

# The Utility of Upaniṣadic Education

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## Abstract

The aim of the *gurukula* system of education is directed towards the purity and solemnity of life and to instil into the minds of the pupil the spirit of self-help, self-sacrifice, devotion to duty and reverence for elders. The true aim of the Upanisadic education can be realised from the constantly recurring prayer invoked in relation to persons engaged in the quest of knowledge and of the Self: the teacher and the taught. The teacher and the student try to build up the intellectual republic which might help them in retaining their fellow-feeling unto the last and develop a keen sense of unity for the achievement of their aspiration. The aim of education is to refine outer and inner life of the individual for the development of his moral, spiritual and intellectual life and to spread the light of knowledge in the direction. From the invocation verse of Kathopanīṣad can be clearly seen that several aims of education are postulated here which can be briefly discussed and evaluated. In this connection we can compare the famous words of Swami Vivekananda – ‘*Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man*’. He also said in his lecture that there is a mistaken notion among some that *Advaita* is likely to make men immortal, because it abolishes the idea of a magistrate God.. So, we must get to connect with Upanisadic thoughts.

## Full paper

The *Upaniṣads* is an integral part of the Vedas, the earliest record of Indian culture and civilization. The term Veda is derived from the root ‘*Vid*’ to know and means by the ancient *Rṣis* of India as the result of their austere penances. It is this revealed knowledge which guides us in every sphere of our social and cultural life. This knowledge has been used as a synonym of Brahman which is the source of all life, light and bliss, from which this universe has been manifested. But what is the aim of the Upanisadic Education? What is the objective that the teacher tries to fulfil? Can it be said that the aim of this education is directed towards integration of personality of the pupil as an individual tending to the creation of an ideal citizen? Lanman says “The great practical aim of all the teaching (of the *Upaniṣads*) is, by exterminating in the soul all desires and activity, root and branch, to lead to the realisation of the unity of the soul and the Supreme Soul. This realised it is liberated; and death can only do away with what no longer exists for the emancipated soul, the last false semblance of a difference between itself and the Supreme.”

In the Vedic age the forest is as it were the powerhouse of wisdom from which the light of knowledge radiates far and wide throughout the country. The forest life affords the opportunity to the student to come in direct contact with nature, contributing to the development of a receptive frame of mind. The aim of the *gurukula* system of education is directed towards the purity and solemnity of life and to instil into the minds of the pupil the spirit of self-help, self-sacrifice, devotion to duty and reverence for elders. The religious fervour and the reverential personality of the teacher exercise a direct influence in creating a healthy spiritual mood in the minds of the youngsters. Dr. Ramaswami Aiyer said, “It would be correct to say that these ancient Hindu schools of learning, which ultimately developed into what might be described as forest Universities, pursued a mode of teaching which was neither mechanical nor soulless but which generated in the learners a spirit of anxious enquiry and a quest for truth.”

Thus it is clear that the aim of education is to encourage both moral and spiritual interest of the young enlightened and the society associated with them to attain the spiritual kingdom. The true aim of the Upanisadic education can be realised from the constantly recurring prayer invoked in relation to persons engaged in the quest of knowledge and of the Self: the teacher and the taught jointly pray that

*saha nāvavatu  
saha nau bhunaktu,  
saha vīryam karavāvahai,*

*tejasvi nāvadhitaṃ astu,  
mā vidviṣāvahai. ( - Śāntipāṭha, Kathopaniṣad)*

- ‘ May the supreme protect us; may He afford us daily sustenance, may we be given strength and the valour for joint enterprises, may our studies be illustrious and crowned with success, and above all, may there be no hatred and jealousy amongst persons following the same path’.

A slight probing into this prayer will make man appreciate that there can be no other satisfactory and complete objectives of education as have been disclosed here in this message of the Upaniṣadic seers. These are the true purposes of gathering of pupils and teachers, disciples and preceptors.

The teacher and the student try to build up the intellectual republic which might help them in retaining their fellow-feeling unto the last and develop a keen sense of unity for the achievement of their aspiration. The aim of education is to refine outer and inner life of the individual for the development of his moral, spiritual and intellectual life and to spread the light of knowledge in the direction. From the invocation verse of Kathopaniṣad, can be clearly seen that several aims of education are postulated here which can be briefly discussed and evaluated.

Firstly, the protection of self (*saha nāvavatu*) is the first postulate of the aim of education. The primary function of the education is to look into the fundamental question concerning human existence. Education should give us strength to protect us from undesirable impulses and wastage of energies. It should also give us strength to overcome all sorts of trials and tribulation of life, to solve its pestering problems and to face the stern realities of life with ease. It requires self-control to generate the sense of self-respect, self-reliance and self-security; security of self ensures successful existence.

Secondly, education should aim at about economic efficiency signified by the motto (*saha nau bhunaktu*) and elimination of distress and poverty from our society leading to social justice and welfare of the state. Let us all live peacefully and happily in the society by resorting to some means of livelihood according to our tradition. Social efficiency depends largely on economic efficiency. Education should prepare an individual for a useful profession for driving out poverty from the society.

The Upaniṣadic seers did not deny or repudiate economic needs of man, but deliberately set a limit beyond which economic needs should not go. Instead of hankering after more and more of worldly goods, they devoted themselves – once the basic requirements of life were met – to the development of a life of intellectual, moral and spiritual culture.

Thirdly, cultivation of physical competence as embodied in the phrase (*saha vīryaṃ karavāvahai*) is another basic postulate of the aim of education. The Upaniṣadic seers are fully aware of the fact that physical efficiency is the corner stone of a complete and successful life. Physical fitness can never stand a man in good stead if it is benefit of mental strength.

Fourthly, the next part of the invocation is – *tejasvi nāvadhitaṃ astu* i.e. may our study be charged with strength and illumination. This prayer purports to acquisition of mental strength and illumination caused by study of sacred lore. Knowledge is the greatest strength of human beings. It has been declared in the Taittirīya Upaniṣad also as – *Yuva syāt sādhu yuvādhyāyakaḥ / āśiṣṭho draḍhiṣṭho valiṣṭhaḥ / tasyaeyam pṛthivī sarvā vittasya pūrṇā syāt / (2|8|1)* – ‘Let the young man during his tutelage be a good student, diligent in his studies, disciplined in mind, firm of purpose and strong in body’. To such a student comes the wealth of the world in abundance.

So, the Upaniṣads teach us not only to be a good human being, in addition to be a good healthy citizen with good heart. The last part of the invocation is – *mā vidviṣāvahai* i.e. should not be jealous. In this connection we can compare the famous words of Swami Vivekananda –“Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man”. He also said in his lecture that there is a mistaken

notion among some that *Advaita* is likely to make men immortal, because it abolishes the idea of a magistrate God. Such a criticism comes from men who are naturally criminal and have not attained to any human standards. On the other hand, it is *Advaita* alone can explain morality. Morality says, be unselfish. Why? A reply comes from *Advaita* alone. It tells you that whomsoever you hurt, you hurt yourself. “Whether you know it or not, through all hands you work, through all feet you move, you are the king enjoying in the palace, you are the beggar leading that miserable existence in the street....know this and be sympathetic. And that is why we must not hurt others. That is why I do not even care whether I have to starve, because there will be millions of mouth eating at the same time, and they are all mine. Therefore, I should not care what becomes of me and mine, for the whole universe is mine.” We can compare the thought with the Delor’s commission report in 1996 under the guidance of UNESCO. The commission prescribed Four pillars of education – i) Learning to know, ii) Learning to do, iii) Learning to live together, iv) Learning to be. In Upaniṣads, all thoughts are found. So, to make a good society as well as blissful world, we must get to connect with Upanisadic thoughts.

### Bibliography

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