

## A study on The Rig Veda and the Upanishads: Two Opposing Philosophical Perspectives in Indian Thought

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**Abstract:** The influence of Indian Philosophy on Asian thought has been substantial. Even a cursory reading of Indian philosophy can reveal nuggets of insight that shine as brightly as anything in Ancient Greek philosophy. It is clear from even a superficial examination that the Vedic and Upanishad traditions represent some of the earliest and most profound speculative thought ever developed. Thus, Indian Philosophy encompasses a staggering range of philosophies, from the most reductionist pragmatism to the most idealistic transcendentalism, as well as all the gradations in between. If you look at it from a chronological standpoint, the earliest Indian writings are crucial to the development of India's distinctive brand of Oriental philosophy. The Rig, Yajur, Sama, and Atharva are the four Vedas. The religious beliefs of the early Aryans are reflected in the first of these, the Rig Veda. The values, norms, and practices of the era are portrayed. The ancient Indians were polytheists who honored many gods, or Devas. The Yajur Veda is a section of the older Rig Veda that details the sacrifices that were performed. Liturgies are included in the Sama Veda, which is also a compilation of passages. The Atharva Veda elaborates on supernatural rites and focuses on the adoration of Agni, the god of fire. It was written later, has low literary merit, and demonstrates how the Aryans internalized the more traditional beliefs of the peoples they conquered, despite the Aryans' superior culture. The Upanishads, which developed from the Vedic hymns, capture India's intellectual and spiritual maturity. Roughly ten of the one hundred Upanishads are the most important philosophically. In contrast to the Brahmins, who originated in the minds of priests, the Brahmins are concerned with knowledge and are the result of the mind of the sage and thinker. There is no clear structure to them; rather, they are a leisurely series of speculations building on traditional Vedic understandings of the ultimate philosophical manifestation and the primordial entity. Many of the claims made in the appointed article are contentious and debatable. In this task, however, I had hoped to compare and contrast the philosophical contributions of the Rig Veda and the Upanishads.

**Keywords:** The Rigveda, Upanishads, Mythological thought, Indian Philosophy, Polytheism, Harmony.

### **Introduction:**

The four Vedas and other texts make up what is known as Vedic literature. Both the original texts of the Vedas (found in the Samhita) and their subsequent interpretations (found in the Brahman) are found within each of the four Vedic canons [1]. They are further subdivided into the Brahmins, who focus on ritual interpretation, the Aranyakas, who emphasize prayer and meditation, and the Upanishads, who explore deeper philosophical questions.

The four books of the Vedas are known as the Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva Vedas [2]. The first three are the ostensibly more ancient of the bunch, while the fourth is a more recent

compilation. Even though they have different names, scholars agree that they all belong to the same collection of texts known as the Vedas. The three Vedas explain what each type of priest should do during a sacrifice. The Rig Veda is an anthology of hymns, or Riks, written for the Hotr priest to use when calling upon the gods for assistance. Udgatr, the priest, relied on the Saman, a book of chants. The Sama Veda evolved from this. When it came to the rituals of a sacrifice, a third priest named Advaryu was in charge [3]. Yajur Veda, which literally means "sacrifice Veda," contains the ritual instructions for the Adhvaryu priest. The word "Veda" is derived from the Sanskrit root "vid," which means "to know," and is therefore used to describe all three types of hymns. This means that a Veda is a book of knowledge. Each Veda is further split into four sections, with each section addressing a specific topic. Only verses written in three or four lines of eight, eleven, & twelve syllables make up the Rig Veda [4]. The metres range from the simple to extremely intricate. Classical Sanskrit meter principles do not always translate to the Vedic meters and vice versa. Despite its occasional metrical passages, the Yajur Veda is primarily a prose work, except for stanzas quoted from the Rig Veda, often with different readings.

Metrical, approximately half the size of the Rig Veda, and containing a sizable portion of borrowed text, the Sama Veda is a smaller and less comprehensive Vedic text. As the sacrifices progress, so does its internal structure. Twenty books make up the Atharva Veda. Whereas the majority of the Rig Veda, the entirety of the Yajur Veda, and all of the Sama Veda are all about sacrifices, the Atharva Veda has almost nothing to do with sacrifices until its final chapters [5]. It's primarily a metrical work, though some prose sections are in the second half. About half of the Rig Veda is made up of hymns to the gods Indra and Agni, with the rest dedicated to other important deities such as Ashvins, Savitri, Surya, Varuna, Ushas, Pushan, Maruts, Rudra, Soma, Vishnu, and Vishvedevas. The Hiranyagarbha Sukta (X. 121), the Purusha Sukta (X. 90), the hymn of formation (X. 129), the hymn at a funeral (X. 14), and the one to the departed spirits are all philosophical hymns (X. 15). Dirghatams's entire hymn to Vishvadevas (I. 164) is deeply philosophical and is often cited in the Upanishads [6].

**Rig veda:**

The Rigveda, also called the Rig Veda or simply the Veda, is an ancient Indian accumulation of Vedic Sanskrit hymns (sktas). It is considered to be one of the four most important Vedic texts (ruti) in Hinduism [7].

When it comes to Vedic texts, the Rigveda is the granddaddy. Its earliest sections contain some of the most ancient surviving texts written in an Indo-European language. Since the second millennium BCE, the sounds and texts of the Rigveda have been passed down orally from one generation to the next. The majority of the Rigveda Samhita was likely written between 1500 and 1000 BCE in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent (see Rigvedic rivers), though an earlier and later date range of 1900 to 1200 BCE have also been proposed. The Samhita, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads make up the text, which has several levels. The Rigveda Samhita is the foundational text; it is a compilation of ten books (maalas) containing 1,028 hymns (sktas) in roughly 10,600 verses (called c, eponymous of the name Rigveda). Hymns praising deities and discussing cosmology and rituals predominate in the eight earliest books (Books 2–9). Some of the hymns in the more recent books (Books 1 and

10) also address philosophical or speculative questions, social virtues like dharma (charity), and metaphysical issues like the nature of the universe and the divine. It is likely the oldest religious text in continuous use, as its verses are still recited during Hindu prayer and rites of passage (such as weddings) celebrations.

During this transition from the Stone Age to the Iron Age, mythological thought emerged as a distinct mode of human thought. The interpretation of early human society beyond humanism that this entails serves as a metaphor for the development of human thought from rudimentary to sophisticated levels of reasoning, and it reflects the divine experience that humans have had of nature and life. Indians' way of thinking and feeling can be traced all the way back to the Vedic era, when their religious beliefs were first codified. When the Aryans fought off attacks from other peoples and Mother Nature, it inspired the epic poem, the Rigveda. The Aryan people who lived on the grasslands were nomads. They were generous in their adoration of the divine because, as a result of their reverence for nature, they could connect with the souls of all things. After establishing themselves in an agrarian society, the Aryans were able to shift their mythology from polytheism to monotheism. That is to say, it converged on a world with fewer gods or a single supreme god. There was a gradual but steady improvement in their worship of the gods thanks to the adoption of polytheism. To some extent, the Rigveda, as the foundation of Indian religious culture, reflects the various facets of Indian mythological thought.

### **A Contrasted View of the Upanishads:**

Every major religious upheaval in Indian history has coincided with a new discovery about the Upanishads. The Upanishads are the Veda's final texts, so they're also known as the Vedanta (which literally means "end of the Veda"), a designation that suggests they contain the religion's central teachings. The teachings of the Upanishads have been the inspiration for every idealistic movement to emerge in India.

Determining the precise nature of the Upanishad's analytical higher teachings is no simple task. Commentators from a variety of backgrounds and with a wide range of worldviews have inserted their own biases and skewed interpretations into the Upanishads [8]. The Upanishads are referred to by every school when conflicts arise. The Upanishads have been highly suggestive, allowing their interpreters to use them to advance their religious and philosophical agendas [9]. The Upanishads did not propose any particular philosophical or theological system. While ethics can be seen as a condition on the way to self-realization, which is the ultimate goal, the Upanishads provide an indirect basis for an ethical system and are thus not seen as essential to the main message.

If I may, here is a high-level summary of the Upanishadic Philosophy's central tenets:

1. True understanding can be attained through knowledge rather than through labor
2. As a result, karma, or the law of cause and effect, is a universally active principle.
3. Samsara is functional. In accordance with this view, souls are believed to be able to "transmigrate," or "re-incarnate," into different worlds.
4. The individual soul and the Supreme Soul both exist outside of time and space, are uncreated and immortal, and permeate everything.
5. Matter has no end in time.
6. In order to free one's soul from the bonds of suffering, one must first break those bonds.

7. To be conscious is to be in one's mind.
8. The ultimate absolute exists in a realm beyond the present, but is not impossible.
9. When properly conceived, reality merely "is"
10. In terms of epistemology, the terms true and false, when applied to knowledge, are concepts that are the product of and serve the purposes of reason.

The Upanishads are not written so much to discover ultimate philosophical truth as they are to calm the anxious human spirit and set it free. The Upanishads are the poetic outpourings of philosophically tempered minds in response to the challenges of life.

**Comparing the Rig Veda and the Upanishads from a Philosophical Perspective:**

It would be interesting to trace, in broad strokes, how the Upanishads relate to the Rig Veda, the oldest known Aryan poem that predates them by at least a millennium. First, it's important to recognize that the Rig Veda, as a massive collection of hymns to the personified forces of nature, represents the earliest stage in the development of religious consciousness, the objective stage of religion [10]. Instead, the Upanishads herald religion's transition into its subjective phase. The Upanishads are not a collection of paeans to various deities, but rather a scientific inquiry into the nature of the Substratum, or the unseen reality beneath the phenomenal forces of nature. Neither do the gods of the Upanishads receive any sacrifices or prayers, and there is no evidence that people feared the gods of nature during the Upanishadic era.

In other words, we can see a clear shift in emphasis from God to self-starting in the Vedic period and continuing all the way through the Upanishadic period. Nobody needs to be afraid of anyone or anything once the ego has merged with the ego of all beings everywhere—once the Atman has been realized. Who or what can accept sacrifices, if any? Who can pray to a god, and what can they pray for? In a nutshell, we can say that the shift from the Vedas to the Upanishads represents a shift from piety to philosophy, from hymnology to introspection, and from polytheism to monotheism in the spiritual outlook of the Vedic people.

Then, secondly, we should not overlook the fact that certain Rig-Vedic hymns already showed signs of progress toward cosmological ideas. One need only consider the famous agnostic hymn of creation x. 129, in which the primal existent is declared as being superior to bot, or Rig-Veda x. 88, in which the seer inquires what was the "hyle" out of which the heavens as well as the earth were built eternally firm, and what it was in which the creator stood when he upheld the worlds.

Thirdly, from a psychological perspective, we may say that while the Rig-Veda may be regarded as a fantastic work of thought and reason, there are many passages in it, especially in the hymns to Varuna, that have a close analogy to the bhakti psalms of the Bible both in point of language and ideas, passages which are very seldom to be met with in the literature of Upanishads [11].

On the other hand, the Upanishads feature a systematic inquiry into the nature of the Ultimate Reality with the coolness of intellectual argumentation. So, while the Rig-Veda contains many hymns in which the supplicant devotee begs for gracious forgiveness from a divinity that is the creation of his own imagination, the Upanishads say categorically: "Seek not favor from any such divinity; reality is not the divinity which you are worshipping - nedam yad idam upasate; the guardian of order isn't outside."

Due to their unique content, the Upanishads are considered a separate genre from the Vedic hymns and the Brahmans. As we saw, the Brahmins' mechanical form of sacerdotalism eventually replaced the simple faith in gods expressed in the hymns. According to the Upanishads, religion that culminates in a house of worship is insufficient. They try to instill a sense of morality into Vedic practice without changing its essential structure. The Upanishads have made progress over the Vedas by putting more weight on the monistic suggestions found in Vedic hymns, moving the focus inward, protesting the materialism of Vedic rituals, and showing little reverence for Veda's inherent sanctity.

A principle of unity and comprehension was emerging amidst the muddled-up Vedic devotion. It is true that some hymns expressly formulate the idea of a unifying power. The Upanishads carry on this tendency. There is only one spirit in their eyes; that spirit is all-powerful, eternal, mysterious, self-existent, and responsible for the world's creation, preservation, and destruction. He is unique and unmatched, the source of all goodness and the only one worthy of our adoration and praise. Vedic demi-gods are slain upon the arrival of the one true God. We cannot abolish the old forms because doing so would be to ignore the fundamental nature of humanity and the patent differences, in the moral and cognitive states of believers who were not capable of acquiring at once the highest wisdom. The Upanishads' stance was also determined by something else. The pursuit of truthful life was more important to them than scientific or philosophical inquiry. They were motivated by a desire to set the soul free from the constraints of the body so that it could commune with God. Studying was secondary to living a holy life. On top of that, there was a sense of respect for the past. It was sacrilegious to criticize the teachings of the ancient Vedic seers who have since passed away. The Upanishads were written in this way because their authors wanted to reconcile a developing idealistic philosophy with the dogmas of an established religion. The wonders of the outside world and the stress of the human soul are both objective and subjective sources of inspiration for man's spiritual interior. The vast order and movement of nature is what the Vedas focus on. Their gods stand for the forces of the universe. Once again, we delve into the inner world in the Upanishads. True self is one with the great cosmic power, and true power is found within. It is true that Brahman is Atman and Atman is Brahman. All men share a connection to the supreme power that brought the universe into existence with their deepest, most authentic selves. In contrast to the Vedas, the Upanishads do not support the idea of grace. Only prayers for relief from suffering are recorded as being addressed to the Vedic gods, who were traditionally seen as the providers of material well-being.

Humans both feared and trusted the gods. All was pure and innocent on this planet. Soul hunger is a rebuke to carefree happiness that forces one to question life's meaning. A lack of satisfaction with present reality is a prerequisite for any kind of moral transformation or spiritual rebirth. The Upanishads' pessimism is the state of all philosophies. Unhappiness rules, and that serves to propel man toward freedom. Mischief-making dissatisfaction occurs when there is no means of escape and no desire for deliverance. The Upanishads' pessimism has not matured to the point where it prevents all activity and creates inertia. The Upanishads are inspired more by a sense of speculative daring than by a desire to alleviate pain and fatigue. Not even the Upanishads' formulation of samsara, or the cycle of birth and death, can be used to prove their pessimism. Living on Earth is how we learn to be our best selves.

**Conclusions:**

By comparing and contrasting the Rig-Vedic Samhita with the Upanishadic system of thought, as is done in the aforementioned commentaries, one can get a sense of how these philosophical ideas developed over time. If we are interested in learning more about the ancient Indian philosophical background, then it is essential that we have access to the detailed descriptions mentioned above. As a result, either way you look at it, the fundamental & theoretical factors in Vedic philosophies are being attacked. However, the Upanishads rank higher than the Rig-Veda when it comes to the philosophies they promote.

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