learn about other mystical traditions as well.

Arpit Sihra says

One of the best books i've ever read. Opens up your mind and teaches you a lot about life.
