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Sama Vedic Upanishads - III

Maha Upanishad

Maha Upanishad describes the magnificence of Lord Vishnu who is also called Narayana. Lord Vishnu is the developer of the whole world who keeps it going. Lord Narayana resides in every being as life. He is also the protector of this whole world and keeps it going according to his wishes. His is the most supreme power. This Upanishad falls in the Sama Veda category of Upanishads and talks about the magnificence, power and Maya of Lord Vishnu through questions and answers among King Janak, Shukdev and Ribhu. This Upanishad comprises of six chapters which talk about the magnificence of Lord Vishnu, his power, Lord Brahma etc.

First Adhyaya

The first chapter of Maha Upanishad talks about Lord Narayana's magnificence. It says that only Lord Vishnu existed prior to the creation of the world. There was nothing before him. There was no Brahma, Shiva, water, fire, air, heaven, earth, sun, moon etc. Lord Vishnu then created fourteen elements including nature, ten body parts, soul, knowledge, pride, mind, karma etc. After this, Lord Brahma and Lord Shiva originated. A drop of sweat fell from his head and gave rise to a golden egg, out of which Lord Brahma originated with four heads. In the east, Gayathri, Rigveda, Devas and fire originated. In the west, Vedas and Air originated. In the north, Sama Veda and Sun originated. In the south, Atharvaveda originated. Post this; different Devas originated who worshipped Lord Narayana. Lord Narayana should be worshipped with total devotion.

Second Adhyaya

The second chapter of Maha Upanishad talks about the world and life in it. It has been talked about by conversations among Sage Vyasa, King Janak and Shukdev. Once, Shukdev wanted to know everything about this world and life. He thus went to Sage Vyasa to know about everything and clear his doubts. He asked Sage Vyasa about the creation and end of the world. Shukdev also tells Sage Vyasa that he already knows about all this but he wants to know about a different point of view. Sage Vyasa says that he can only tell this much to Shukdev and if he wants to know more, he would have to visit King Janak of Mithila district. So, Shukdev visits King Janak.

Shukdev visits King Janak to ask him the same questions that he asked Sage Vyasa. King Janak says that he would only be able to meet him in sometime and till then Shukdev should rest. Shukdev does so. King Janak tests him by making food arrangements with a lot of different delicacies. Nothing is able to attract Shukdev and this impressed King Janak. He meets Shukdev and asks him about his questions.

Shukdev was still not satisfied with King Janak's answers. He said that he was told the same things by Sage Vyasa. He says that the mind and the heart are unstable and are attracted to a lot of different things which create problems. He wanted to know the meaning and importance of life.

King Janak says that a person attains salvation when he understands the true meaning of life. He says that life is meaningless and destructible. In order to attain salvation, a person should understand this and should sacrifice all wants and desires. A person is a part of every soul when he sacrifices everything. A person is free from the cycles of life and death when he is free from all emotions including anger, pride, happiness, sorrow etc. Such a person is neutral in every situation. He should have a pure soul. This state is supreme and a person experiences immense pleasure and contentment in this state. Knowing all this, Shukdev calms down and all his doubts were cleared.

Third Adhyaya

The third chapter of Maha Upanishad talks about the world being destructible and Saint Nidagh's thoughts. Saint Nidagh takes permission from his father and visits different pilgrimages. A question arises in his mind. He was curious about the creation of the world, Maya, sorrow, the stability of the world etc. He tells Ribhu that he has understood the world in a way according to which sacrificing everything lets you walk on the path of salvation. The world is destructible and a person should be free from all material desires to attain salvation.

Fourth Adhyaya

The fourth chapter of this Upanishad talks about the importance of salvation. Four ways to attain salvation mentioned in this chapter are Manonigraha, Vichar, Santosh and Satsang. A person doing any one of these is good in the other three too. These ways help a person to attain salvation. All these purify the mind and soul. They should be practiced regularly. A person gets closer to Lord Brahma by doing this.

A person should be neutral in all situations. He should neither be happy nor sad. He should not be worried about auspicious and inauspicious. Such a person is happy and content and walks on the path of salvation. A person should understand that the world is destructible and should not be attached to it. Such a person should understand his soul. This person possesses immense knowledge or Kaivalya. A person understanding the fact that he does not possess anything and everything belongs to Lord Brahma, walks on the path of salvation.

Fifth Adhyaya

In the fifth chapter of Maha Upanishad, Saint Ribhu tells his son about the different steps of knowledge. He

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says that there are seven steps to gain knowledge.

He says that pride is the basis for darkness of the mind. It entangles a person in a web of desires and wants so that he faces a lot of problems. Such a person is unable to understand the soul. The basis for knowledge is selflessness and satsang. Satsang gives rise to good feelings. It also keeps a person away from desires and wants so that he can walk on the path of salvation. A person with knowledge always performs auspicious actions and attains salvation.

Sixth Adhyaya

This chapter of Maha Upanishad talks about getting closer to Lord, the importance of samadhi and the procedure of worshipping. A person with knowledge understands that the world is destructible and he should not be attached to it. He should sacrifice all emotions, desires and wants. Such a person attains salvation. A person with no knowledge is always entangles in a web of sorrows and desires and can never walk on the path of salvation. A person should thus always perform auspicious actions and should be filled with good feelings.

Importance

The individual who studies this Maha Upanishad text, one who is not an authority on scriptures becomes an authority on scriptures, an uninitiated becomes initiated; he is purified by Agni, purified by Vayu, purified by Surya, purified by Soma, purified by truth, purified by all; he is known by all the gods, is meditated upon by all the Vedas, becomes one who has bathed in all the holy bathing places, and all sacrifices are performed by him; sixty thousand Gayatri stanzas are muttered by him, a hundred thousand stanzas of the Ithihaasa - puraanaas and of the Rudra - hymns are muttered by him, ten thousand pranavaas are chanted by him. He purifies the assembly as far as his sight reaches, he purifies up to the seventh generation (ancestors and descendants); thus has the exalted Hiranyagarbha promised. By muttering one attains immortality.

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