



Analysis of the First Mantra of Īśopaniṣad from Two Different Philosophical Perspectives

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Abstract : The *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad*, one of the principal Upaniṣads, has attracted significant philosophical interpretation across various philosophical schools. This paper comparatively analyzes two distinct commentarial traditions on its first mantra: the *Śāṅkara Bhāṣya* rooted in Advaita Vedānta and the *Tattvaparakāśikā Bhāṣya* composed by Amolakram Shastri, reflecting the Nimbārka school. Śāṅkarācārya interprets the mantra through the lens of non-dualism, asserting the omnipresence of the Supreme Self (Ātman) and advocating renunciation (tyāga) as a means to self-realization. He emphasizes the illusory nature of multiplicity and the need to perceive the Self as the substratum of all existence. On the other hand, the *Tattvaparakāśikā Bhāṣya* elaborates the inner purport of the Upaniṣad by affirming the dual reality of the sentient and insentient, governed under the divine auspices of Lord Hari (Śrī Kṛṣṇa), who resides in both individual and collective entities (Vyaṣṭi and Samaṣṭi). The commentary draws upon the Nimbārka philosophical framework of *bhedābheda* (difference-cum-non-difference) and underscores the importance of spiritual eligibility (adhikāritva) and detachment for true understanding. By comparing these two exegeses, the study highlights the distinct metaphysical and soteriological approaches within Vedānta, contributing to a deeper appreciation of the plurality of interpretations in Indian philosophical thought.

Keywords : Īśāvāsyopaniṣad, Śāṅkara Bhāṣya, Tattvaparakāśikā Bhāṣya, Advaita Vedānta, Nimbārka philosophy.

Introduction: The Īśopaniṣad stands as one of the most revered and foundational texts within the Upaniṣadic literature, forming a crucial link between Vedic ritualism and the introspective philosophies of later Hindu thought. Unlike many other Upaniṣads that are lengthy and discursive, the Īśopaniṣad is remarkably concise, composed of just eighteen mantras. Despite its brevity, it addresses profound metaphysical questions

concerning the nature of Īśvara, ātmā, vidyā, and avidyā, among others. The Īśāvāsyā Upaniṣad holds a unique place among the Upaniṣads as it is the only one incorporated directly into the Samhitā portion of the Vedas. Specifically, it forms the 40th chapter of the Śukla Yajurveda, setting it apart from other Upaniṣads that are typically found in the Brāhmaṇa or Āraṇyaka sections. The text is unique among the major Upaniṣads as it is embedded in the Śukla Yajurveda, blending elements of karma (action) and jñāna (knowledge), reflecting a transitional phase in Indian philosophy. Its opening mantra—rich in spiritual and metaphysical significance—has been the subject of extensive commentary by various philosophical schools over the centuries. Each tradition offers a distinctive interpretation based on its core doctrines and ontological commitments. The Īśopaniṣad has attracted the highest number of commentaries among all the Upaniṣads, reflecting its profound significance in the Indian philosophical tradition. It has been interpreted through both Vaidik (ritualistic) and philosophical lenses. This dual approach is largely due to its unique position within the Samhitā portion of the Śukla Yajurveda, which invites both exegetical treatments grounded in Vedic ritualism and deeper metaphysical analysis. As a result, it serves as a bridge between early Vedic thought and later philosophical inquiry.

This study draws upon two traditional commentaries: Tattvapraśāṅgikā and Śāṅkara Bhāṣya. Each of these texts offers a distinct philosophical perspective, reflecting the doctrinal frameworks of their respective schools. By engaging with these interpretations, the analysis aims to highlight the diversity of thought surrounding the first mantra of the Īśāvāsyā Upaniṣad. These commentaries serve as essential sources for understanding the nuanced meanings embedded in the verse.

Description of the Two Commentaries: The selected commentaries represent two distinct interpretations of Vedānta Philosophy. The *Śāṅkara Bhāṣya*, authored by Ādi Śāṅkarācārya, reflects the non-dualistic framework of Advaita Vedānta. On the other hand, the *Tattvapraśāṅgikā Bhāṣya*, written by Amalakarāma Śāstrī, is grounded in the dualistic-bhedābheda perspective of the Nimbārka school. These two interpretations are to be incorporated at this point in the discussion, in accordance with the respective primary sources from which they are derived. This ensures that the analysis remains both contextually grounded and faithful to the original commentarial traditions.

The first mantra of the Īśopaniṣad —

īśāvāsyamidamsarvamyatkiñca jagatyām jagat

tenatyaktenabhūñjīthāmāgr dhaḥ kasyasvid dhanam /¹

— conveys the idea that all that exists in the moving world, *jagat*, is pervaded or enveloped *āvāsyam* by the Supreme Being, referred to here as *īśa*, the Lord or the Ruler. The mantra emphasizes that everything within the universe, whether seen or unseen, is under the domain and regulation of a higher, all-encompassing principle. It further advises the individual to enjoy or make use of the world through rightful means *tenatyaktenabhūñjīthā*, implying a life of moderation, non-possessiveness, and ethical restraint. The concluding part — *māgr dhaḥ kasyasvid dhanam* — warns against covetousness and the desire for the wealth or possessions of others, promoting contentment and self-discipline. Overall, the mantra encourages a vision of the world as sacred and interconnected, where responsible action and inner detachment are essential for harmonious living. Dr. E. Röer interprets the meaning of the first mantra of the Īśopaniṣad as follows:

“Whatever exist in this world, is to be enveloped by (the thought of) God (the Ruler). By renouncing it (the world), thou shalt save (thy soul). Do not covet the riches of anyone.”

This translation emphasizes the ethical and spiritual aspects of the text, highlighting inner detachment and reverence for the divine presence that pervades all existence.

Śāṅkara Commentary: The first commentary examined in this study is the *Śāṅkara Bhāṣya*. Śāṅkarācārya is regarded as the most prominent among the classical commentators on the Upaniṣads. He composed authoritative commentaries on all eleven principal Upaniṣads, through which he systematically established and articulated the doctrine of Advaita Vedānta. His interpretations have had a profound and enduring influence on the development of Indian philosophical thought.

In his commentary on the *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad*, Śāṅkarācārya interprets the term *īśā* as referring to the Lord, who is both the inner ruler and the true Self of all beings. The phrase “*Īśāvāsyamidamsarvam*” is understood to mean that everything in the world—both movable and immovable—should be perceived as pervaded by the Self, which is identical with the Supreme Lord. According to Śāṅkara, the apparent multiplicity of the world is a superimposition upon the non-dual Self, similar to the way bad odour arising from moisture in sandalwood is removed by revealing its true fragrance when rubbed. This realization dissolves the false notions of agency and enjoyment attributed to the Self. The term *tyaktena* is interpreted not as a participle but as the abstract noun ‘renunciation’, implying that one should renounce desires rather than merely give up objects. Śāṅkara argues that renunciation leads to inner security and self-realization, unlike external abandonment, which severs all meaningful connections. The phrase “*māgrdhaḥ kasyasvid dhanam*” is taken as an injunction against greed, highlighting that since all is the Self, wealth does not truly belong to anyone. Thus, desiring wealth is to pursue an unreality, as the realization of the Self renders all such distinctions illusory.³

Tattvapraśāṅkā Commentary: The second commentary is *Tattvapraśāṅkā Bhāṣya* by Amolakram Shastri. This commentary is based on the eighteen mantras of the *Īśopaniṣad* as preserved in the Kāṇva recension. It forms part of a larger work titled *Īśādyastopaniṣad*, in which the author offers interpretations of not only the *Īśopaniṣad* but also eight other principal Upaniṣads. The commentary reflects the doctrinal orientation of the Nimbārka school, providing both textual expositions and philosophical analyses.

In the opening verses of his commentary, Amolakarāma Śāstrī outlines the lineage *Ācārya-Paramparā* of the Nimbārka tradition, beginning with Śrī Harīśa Bhagavān and extending through sages such as Sanaka, Sanandana, and Nārada, culminating in Nimbārka as the principal teacher. He pays homage to key successors of the tradition and then proceeds to interpret the *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad* in alignment with their doctrinal teachings, particularly emphasizing the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa concept central to the school.⁴

The commentator presents a detailed exposition of the *Īśopaniṣad* from the perspective of the Nimbārka school of philosophy, emphasizing the dual yet dependent reality of the sentient and insentient world under the divine supervision of Lord Hari. This subordination arises due to the lack of inherent self-sufficiency and the inert nature of these entities, a view supported by the concluding verses of the *Vājaseyanī Saṁhitā*. The teachings of the Upaniṣad, according to this interpretation, are intended not for the general populace but for

spiritually competent individuals—those who have cultivated vairāgya (dispassion) through the renunciation of worldly desires, which is a prerequisite for receiving such esoteric knowledge.⁵

The term “Īśa” is etymologically derived from the root √ईश्, meaning “to govern” or “to possess lordship” *Īśaiśvarye*. Grammatically, with the affix kvip(स्वार्थे क्विप् प्रत्यय), it yields the form Īśaḥ, denoting one who inherently possesses supreme sovereignty. The commentary elaborates that the Īśa, or supreme ruler, is none other than Lord ŚrīKṛṣṇa, identified as *Puruṣottama*—the Supreme Person. He is described as the destroyer of ignorance, bondage, and suffering; the embodiment of truth, knowledge, and infinity; and the possessor of innumerable divine qualities such as compassion, majesty, and omniscience. As the creator and sustainer of both the individual (vyāṣṭi) and cosmic (samaṣṭi) realms, and as one who is comprehensible only through the Vedānta, he pervades all creation while remaining transcendent. This interpretation affirms the central Nimbārka tenet of a personal, saguna (qualified) Brahman who is both immanent and transcendent.⁶

In the first mantra of the Īśopaniṣad, Śaṅkarācārya’s commentary (ŚaṅkaraBhāṣya) emphasizes the AdvaitaVedānta view that the entire world, both movable and immovable, is ultimately unreal and must be renounced through the knowledge that the Self (Ātman) is non-different from Brahman, the inner ruler of all. The mantra is interpreted as an exhortation to see all as the Self and abandon worldly desires, thereby attaining liberation. In contrast, the *TattvaparakāśikāBhāṣya* by AmolakramaShastri, representing the Nimbārka school, interprets the mantra theistically, asserting that the universe, comprising sentient and insentient beings, is under the divine governance of Lord Hari (Kṛṣṇa), who is distinct yet intimately related to the world. The principle of *bhedābheda* (difference and non-difference) is central here, affirming both the immanence and transcendence of the Lord. While Śaṅkaraemphasizes inner realization and renunciation, the *Tattvaparakāśikā* stresses devotional submission and divine guidance.

Conclusion: The first mantra of the Īśopaniṣad serves as a profound ground for diverse philosophical interpretations. While Śaṅkarācārya’sAdvaita perspective underscores the renunciation of worldly attachments through the realization of the non-dual Self, the Nimbārka school’s *TattvaparakāśikāBhāṣya* emphasizes the divine governance of Lord Hari and advocates devotion grounded in the doctrine of *Svābhāvīkabhedābheda*. These interpretations reflect the broader plurality of Vedāntic thought. Thus, the same mantra becomes a unifying yet distinctive basis for multiple schools of Indian philosophy.

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3. Śaṅkarācārya. *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad: With the Commentary of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya.* Translated by M. Hiriyanna, Sri Vani Vilas Press, 1911. p. 4-6.
4. श्रीमद्धंसं कुमारंश्च देवर्षिं नारदं नुमः ।
हृत्तमोनाशने शक्तं निम्बभानुं गुणार्णवम्॥
श्रीकृष्णाय नमस्तस्मै राधिकानन्ददायिने ।
परमानन्दसन्दोह सान्द्रानन्द वपुष्मते॥

अनन्यनृपतिं वन्दे शुचिरत्नमहोदधिम् ।

आशुधीरस्य शिष्यं श्रीहरिदासं दयानिधिम्॥

स्वामिनीशरणं नत्वा सकलदेशिकोक्तितः ।

ईशोपनिषदो व्याख्यां व्याकरवाणि यथामति॥

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5. Ibid. p. 1-3.

⁶ Ibid. p. 2.