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Hindu Literacy: The Basic Concept of Education and the Literacy Patter in *Upanisads*

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Abstract

Literacy is the soul of education in Hindu civilization. The Upaniṣad is an integral part of Vedic literature, and it provides the basic concepts of education and literacy patterns. According to the Upaniṣad, education is about giving academic degrees to students and building excellent human character; literacy is essential in Hindu Education. Various educational methods are used in the Upanisad, with the aim of awakening all human potential. Through educational efforts to generate superior human character as a whole, intelligence and wisdom are accentuated. Upanisad learning still has relevance in the modern era, such as in the philosophy of idealism. Students must be made aware of the importance of education in life, outside of simply making a living. The spirit of the learning torch must be adopted in modern times to prevent it from losing sight of its main path, that is, to raise human excellence. Hindu literacy becomes the main foundation in the education system, which builds the machine of human intelligence and wisdom. Activating the spirit of learning and methodology in Upanishad will directly help efforts to increase literacy.

Keywords: upaniṣad, vedānta, Hindu literacy

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1. Introduction

Education is the soul in Hindu, Vedic, or *Sanatana Dharma* Civilization. The education system that is held generally changes every time but is still based on the same spirit. Hindu education in the Vedic era was generally in the form of learning in the middle of the forest. The goal is that teachers and students concentrate fully on the development of education and student personality. In the following period, the Vedic Civilization moved forward with learning through the past universities.

In times past, education pattern can be observed in various phases, beginning with the Brahmanic Education. This period is often known as education in oral tradition. Our knowledge of this period is derived from the *Samkriti* [collections of verses] of the

Vedas, which form the oldest strata of Indian literature. The *Ṛgveda* was the earliest of these collections. It contains 1017 hymns divided into ten different books or mandates. The composition of these hymns took place previous to 1000 B.C. The Aryan race still occupied territories on both sides of the Indus (1). In the following period, Vedic Civilization has given birth to many of the oldest Hindu universities globally, with books as a world-famous educational medium. Taxila University or Taksasila is the oldest university with the largest and most comprehensive collection of books on earth. (2) states the taxasila university is estimated to exist in 1000 BC-500 AD. Taksasila was known as the center of education in 700 BC. The university is a vast building complex consisting of several lecture halls, discussion rooms, dormitories, and a huge library (3). The first Bactrian invader to reach Taxila was Demetrius, son-in-law of Antiochus the Great [c. 190 BC], who carried his troops successfully through Kabul's valleys, Punjab, and Sind.

The *Upaniṣad*, an essential part of the Vedic corpus, is a reference for the Vedic education system and was developed at various times and in Hindu civilization. But unfortunately, Hindu education today seems to lose its roots amid modern education patterns. Vedic Education pattern should be back on its primary source of the *Upaniṣads*. *Upaniṣad's* main purpose of education is to build superior human character by developing various aspects and dimensions such as intellectual, understanding, attitude, emotional to spiritual. Hinduism believes that human development must be done holistically and simultaneously and cannot be done partially. *Upaniṣad* education is more critical for awakening humans, realizing all their potential, and making them empowered and capable of creating outstanding contributions to their lives. Thus, the purpose of human life will be achieved. Another essential feature is the very high level of literacy. Students must have the strength of understanding, the ability to remember and analyze the obtained learning. In the Vedic system, education is carried out for twelve years at the beginning of human life or known as the *Brahmacari* period. *Brahmacari* or education period was preceded by a ceremony, called *upanayana*, and ends with *samavartana* indicating that the student has mastered the learning implied.

The *Upaniṣads* are an integral part of the Vedic Scriptures dealing with philosophy and knowledge [*jñanakanda*]. The *Upaniṣads,* in particular, are the books of scholars who deal with education and efforts to increase understanding, knowledge and sharpen the machine of human intelligence (4). The *Upaniṣad* is taken from the word *Upa* [near], *ni* [below], *sad* [sitting], so below, and nearby. A group of *Siṣya* [disciples] sit near the teacher to study *Upaniṣad* teachings, examine their most essential matters, and present them to the *Siṣya* near them. According to *Śri Śankara*, the word Upaniṣad is taken

from the word sad, let go, attain or destroy with upa and ni as the prefix and kvip as the ending (5). The *Upaniṣad* series is a literature that has continued to develop since time immemorial. Their number exceeds 200, although tradition puts the number at 108. As part of the Vedas, the *Upaniṣads* are included in *Śruti* or revealed literature (4). Initially, the Vedic texts, including the Upaniṣad, were passed down orally from one generation to the next as a medium for life learning. It is generally accepted that the *Upaniṣads* amount to 108 types, each of which belongs to the Veda *Śruti* [Samhita] branch. (6) several important *Upaniṣads,* an integral part of the Vedic Corpus, are shown in the following table.

TABLE 1: The Upanisads within the Vedic Corpus (6)

ṚGVEDA	YAJURVEDA			SĀMAVEDA	ATHARVAVEDA
	Black (Kṛṣṇa)		White (Śukla)		
Ṛgveda Saṃhitā	Taittirīya Saṃhitā	Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā	Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā	Sāmaveda Saṃhitā	Atharva Saṃhitā (Śaunaka)
Aitareya Brāhmaṇa Kauṣītaki/Śānkhāyana Brāhmaṇa	taittirīya Brāhmaṇa		Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa	Talavakāra (Jaiminīya) Brāhmaṇa	Gopata Brāhmaṇa Chāndogya Brāhmaṇa
Aitareya Āraṇyaka Śāṅakhanaya Āraṇyaka	Taittirīya Āraṇyaka				
Aitareya Upaniṣad Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad	Taittirīya Upaniṣad Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad	Kāṭha Upaniṣad	Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad Īśa Upaniṣad	Chāndogya Upaniṣad jaiminīya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa Kena Upaniṣad	Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad Praśna Upaniṣad-Muṇḍakya Upaniṣad

A great scientist in the history of Indian Philosophy, *Śankaracarya*, emphasized eight main *Upaniṣads* which can be a comprehensive reference in the discussion of philosophy and basic concepts of Vedic Education. The eight *Upaniṣads* are *īśā, kena, kaṭha, taittirīya, aitareya, muṇḍaka, māṇḍūkya*, and *paśna* (7). This article uses the *Upaniṣad* references from the *Śankaracarya* to elaborate on Hindu Literacy. In his article Literacy And Rationality In Ancient India [9], Bronkhorst describes the literacy and rationalization patterns used by several Vedic history figures who drove the intellectual revolution in the Indian tradition. It is the Upaniṣad, which is the driving torch of Education in Hindu Civilization.

This study will discuss how the basic concepts of Hindu education and literacy in *Upaniṣads*. This study aims to analyze how the basic concepts of education and literacy in *Upaniṣad* can be reflected in Indonesia's current situation amid the shallow literacy levels. These thought results are expected to reflect the Hindu education system's improvement and efforts to increase literacy to increase national literacy.

2. Research Method

This research is a qualitative research that focuses on text. Text study is a data analysis that examines the text in depth regarding its content, meaning, structure, and discourse. The first thing to do is the principle of organizing to obtain complete knowledge by finding truth in texts, objects, people, and oneself (8). Swami Dayananda argued that Veda is an utterance from God, spoken by God [*svatah pramana*]. Still, there have been many misinterpretations so that what is understood is ultimately a mistake.

For this reason, an effort to interpret it is necessary (9). The steps that must be done are: First, he analyses the composite words according to Sandhi's rules. Secondly, he gives the *padārtha*; these components' systematic explanation indicates their meaning. The third step is constructing the whole sentence in a straightforward grammatical form. Finally, he gives the bhāvārtha. It explains' the purport of the text, indicating whether it is an injunction, a statement of principle or some comparison. Thus the meaning of the text will be understood, showing an order, a statement of principle, or some comparison. This principle of comprehensive Vedic interpretation has been used for a long time by Hindu thinkers. Some of the famous name of Hindu thinkers namely, *Śankara*, the formulator of the *Advaita*, *Rāmānuja* of the *Viśistādvaita* group; *Nimbārka* who conveyed the idea of *bhedābedhavāda* or the theory of difference and no difference; *Madhva*, enforcer of the theory of dualism and *Vallabh*a, exponent of *śuddhādvaitavāda* (10). (11) states that the Vedic interpretation method has been used in building philosophical system arguments such as the *Mīmāṃsā, Nyāya, Vedānta*, and *Navya-Nyāya*.

Researchers use the basic Sanskrit knowledge system in a complex arrangement of relationships between arguments, texts, writers, and scientific disciplines. Texts not only interpret but also construct new meaning structures, new ways of understanding. The *Upaniṣads* texts studied were *īśā, kena, kaṭha, taittirīya, Maitreya, muṇḍaka, māṇḍūkya*, and *paśna*. The *Upaniṣads* texts are organized, read comprehensively, interpreted, and written according to this research's aims. As a comparison and efforts to validate

the data, the authors use Paul Ricoeur's interpretation method and also Ethnographic Content Analysis [ECA] content analysis.

Thus, this research procedure follows the Vedic Hermeneutic pattern (12), consisting of four stages. The First Stage [1] is the research preparation stage, which includes selecting and obtaining the text, checking the text's authenticity to be studied, and determining the approach to be used. Next is to read the entire predetermined text intently and make paraphrases. The second stage [2] is the stage of data collection. Data collection is related to data selection and reduction activities, concluding, and data verification. The third stage [3] the stage of analyzing the data. The last step [4] concludes. Vedic Hermeneutic's use has been carried out from the first to the last stage, namely interpreting the Vedic text, which is carried out by checking the origin and meaning of words to the context Vedic Mantra.

3. Results and Discussion

Indonesia, in its history since Independence, has struggled to improve the literacy of its people. It was started with a literacy program and efforts to improve skills. Since 2000, Indonesia has concentrated on increasing literacy related to empowerment, including increasing community interest in reading (13). Efforts to increase literacy by the government should be welcomed by all groups, including the Hindu community and universities, because this is related to the spirit of Hindu education in the *Upaniṣad*, which promotes learning to achieve enlightenment. The spirit of education and literacy became the basis for the *Upaniṣad* and other Vedic texts. Ancient Hindu education can be a spirit for education in the modern era to build excellent human resources (14).

The *Upaniṣads* are a source of learning, education, and literacy. The *Upaniṣad* contains the torch of the spirit of education and efforts to develop intelligent people. Students are taught to spend 12 years studying diligently various knowledge using several methods. The *Upaniṣad* uses diverse learning and discussion methods. Namely, the enigmatic method, aphoristic method, etymological method, mythical method, analogical method, dialectical method, synthetic method, monologic method, ad hoc or temporizing method, and regressive method (15). This method can be used separately or simultaneously following the learning context. This method aims to build rationality from the beginning to improving human intelligence machines and achieving enlightenment. This is in line with the opinion (16) that rationality and the ability to remember are the main things in Vedic learning. Besides, there are three essential stages of learning in

the Upaniṣad, namely *Śravana*, learning by hearing, *Mañana*, thinking and reflection, and *Nidhidhysana*, a realization by meditation [18]. This learning stage leads students to understand a subject and feel, absorb, apply, and realize the genuine truth in their lives. Thus happiness in education will be handled. This is different from modern education, which is felt as a burden by students. *Upaniṣad* learning pleasures the education process and afterward, because the knowledge provided leads to true happiness in life [Lee, 2016]. Students or *Brahmacari* are the main pillars of *Upaniṣad* education [19]. Therefore, he must get the right education through a good system and truly competent teachers.

Education in the *Upaniṣad* implies mastery of certain branches of knowledge, having a good understanding, memory, and at the same time, the most profound dimensions of enlightenment to achieve liberation. Education aims at cultivating humility. Therefore, literacy is not just understanding, reading, but achieving the primary goal of learning in the *Upaniṣad*, which builds a superior human character marked by attaining the highest enlightenment. Therefore, at the final stage, *Nidhidhysana* is needed, namely self-realization, inner understanding through *samadhi*.

The learning method in the past, in addition to using the technique of *Śravana* or Listening, *Mañana* or meditation, and *Nididhyaana* or realization, some other methods such as experience, question, and answers, discourse, discussion and debate lecture Also were prevalent. These methods can still be used in our classrooms faithfully. Besides, there is another instruction that strengthens a student, namely *svadhyaya.* It is also stated that the Vedic Pedagogy is supported by dual methods in the form of upadesa and svadhyaya, namely the first learning in the form of instruction from the teacher then repeated privately by students [20]. Besides, the *Upaniṣad* literature also recommends the *upāsanā* method, a ritual related to learning, which shows a student's obedience and devotion to his teacher, which is an essential key to education success. It is also stated [21] that *upāsanā* can be described as a systematic practice of the worship method to please a teacher, and students absorb knowledge and good attitudes from the teacher. This method is still considered relevant in the current educational context.

This point is intensely discussed in the *Śikṣāvalli Taittiriya Upaniṣad*. The teacher, at the same time, becomes a role model in learning that he will speak to the student of truth, *satyaṃvadiśyāmi*, and he will speak to the student of truth, *ṛtaṃvadiśyāmi.* These two words, which have been used, *ṛtaṃ*and *satyaṃ*, are central in the Educational process [22]. The emphasis on the truth and righteousness in the Upaniṣads and their connection are similar to what we find in Socrates' Famous doctrine, "Virtue is Knowledge."

Following Das's [2015] opinion, the Vedas and *Upaniṣads* have provided powerful enlightenment in building brilliant knowledge patterns. Theorization has been the most challenging part of science. The Vedas and *Upaniṣads* significantly strengthen together to help explain and establish an inseparable, but a variant, relationship between linguistics, literary science, and empirical science (22). The research results from Ferrer [2018] (19) also show the superiority of the education pattern applied in Vedic Education in the *Upaniṣads* and continue to roll in the spirit of Hindu education even though times are changing. Several educational methods and patterns continue to be used and proven to be superior in building all human life dimensions.

An educated people in the *Upaniṣad* are called by various names such as *Vidvān, Snātaka*, and at a higher level are called *Upādhyāya, Jñānī*, and *acarya*, which indicate the mastery of knowledge and at the same time are wise humans. This is the highest intellectual attainment in Vedic civilization. These educated people are, at the same time, a symbol of wisdom. They are expected to move the wheels of education, increase public knowledge, and encourage society to become a civilized community and uphold the principles of virtue [*dharma*].

In the *Śikṣāvalli Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, it is emphasized that students must be able to control physically and mentally to remain firm in learning. The teacher and student must jointly realize the virtues as stated in the holy text and confirm it in the form of practice in good deeds and speech (21). Concepts like this are essential to be adopted and revived to build an education system that fosters everyone's virtue and the much needed intellectual abilities. (23) stated that education in the *Upaniṣad* implies the development of high moral character and integrity. However, it cannot be separated from what Western science calls the scientific method of learning. It was widely used in ancient *Upaniṣad* Education.

Relevant to the condition of education and literacy today, the concept of Hindu education must be linked back to its spirit in ancient education, which was applied in the *Upaniṣad* era. Furthermore, it continued with establishing the oldest university globally, until the model can still be found in the kingdom era, including Nusantara. The greatness of a scholar is reflected in the following Sanskrit sources;

sva-deśe pūjyate rājā vidvān sarvatra pūjyate ‖ 58 ‖

"A king's reverence for his kingdom, a learned, wise man, the whole world respects him."

Panchatantra 2.58 (24)

The text asserts that a king is respected in his country only, whereas a learned person is respected worldwide. This sentence is not just motivation in taking education but an appreciation for educated people in Vedic Civilization. This sentence has given the inspiration to keep the education torch burning. The teacher has to go the extra mile to help students gain knowledge.

The Vedic period's education system has unique characteristics and qualities that were not found in the ancient education system of any other country in the world. According to Key, in his book entitled *Ancient Indian Education an Inquiry Into its Origin, Development, and Ideals*, Key stated that Brahmans develop an education system that survived in society's changes to achieve their aim the events of the empire's crumbling. Still, they also kept a glow of torch of higher learning [1].

Seeing the strong roots of education and literacy in the Vedas and *Upaniṣads*, Hindu Education Institutions should re-explore their education's cultural roots. It is essential to contribute to building a superior education system in the future because Hindu civilization has placed education and the center of development [25]. Besides, various knowledge and disciplines such as *Ānvīkṣikī* [research and reasoning science], *Tarka-Vidyā* [debate method], *Vāda Vidyā* [discussion method], and speech are the necessary skills of this century. Education in the *Upaniṣad* is not to earn a living or income, but to build a dignified life. It takes a more serious and earnest effort to integrate the spirit and several aspects of Ancient Vedic Education and the torch of literacy efforts to build an excellent education system and literacy spirit. The community should be an essential part of increasing the literacy torch to increase the number and spirit of literacy in Indonesia, which is still in the low rank of various countries in Southeast Asia.

This is in line with the statement [19] that through the ancient *Upaniṣads* Education, modern students can learn not only to understand but also to understand themselves and realize who they are deep inside to become aware of their identity. They realize it in freedom. The student can then awaken to a higher level of consciousness. Love and compassion for all beings develop naturally into service to others in real solidarity with all and the entire cosmos. This notion is the main reason why Vedic Education is considered to continue to be relevant even though advances in the world of education have continued throughout the centuries. Hindu ancient education still finds its significant breath amidst modern education.

4. Conclusion

In Vedic civilization, education has a prominent place in society. Education is a must for every person to be cultured. The student and teacher relationship is very close. The teacher provides direct examples of life learning. Various educational methods are used in the *Upaniṣad,* with the aim of awakening all human potential. Through educational efforts, it is hoped that the superior human character will be produced as a whole, which accentuates intelligence and wisdom. The great aim of Hindu education is character and the effort to achieve self-realization. Thus the ancient educational system achieved its full goal.

Upaniṣad learning still has relevance in the modern era, such as educational idealism, which develops human beings as a whole, not only smart but also wise. The discipline of teachers and students in the ancient era was very relevant to be developed. Students must be made aware of the importance of education in life, not just making a living. The *Upaniṣad* provides various teaching methods that lead students to enlightenment, apart from having brilliant abilities in their fields. This education torch's spirit must be adopted in modern times not to lose its main path, namely, to raise human excellence. Hindu literacy becomes the main foundation in the education system, which builds the machine of human intelligence and wisdom.

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