CHAPTER 3

MĀṆḌŪKYA UPANIṢAD - SUBJECT MATTER

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3.0 INTRODUCTION

Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad is the shortest among the principle *Upaniṣads*. It belongs to the *Atharva Veda*. It has twelve *maṅtra-s* but they represent the entire essence of all principle *Upaniṣads*. It is in lucid prose, consisting of twelve verses, and is associated with Atharva school of scholars (Paul Deussen, *Sixty Upanishads of the Veda*, Volume 2).

It discusses the syllable *Omkāra*, propouds the concept of four states of consciousness, asserts the existence and nature of *Ātman* (Soul) (Paul Deussen, *Sixty Upanishads of the Veda*, Volume 2).The *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* is notable for having been recommended in the *Muktikā Upaniṣad*, through two central characters of the *Rāmāyana,* as the one *Upaniṣad* that alone is sufficient for knowledge to gain liberation, and as first in its list of eleven principal *Upaniṣads* (Hume, Robert Ernest (1921), *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*).

The antiquity of *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, like all other *Upaniṣads* is still uncertain and contested by both Indian and western scholars (Stephen Phillips (2009), *Yoga, Karma, and Rebirth: A Brief History and Philosophy)*. Phillips assigns *Māṇḍūkya* Upanishad before and about the time the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, the *Maitri Upaniṣad*, as well as the first *Buddhi*st Pali and Jaina canonical texts were composed. Patric Olivelle opines: 'The chronology is difficult to resolve because all opinions rest on scanty evidence, an analysis of archaism, style and repetitions across texts, driven by assumptions about likely evolution of ideas, and on presumptions about which philosophy might have influenced which other Indian philosophies' (Patrick Olivelle (1996), *The Early Upanishads: Annotated Text & Translation)*.

Nakamura and Richard King give the date of authorship of Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad to "about the first or second centuries CE (Nakamura, Hajime (2004), *A History of Early Vedānta Philosophy,* King, Richard (1995), *Early Ādvaita Vedānta and Buddhism: The Mahāyāna Context of the Gauḍapādīya-kārikā*).

Olivelle states, "We have the two late prose *Upaniṣads*, the *Praśna* and the *Māṇḍūkya*, which cannot be much older than the beginning of the common era." (Olivelle 1998, p. 13)

But Mahony informs that *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* probably emerged in the late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE, along with *Praśna* and *Maitri Upaniṣads* (WK Mahony (1987), *Upanishads*, in Jones, Lindsay, *MacMillan Encyclopedia of Religion (2005)*. Ranade places *Māṇḍūkya*'s chronological composition in the fifth that is the last group of ancient Principal *Upaniṣads* (Ranade R D, *A Constructive Survey of Upanishadic Philosophy).*

An Indian and two western scholars are of the opinion that *Upaniṣads* were composed during the Vedic civilization and based on external and internal evidences; they assign the Vedic civilization to 7500 BCE. Hence date of *Upaniṣads* can be   pushed back to around 8-10,000 years BCE ([David Frawley](), [Subhash Kak](), [Georg Feuerstein](), *In search of the Cradle of Civilization).*

3.1   ETYMOLOGY OF THE WORD MĀṆḌŪKYA

The root of *Māṇḍūkya* is sometimes considered as *Maṇḍūka* (Sanskrit: मण्डूक) which literally has several meanings. It means "frog", "a particular breed of horse", "the sole of horse's hoof (*Monier-Williams' Sanskrit-English Dictionary*). Some writers have suggested the "frog" as the etymological root for *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* (Nanditha Krishna (2010) *[Sacred animals of India]).* Another root for the *Upaniṣad*'s name is *Mānduka* (Sanskrit: माण्डूक) which literally is "a Vedic school" or means "a teacher" (*Monier-Williams' Sanskrit-English Dictionary*).

The text of the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad* is fully incorporated in the *Māṇḍūkya Kārika*, a commentary attributed to the 6th century CE by western scholars (P T Raju (2009), *The Philosophical Traditions of India*, Routledge). This *Upaniṣad* explains the concept of consciousness in the three states of human being namely waking state (*jāgrat*), dream state (*svapnam*),and dreamless sleep stage (*suṣupti*). It explains that one can attain the state of non- dual consciousness by transcending the three states. This *Upaniṣad* has one of the secret dictums among the four Upaniṣadic dictums (*mahāvākya*) namely, 'This self is *Brahman*' (*Ayam ātma Brahma*).   This *Upaniṣad* gives the symbol for doing meditation by spiritual seekers. The symbol is "AUM". The word AUM has three letters namely A, U and M. Each represents one organ in the mouth apparatus and has several shades of meaning. The philosophical implications of these three letters are also explained in this *Upaniṣad*.

The language of this *Upaniṣad* is very terse and precise in nature. Hence Ācārya Gauḍapāda who was the preceptor of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya wrote a commentary (*Bhāṣya*) on this *Upaniṣad* as well as explanatory treatise (*Kārika*), in lucid style which can be understood by readers. These texts were called as Gauḍapāda *bhāṣya* and *Māṇḍūkya kārika*. *Māṇḍūkya kārika* is one of the earliest attempts in systematizing the *upaniṣad*ic teachings rationally and scientifically.

This *Upaniṣad* in its essence gives the *Ādvaita* philosophy which was later propounded by Ādi Śaṅkarācārya in later part of 7th century (788-820 CE). Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda, a disciple of [Govinda Bhagavatpāda](#) who himself was either a direct or a distant disciple of [Gauḍapāda](#) ([Conmans 2000](#)) further made commentaries on *Gauḍapāda Māṇḍūkya kārika*, *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* forms one of the basis of [*Ādvaita Vedānta*](#) as expounded by Ādi Śaṅkara (David Garrett (2009) [*The Influence of Mysticism on 20th Century British and American Literature*](#)). A deep study of *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* helps us in understanding the *Ādvaita* philosophy and the eternal truth (*parabrahman*) without the basis of caste, culture, creed, gender, religion, race or any belief.

The *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* has four chapters namely *Āgama - prakaraṇa*, *Vaitāthya - prakaraṇa*, *Alāṭaśānti - prakaraṇa* and *Ādvaita - prakaraṇa*.

In *Āgama prakaraṇa*, sage *Māṇḍūkya* explains the word AUM and its importance. He discusses the concept, subject and object relationships where the subject is your ownself, where as the object is the external world. The aim of any spiritual seeker is to realize this apparent duality of subject and object relationships.

This duality is described by *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* as there is no duality as it were, then one smells something, one sees something and so on, (Br. Up. II. IV. I4), when there is something else, as it were, then one can see something, one can know something, (Br. Up. IV, iii, 31) but when to the knower of *Brahman* everything has become the self, then what should one see and through what (Br. Up. II. iv 14).

This concept of "*OMKĀRA*" is based on vedic knowledge and it would help us to know about oneself. The second chapter explains to us as to how the duality (*dvaita*) is false and incorrect. The subject (self) and the object (world) appear to be dual in nature. Is it real or

unreal? This can be explained with an illustration of rope and snake. A person walking bare foot in darkness tramples on the rope and mistakes it as snake and shouts as snake. But when the light or torch is shown upon it, he understands it as a rope and not as snake. He had superimposed the snake on the rope owing to his ignorance. This illusion of rope and snake is false knowledge and this gets removed by right knowledge. This truth of non-dualistic monism is explained in the 3rd chapter rationally.

The 4th chapter establishes the same greatness of *Omkāra*, its multi-layered meanings are described in *Kaṭa Upaniṣad*, *Praśna Upaniṣad*, *Maitrāyani upaniṣad*, *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* and *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*.
'It is this *Om* (Ka,I. ii.15). This medium is the best (Ka, I, ii.17) 'O" Satyakāma. This (*Om*) is verily *Brahman* (superior and inferior - Pr.V.2) meditate on the self as *Om* (Mai. Vi.3) Om is *Brahman* (Tai.I.viii.i).

Om indeed is all these (Cha. II. Xxiii. 3). Just as the supreme reality is the basis for the entire universe, in the same way, *Omkāra* is the basis for the self and for understanding the ultimate reality. The *Upaniṣads* declare that *Brahman* is woven by names and symbols such as *Omkāra* (*Om iti etat akṣaraṃ idaṃ sarvaṃ |*). The letter *Om* is all this.

The 3rd *maṅtra* declares that in the waking state (*jāgrat sthiti*) it is called *vaiśvānara* whose consciousness is external in nature and he is the very embodiment of Lord Agni or *vaiśvānara* who encompasses all beings.

The *Āgama prakaraṇa* deals with the great Upaniṣadic sentence that "*This self is Brahman*". This *Brahman* is divided in to four parts and each merges with the other. *Viśva* merges in the virtue called *taijasa* which in turn merges in *prajñā (*consciousness). *Prajñā* merges in *turīyā* (the fourth state). The 3rd *maṅtra* also mentioned that the *taijasa* and *prajñā* gets united with *the Hiraṇyagarbha* which is unmanifested. The *taijasa* (luminous) is in the nature of the supreme reality, as it is self - luminous in nature as this *taijasa* will stand as an eyewitness for all the activities happening in the external world vision or *vaiśvānara* is dependent on objects, so the self experiences the external recognition. In the next *maṅtra*, the sage describes the deep sleep stage (*suṣupti).* In this state, the sleeper does not experience any dream. Here the subject and object relationship ceases to exist.

The soul or the seeker is unaware of the external world, who although is the enjoyer of bliss, is not fully aware of that experience at the time the *Ātman* is in abundant joy, which is the real nature of the soul, such a person experiencing such a bliss is called *ānandabhuk.*

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad informs that this supreme bliss is in the nature of *ātman* or *parabrahman*. The nature of *parabrahman* is consciousness par-excellence called *prajñā*. This *parabrahman* is all powerful, all knowing, all pervading in nature. He is the source of all and the origin and dissolution of all beings.

Further the sage describes the 4th state of the *ātman* called *turīyā*. This state is not consciousness of either the internal or external world. It is not just a mass of consciousness. The peculiar thing about this *prajñā* is that, it is neither consciousness nor unconsciousness because it is above both. It cannot be seen, but can only be experienced. It is unchanging and indestructible. It is the unchanging phenomena behind all changes. It is non- dualistic in nature because duality ends up in duplicity as truth is only one. That truth is supreme consciousness or *parabrahman* is defined in all the major *Upaniṣads*.

Sage Gauḍapāda calls this resplendent of *turīyā*, which is the all pervasive sources of all objects, (*Gauḍapāda kārika* No.10, Mu. Up, vii, 1). The sage in his 8th *maṅtra* explains that the self is denoted by the letter "*OM* . It consists *A-kāra, U-kāra* and *M -kāra*. According to sage Vaishvānara, *A-kāra* pervades the physical world. The *Aitareya āraṇyaka* mentioned that the sound of it is all speech (Ai, iii. 7. 13). The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* declines that the *vaiśvānara* self is the head of *parabrahman* (Ch. Up. V, xviii, 2). The person who realizes *vaiśvānara* obtains all desirable objects. He becomes the supreme among all the beings.

3.2 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the subject matter of *Māṇḍūkya upaniṣad* is explained. The *upaniṣad* gives the concept of consciousness, its three states namely *jāgrat* (waking state), dream (*svapnam*), and deep-sleep (*suṣupti*). It explains the importance of fourth state called *Turīyā* which is unique compared to western philosophy. Here I have explained the importance of *Omkāra*, one of the *mahāvākyas* namely *Ayam Ātma Brahmā*, with the analysis of Gauḍapāda's *Kārika*.

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