

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LEGENDS OF THE *BRHADĀRAṆYAKOPANIṢAD*

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Abstract: This article presents the significance of the legends of our upnishad. The Sanskrit word ‘*Ākhyāna*’ is called legend in English. From the etymological point of view, the word ‘legend’ comes from the Medieval Latin word ‘*legenda*’ or ‘*legere*’ which primary means ‘things to be read’. It was originally used for the history or life-story of a saint extended sense of ‘historical or mythical story’.¹ In the spoken Sanskrit dictionary the word ‘legend’ means - *Vivaraṇ* (विवरण), *Kathā* (कथा), *Rāma* (राम), *Ākhāna* (आख्यान), *Itihāsa/History* (इतिहास) etc. So, it can be surmised that legends means traditional stories or tales popularly regarded as true, without any historical foundation. There are so many legends are found in the *Brhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*. We try to show the significance of these legends.

Keywords: History, Upanisad, Legends, Dialogue (*Samvāda*).

Introduction:

The Sanskrit word ‘*Ākhyāna*’ is called legend in English. From the etymological point of view, the word ‘legend’ comes from the Medieval Latin word ‘*legenda*’ or ‘*legere*’ which primary means ‘things to be read’. It was originally used for the history or life-story of a saint extended sense of ‘historical or mythical story’.¹ In the spoken Sanskrit dictionary the word ‘legend’ means - *Vivaraṇ* (विवरण), *Kathā* (कथा), *Rāma* (राम), *Ākhāna* (आख्यान), *Itihāsa* (इतिहास) etc. So, it can be surmised that legends means traditional stories or tales popularly regarded as true, without any historical foundation. There are so many legends are found in the *Brhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*. We try to show the significance of these legends.

Legends in the *Brhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*:

These legends set mainly in dialogue form between the guru and his pupils, between father and son², between husband and wife³ and also through questions and answers or in the form of argument between the great sages⁴, serve the purpose of providing easy understanding of the deep mysterious speculation. In this way the very deep ideas of the *Upaniṣads* have become easy to be communicated to the people. These stories take the student’s mind to the source of *Brahmavidyā* and illustrate how supreme knowledge could be attained and how at the same time it could be harmonised with the daily

¹ Online etymology dictionary

² *Brhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*, V.II, XII

³ *Ibid*, II.IV, IV.V,

⁴ *Ibid*, IV.I-IV, III.I-IX

life. These stories represent a marvellous attempt by the seers to convey the profoundest truths. The list of some legends is following –

- a) Udgīthagānarupākhyāyikā (उद्गीथगानरुपाख्यायिका)⁵
- b) Madhuvidyā upadeśarupākhyāyikā (मधुविद्या उपदेशरुपाख्यायिका)⁶
- c) Dakāratrayopākhyānam (दकारत्रयोपाख्यानम्)⁷
- d) Brahmopāsanārupākhyānam (ब्रह्मोपासनारुपाख्यानम्)⁸
- e) Indriyavivādarupākhyānam (इन्द्रियविवादरुपाख्यानम्)⁹
- f) Dr̥ptavālākigārgya – Ajātaśatru Saṁvāda/dialogue (दृप्तवालाकिगार्ग्य – अजातशत्रु संवाद)¹⁰
- g) Yājñavalkya – Maitreyī Saṁvāda (याज्ञवल्क्य – मैत्रेयी संवाद)¹¹
- h) Ārtabhāga – Yājñavalkya Saṁvāda (आर्तभाग-याज्ञवल्क्य संवाद)¹²
- i) Yājñavalkya – Bhujyu Saṁvāda (याज्ञवल्क्य – भुज्यु संवाद)¹³
- j) Yājñavalkya – Uṣasta Saṁvāda (याज्ञवल्क्य – उषस्त संवाद)¹⁴
- k) Yājñavalkya – Kahola Saṁvāda (याज्ञवल्क्य – कहोल संवाद)¹⁵
- l) Yājñavalkya – Gārgī – Uddālaka Ārūṇi Saṁvāda (याज्ञवल्क्य – गार्गी – उद्दालक – आरूणी संवाद)¹⁶
- m) Yājñavalkya – Śākalya Saṁvāda (याज्ञवल्क्य – शाकल्य संवाद)¹⁷
- n) Janaka – Yājñavalkya Saṁvāda (जनक – याज्ञवल्क्य संवाद)¹⁸
- o) Śvetaketu – Pravāhaṇa Saṁvāda (श्वेतकेतु – प्रवाहण संवाद)¹⁹

The *Ākhyāns* or stories from the *Upaniṣads* are not only legends. These legends have been made the vehicles of expressing the highest wisdom about existence, knowledge and joy. In these legends the values of life find concept of truth. From those *Ākhyāns* we may gather much information on the social, political, philosophical, historical, moral and religious status of Vedic India. They also throw a flood of light on the history, development and origin of *Brahmavidyā*. The main purpose of these legends is to educate the people in the way of liberation. These stories take the student's mind to the source of

⁵ *Ibid*, I.III

⁶ *Ibid*, II.V

⁷ *Ibid*, V.II

⁸ *Ibid*, V.III-XII

⁹ *Ibid*, VI.I, This topic also occurs in the 1st and 2nd sections of the fifth chapter of the *Chāndogyaopaniṣad*.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, II.I

¹¹ *Ibid*, II.IV and IV.V

¹² *Ibid*, III.II

¹³ *Ibid*, III.III

¹⁴ *Ibid*, III.IV

¹⁵ *Ibid*, III.V

¹⁶ *Ibid*, III.VI-VIII

¹⁷ *Ibid*, III.IX

¹⁸ *Ibid*, IV.I-IV

¹⁹ *Ibid*, VI.II

Brahmavidyā and illustrate how supreme knowledge could be attained and how at the same time it could be harmonised with the daily life. These stories represent a marvellous attempt by the seers to convey the profoundest truths.. About the significance of *Ākhyāns* it says²⁰ – “साधारणतः वक्तव्यविषयस्य सुखबोधनार्थमाख्यायिका प्रयुज्यते । अद्यतनयुगे यथा कृष्णफलके चित्राङ्कनं कृत्वा शिक्षार्थिनां शिक्षा सम्पाद्यते, वैदिकयुगे तन्नासीत् । तस्मिन् स्थले आचार्यः वाङ्मनैपुण्येन रोचकशैल्या छात्रमनसि चित्रनिर्माणं कृत्वा तान् बोधयन्ति स्म । अस्य तात्पर्यं तु विषयवस्तुनो महत्त्वप्रतिपादनमेव”. Śaṅkarācārya says – “आख्यायिका तु सुखावबोधार्था विद्यासम्प्रदानन्यायप्रदर्शनार्था च”²¹. Ananda Giri also says- “विद्यायाः सम्प्रदानं शिष्यः, तस्य न्यायो विनयादिसम्पत्तिः तत्प्रदर्शनार्थाख्यायिका”²².

However in the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*, the legends give a pure context to the philosophical ideas of the Vedic sages. The great *Upaniṣadic* imaginations have also inspired the later scholars in their enduring quest of right knowledge through the *Ākhyāns*, like Śvetaketu’s laborious effort under his father to arrive at the ultimate, fundamental position as the source, sustenance and goal of our world of multiplicity. In this connection, we also remember the famous words of Maitreyī, wife of Yājñavalkya, when she said: what is the utility of that which cannot give her *Amṛtaṁ* or the immortal treasure of knowledge of the Ultimate Reality – ‘*yenāhaṁ namṛtā syāṁ kimahaṁ tena kuryāṁ*’²³. The sole purpose which is implied in these legends and dialogues is to prove the reality of Brahman. The legends are of much historical value, as they paint a vivid picture of the Vedic India. Hence an in depth studies of the different legends of these works is very necessary and relevant in regard to the ultimate requirement of human life.

Through the study of *Udgīthagānarupākhyāyikā*, it has been demonstrated that selfless services can be rendered only by the *Prāṇa*, it cannot be polluted by anything. Whatever the *Prāṇa* accumulates is all distributed by it among the organs and so it does not care for providing itself. Thus the *Prāṇa* is greatest. The significance of this legend lies in the demonstration of this selflessness.

The *Madhuvidyā-upadeśarupākhyāyikā* shows that, every object of the universe exists in a divine connection with the *Brahman*. This connection is like the sweetness of honey. This connection enables the *Brahman* to play with the universe like a child night and day – destroying and preserving it. The honey like connection here means *amṛta-cetanā*. This *amṛta-cetanā* leads to the creation of the universe. The *Ātman* is the ruler of universe and the king of universe.

The *Dakāratrayopākhyānam* presents the morals of self-control, kindness and give. The one in power can give. Not everyone posses the ability to give. The Mahabharata says – ‘दरिद्रान् भर कौन्तेय’. To

²⁰ *chhāndogyopaniṣattattvasamīkṣā*

²¹ *CU, 4.11 introduction of Śaṅkarācārya’s bhaṣya*

²² *Sāmvediyobrāhmaṇi ka pariśīlan, page no-334*

²³ *Ibid, II.IV.3*

be successful one must sacrifice. It is sacrifice which makes a man great. To learn the value of sacrifice, it is essential to control the organs.

The *Brahmopāsanārūpākhyānam* discussed *anna* and *Prāṇa* neither can singly be *Brahman*. *Brahman* is the combination of these two deities. Who knows thus, called '*Brahmavid*'. The man, who knows that food and the vital force together constitute *Brahman*, is not slighted by any offence done by him, nor is he magnified by honours done to him. But in the last part of *Samvāda* it says that, no aspirant would attain perfection through this realisation of *Brahman*. The *Prāṇa* is 'Ram' (रम्), because all beings are pleased when there is the *Prāṇa*. So says – “आनन्दं ब्रह्मणो विद्यात्”

The *Indriyavivādarūpākhyānam* also demonstrates the perfect state of the *Prāṇa*. All the organs of the body function towards the working of the body but it is the *Prāṇa* which is the chief of all. One who does not pay respect to the senior-most and superior-most is bound to develop pride in the heart. This pride leads to ultimate destruction. It often said that – ‘अतिरूपेण वै सीता ह्यतिगर्वेण रावणः। अतिदानाद् बलिर्बद्धो ह्यति सर्वत्र वर्जयेत्।’²⁴

In the *Dr̥ptavālākigārgya – Ajātaśatru Samvāda*, Bālāki said *Brahman* is the person in the moon, in the lighting, in the sky, in the air, in the fire, in the water etc. In this dialogue we have seen that a *Brahmaṇa* approach a *kṣatriya* to learn the *Brahmavidyā*. When the self goes into deep sleep the Supreme Self returns to the body among the seventy-two thousand nerves called *Hitā* and stay like a great king, having reached the very limit of bliss. King *Ajātaśatru* narrated the concepts of waking, dreaming and deep sleep while revealing *Ātmavidyā* to Bālāki. Throughout worldly all are true, but *Brahman* is not confined. He is present in the heart of animals, in truth by adopting *Prāṇa*. Paul Deussen realized properly-“This was the case already in the definition of *Brahman* as सत्यस्य सत्यम् (The reality of reality). The universe is reality (सत्यम्) but the real in it is *Brahman* alone”.

For getting rid of deaths and births and to get eternal peace which has been written in the dialogues *Śvetaketu – Pravāhaṇa Samvāda*. In this dialogue the suspense of birth and death has been simply elaborated. Explanation of *Devayāna* and *Mṛtyuyāna* which is after death is described here. The eternal human beings attain eternal peace through *Agnividya*, knowledge of fire. The *Pñcāgnividya* reveals that creation and destruction of human beings is created through *Homa*. This has been elaborated here. In this dialogue through *Pñcama āhuti* the scientific process of creation of creature has been explained.

The *Yājñavalkya*'s philosophical thought is presented in the *Janaka – Yājñavalkya Samvāda*, *Ārtabhāga – Yājñavalkya*, *Yājñavalkya – Bhujyu*, *Yājñavalkya – Uṣasta*, *Yājñavalkya – Kahola*, *Yājñavalkya – Gārgī – Uddālaka Ārūṇi*, *Yājñavalkya – Śākalya* and the *Yājñavalkya – Maitreyī Samvāda*, stressing mainly on *Ātmavidyā*. In this connection, we also remember the famous words of *Yājñavalkya* – “न वा अरे पत्युः कामाय पति प्रियो भवति आत्मनस्तु कामाय पतिः प्रियो भवति.....” Not for the

²⁴ *cāṇakyanītidarpaṇah*, 3.12

sake of husband, wife, children etc., these are dear to a human, but only for the sake of Self or *Ātman*, they are dear. So ‘know the *Ātman*’ –“आत्मानं विद्धि”. *Ātman* is the दर्शनीय, श्रवणीय and मननीय, this fact is shown here. The ‘*Paramātman*’ is indeed unchangeable and indestructible and only one without a second. But when this *Paramātman*’ takes the form of multifarious objects and beings, then only one can see, smell, ask, hear and known others.

The Yājñavalkya declared that all are the pervaded by the *Brahmaloka*. Gārgī again asked him, ‘by what is the *Brahmaloka* pervaded?’ But Yājñavalkya warned to Gārgī that she was questioning too much about the *Brahman*, about whom, one should not ask too much. Yājñavalkya’s contentions were that *Brahmaloka* is the ultimate causes which cannot be known by only logical speculation. Yājñavalkya also stated that this soul is identical with the highest *Ātman*. This *Ātman* is incomprehensible by any organs and it is stated only as *neti neti*.

These legends or *Ākhyāns* set down in their unique style the nature of *Brahman* as both immanent and transcendent of the world. Brahman is all in all, it is the *Ātman*. The search for Brahman is essentially the search for the *Ātman* as narrated in the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*. It is precisely depicted through the legends that the ‘*Brahmatattva*’ or ‘*Ātmatattva*’ i.e. the knowledge of *Brahman* shatters ignorance, the root-cause of bondage and leads to salvation.

Conclusion:

From our foregoing discussion it is clear that the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* is rich in so many आख्यान, उपाख्यान, दृष्टान्त and संवाद. The style of these legends can be used in Modern education system. These legends and dialogues are very significant for their shortness, cleverness in speech, repetitions and simply understanding of the Vedic philosophical theory.

Therefore, in order to understand the latent ideas lying in the legends, narratives, illustrations and dialogues of the *Upaniṣads* there is a need of thorough and thoughtful study. The erudition, poetic spirit and philosophical doctrines of our ancestors lies concealed in the form of the everlasting *Upaniṣadic* knowledge and wisdom. As such, it is obligatory to study cogitate and contemplate the *Upaniṣads*

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