

Significance of 'Om' Mantra in Indian Scriptures

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ABSTRACT

Background: Om mantra is powerful mantra that has been in practice since Vedic era to enhance mental capacity and spiritual upliftment. The word 'Om', which is symbolized as "ॐ", is not merely a word or symbol it holds profound meaning in Hinduism and spirituality. Om is also named Pranav which is God itself. **Aim:** This study aims to analyze om mantra and its various benefits, its spiritual and mental significance describes in various Indian scriptures. **Method:** The study reviewed multiple Indian scripture to explore the profound meaning, method of practicing pronunciation, various benefits and spiritual and mental significance of Om mantra. The proposed study used the Indian knowledge of Purāna, Upanisad and other texts that described the Om mantra in great detail. **Result:** This review article employs primary data to explore the Om mantra. It involved an in-depth search of ancient texts to examine the Om mantra's significance. The study includes scriptures with detailed descriptions of the Om mantra, and these texts were thoroughly reviewed to gain a deeper understanding of its meanings and implications, pronunciation, practice and its impact on practitioner. **Discussion:** Om is prime mantra and used at the beginning of every mantra, Vedic-teachings and all spiritual practices. The spiritual significance and the subtle power of om on human mind, and life was mentioned in ancient Indian scriptures. The present study presents the concept of om (Pranav) described in various scriptures in Indian knowledge system. The om is symbolic or word manifestation of God, the supreme consciousness. The origin and meaning of om mantra, its method of practicing and various benefits has been mentioned in Indian scriptures by various Indian sages and seers after profound observation and realization. **Conclusion:** The Pranav is omnipresent and act as protector in one's life who practice Pranav mantra. The Pranav is practiced by pronouncing Om which contains four mātrā which brings joy, peace to life and fulfil all wishes. The various style of recitation yields different results in practitioner's life. Sages suggested to practice Om mantra to get liberation from the world or worldly pleasure.

Keywords: Om, Mantra, Indian Scriptures, Pranav, Purāna, Upanisad, Yoga

SIGNIFICANCE OF 'OM' MANTRA IN INDIAN SCRIPTURES

INTRODUCTION

Vedic hymns are mantra that are offered as prayer in front of deities. The mantra holds medicinal power and also protect us from illusion of this world. Every mantra holds special significance. In Hindu dharma, every deity has one special mantra that protect practitioner from sorrows and troubles and lead one to tranquility and peace. Om is primal, supreme mantra. The word 'Om' is the first word of this universe which is itself a god in the form of sound [1]. Pranav, Udgeetha, Oṃkāra, Akṣarabrahma are other names of 'Om'. The Om has been mentioned in many Indian scriptures as Pranav. Om is Pranav (God). Sage Patañjali has mentioned that Pranav is the signifier of God. The word Pranav is Brahmā, because it cannot be used for any other living being apart from the Supreme Soul due to being an eternal signifier. As the Pranav is the sound form of the God, hence Pranav is also called śabda brahmā. The sages, in the higher state of Samadhi, realized Brahma in the form of the sound of Om, i.e. realized God. Pranava is called as seed of Brahma which is the essence of the Vedas and is used before all mantras. The Pranav mantra is extremely powerful, infinite and limitless. The Bṛhad Yogayājñavalkya scripture lists ten names for Pranava, that are- Oṃkāra, Praṇava, Sarvavyāpin, Ananta, Tāraka, Śukla, Vidyut, Haṃsa, Turya and Parabrahma [2]. The Śrī Viṣṇu Purāṇa describes 'Om' as the ruler of all sounds, stating that just the utterance of 'Om' alone scares away demons [3]. The Yajurveda Saṃhitā advises remembering 'Om' [4]. 'Om' is considered the first word of the world. "Om" is regarded as the eternal sacred sound. it is extremely powerful, infinite, and limitless. The three words A, U, and M make up the word "Om." The A (aahhh) sound denotes the beginning of the universe and all of its vast objects. "Ahh" is the root sound of all sounds. The U (oooh) sound stands for the sustaining energy of the universe and, thus, for the mental impressions that are subtle. It connects us to a deeper feeling of something beyond what our senses can see and feel. The M (mmmm) sound stands for thoughts and beliefs as well as the transformational force of the universe. This sound makes one realise, they are all one. 'Om' is the name of God, which is devoid of gender. In Sanskrit grammar, there is a description of three genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter, but Pranav is beyond all three genders. 'Om' is above all mantra. It is imperishable and contains the past, present and future. 'Om' is the Omnipotent and Omnipresent sound. As a result, it is

also known as Pranav; the energy that drives our 'Prāṇa' [5]. In Śrīmadbhagavadgītā, Shri Krishna manifests himself as a supreme god by addressing himself Pranav. Lord Krishna Says 'Praṇavaḥ Sarvavedeṣu' it means, I am Pranav in all the Vedas [6]. Vasiṣṭha Saṃhitā has mentioned Pranav as mono-syllable light which contain everything and all deities are being evoked through recitation of 'Om' mantra [7]. In the Śrī Śiva Mahāpurāṇa, Pranav is called as Dhvaniliṅga and Nādaliṅga and it was explained that practitioner can get the knowledge and destiny in one's life through chanting Pranav [8]. In the Agni Purāṇa, it is said that Pranav is the essence of all mantras, and actions performed with Pranav are complete and nothing is complete without it [9]. Maḥarṣi Kālidāsa called Pranav, a primal mantra and is used at the beginning of all mantras [10]. In Śrī Vāmana Purāṇa, abandoning the chanting of Pranava is termed sinful [11]. The "Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad describes the significance of "Om" in its very first verse, declaring Omkara to be everything (idaṃ sarvaṃ), the past, present, and future, as well as whatever exists beyond the threefold time. As the ultimate Brahma, it has four quarters: the waking state (jāgrat) presided by universal man (vaiśva nara), the dream state (svapna) presided by illumined being (tejas), the deep sleep state (śuṣupta) presided by intelligent being (prajñā), and the transcendental state (turiya) presided by the individual Self (ātman).

The Śrīmadbhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa describes that Pranava is the symbol (Liṅga) of the Supreme Brahmā, the Paramātmā. The symbol of the supreme entity referred as Brahmā, its form is 'Om' itself, is beginningless and unmanifest. Lord Brahma composed the entire alphabet through 'Om'. This 'Om' manifests from the heart-space of the Supreme Being, appearing as the great Vedic speech [12].

AIM

The aim of this study is to explore and analyze the significance, meanings, and interpretations of the Om mantra by referencing and comparing the explanations provided in diverse ancient texts and literary sources. This study intended to provide a deeper understanding of the mantra's role and significance in historical and spiritual contexts.

METHOD

The present study offers a comprehensive and in-depth review of the Om mantra, a fundamental concept in ancient spiritual traditions. This research incorporates a wide range of books and texts that elucidate the methods, material aspects, spiritual significance, and benefits associated with the Om

mantra. To achieve a thorough understanding, the study draws on data from several sources, each providing detailed descriptions of ancient scriptures. This data was meticulously collected through an exhaustive review process, which involved examining various ancient texts that discuss the Om mantra in depth.

The research methodology included a systematic text-to-text analysis. This approach involved comparing and contrasting different texts to uncover deeper insights and nuances related to the Om mantra. By performing this detailed textual analysis, the study aims to enhance the understanding of the Om mantra's significance and its applications in spiritual practices.

RESULT

This review article employs primary data to conduct an in-depth exploration of the Om mantra. The research involves a thorough investigation of ancient texts, which are crucial for understanding the multifaceted significance of the Om mantra. The study systematically examines a range of scriptures that provide detailed descriptions of the Om mantra. These texts are essential for uncovering various aspects of the mantra, including its pronunciation, the proper methods of its practice, and its spiritual and practical implications.

By thoroughly reviewing these scriptures and performing a detailed analysis of the texts, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Om mantra's significance, its practice, and its impact on those who engage with it. This holistic approach ensures a deeper appreciation of the Om mantra's role in spiritual and everyday life.

DISCUSSION

The present study is an attempt to give perspective of om mantra that has been portrayed in ancient texts including Purāṇa, Upaniṣad. The study used intensive review method from various books to explore better understanding of the Pranav (om) which is core of Indian spiritual and hold significant meaning in Hinduism. Ample of studies concluded significant role of om mantra in mitigating various mental issues. In addition, the practice of Om has profound foundation in spiritual upliftment and self-realization.

Pranav: Meaning and Etymology

Maharshi Patanjali has mentioned in his Philosophy that "tasya vaachaka pranavah", means that thou (God) name is pranav. The word 'Pranav' derived by adding 'Pra' as a prefix and root

'nul' from ridorap. 'ap' as suffix with meaning "Prakarṣeṇa nūyate stūyate ātmā sveṣṭadevatā vāneneti", which is the form of Trideva (Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Maheśvara), to whom reverence is paid through Pranav [13]. It is used to praise the one's supreme deity.

To answer the quest why is it called Pranav Vāṭukopaniṣad states that it is called Pranava because through its recitation, the Ṛigveda, Yajurveda, Sāmaveda, Atharvaveda and the Brahmā are all saluted and greeted, hence it is called Pranava [14]. The word om, whose chant removes the deception, is known as 'Pranava'. It leads excellently towards liberation, and for this reason, it is called 'Pranava' [15]. the word Pranav is used in the meaning of omnipresent and protector.

Pranav And Mātrā (Syllables)

Pranava consists of three mātrā (syllables) and one ardhamātrā (half-syllable). It has a pluta mātrā (elongated syllable) due to the presence of 'O' and becomes trimātrā (three syllables), and the letter 'M' is ardhamātrā (half syllable), as per the "Omabhyarāne" panini sutra. In Sanskrit Grammar, any word has one mātrā is called Haṣva (short), two mātrās it becomes Dīrgha (long), three mātrā is called Pluta (elongated) and consonants are ardhamātrā [16]. Pranava in the beginning of the mantra is pluta, making it consist of three mātrās, and the letter 'M' becomes the fourth mātrā, hence, Pranava is considered to be of four mātrā [17].

The description of four mātrā in the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, Gopatha Brāhmaṇa and Pāṇini grammar is different. In the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, 'A' is the first mātrā, 'U' is the second mātrā, 'M' is the third mātrā, and the fourth mātrā of the 'Omkaṛa' is considered as amātrā (without mātrā) [18]. According to panini grammar and the Gopatha Brāhmaṇa, Pranava is considered to be of four mātrās, consisting of three pluta mātrās, and the fourth consonant 'M' is ardhamātrā. The same has also described in Yogavāsiṣṭha [19]. The meditation on 'Om' is based on these mātrās, which has been defined in ancient scriptures yield various results.

Pronunciation and Recitation of the Pranava (Om)

The word 'Om' should be pronounced with a prolonged mātrā (pluta) and an elevated tone [20]. It has been said in Gopatha Brāhmaṇa that the pronunciation of the auspicious 'Om' begins with Pluta mātrā, in which 'A' is pronounced from throat and 'U' and 'M' from the lips, which ultimately increase the sound [17].

According to the Bṛhadayogī Yājñavalkya Smṛti, the

pronunciation of Pranava is like "Tailadhārāvadacchinam dīrghaḥaṅṭāninādat." means likened to the continuous flow of oil and the sound of a long bell [2]. Dhyānabindupaniṣad also stated that initial part of 'Om' remains soundless, akin to the continuous resonance of a long bell [21]. The Bṛhadayogī Yājñavalkya Smṛti, Yogavāsīṣṭha and Dhyānabindupaniṣad all describe the pronunciation of Pranava as akin to the continuous flow of oil and sound of a long bell, as stated in the Gopatha Brāhmaṇa, where it is said that 'Om' is an elevated tone and its pronunciation begins with a prolonged with a high tone and upward-moving sound, like the sound of a long bell.

In Patañjali Yoga Darśana, Sage Patañjali mentioned that recitation of Pranav must be done keeping meaning of Pranav in mind with devotion towards supreme god. It makes one's mind more concentrated and helps in attainment of yoga mind if the recitation was done with contemplating the supreme god and its qualities [22]. The description of the arrangement for the practice of chanting the sacred syllable 'Om' is mentioned in the Manusmṛti, the practitioner should sit facing the eastern direction on a Kuśa grass mat, purified by holy water then again purified by practicing three times pranayama. In this way becomes fit to chant 'Om'. In other words, one should begin chanting 'Om' after purifying oneself with the ritualistic purification of water, followed by pranayama. The Gopatha Brāhmaṇa also states that chanting 'Om' should be done facing the east, seated on a Kuśa grass mat to fulfill one's desires [17]. By describing the chanting of the Pranava, the Agni Purana stated that the Tūriya, the Supreme Brahmā, lights up as Pranav just as the house get light from the lamp so one should meditate on the Tūriya Brahmā like Pranava within the heart and chant it constantly. It further says that "vāṅmayas pranavaḥ sarvaṁ tasmāt praṇavamabhyaset", this means that the Pranava is complete literature, so one should practice chanting the Pranava [9].

The method of chanting Pranav Mantra along with Viniyoga is found in Puranas and Tantra texts. Viniyoga reveals the purpose of chanting the mantra, that is, the purpose for which the mantra is chanted is called Viniyoga. In Viniyoga, the worshiper who worships the mantra along with the sage, deity and sound of the mantra, fulfills his desired wish or duty.

According to Liṅga Purāṇa, the Pranav mantra has Gāyatrī as its goddess, Antaryāmī as its seer, the Supreme Being as its deity, and its application is attainment of peace and prosperity, in the fulfillment of desires, and in liberation [23]. In the Śiva

Mahāpurāṇa while describing the chanting of the Pranava, it is said that "pravṛttānām ca miśrāṇām sthūlapraṇavamīṣyate", this means that both those engaged in worldly activities and those who have renounced the world should chant the sthūla (gross) Pranava. It further says that those who wants worldly pleasure should recite Haṣva (short) Pranav and those who want liberation from this world should recite Dīrgha (prolonged) Pranav. the Pranava should be used at the beginning of Vyāhṛti and the commencement of mantras. It should also be chanted during the initiation of Vedic studies and during the Sandhya times of the day. Chanting a thousand Pranava mantra daily purifies a person [8].

In the Linga Purana, the Pranava is called Svādhyāya and described that: "svādhyāyastu japaḥ proktaḥ praṇavasya tridhā smṛtaḥ" This means that reciting the Pranava mantra in three ways is called Svādhyāya [24]. Maharṣi Vyāsa also states in the Yoga Bhāṣya that "Swadhyayah Pranavadipavitraanam jayah, means that chanting the Pranava and other sacred mantras is Svādhyāya [22]. In the Vyāsa Bhāṣya (commentary) of the Patañjala Yoga Sūtra, it is said that the chanting (japa) of sacred mantras such as 'Pranava' is called Svādhyāya. It is mentioned in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa that through Svādhyāya, the direct realization of the Supreme Being (Paramātmā) is attained [3]. In Indian educational scriptures, it is advised for to chant the sacred mantra 'Om' at the beginning and end of reciting the Vedas. In the Nirvāṇa Prakaraṇa of the Yogavāsīṣṭha, states that sitting on a soft Āsana (mat), controlling the senses and the activities of the mind, one should chant "Om" until the mind becomes serene¹⁹. The recitation of Pranava is done as a daily ritual, as a form of worship for desired and non-desired actions, for the attainment of peace, and for the fulfillment of various desires, as described in various scriptures.

Benefits of Pranava ('OM') Chanting:

'OM' is a symbol of the Supreme Being. Therefore, worshiping 'OM' is essentially worshiping the Supreme. Pranav is auspicious, purifying and fulfills all the desires, this Omkar is parabrahma, the leader of all mantras [2]. Worship of 'OM' become more effective when it is done with faith, devotion and Upaniṣad, so it is powerful. 'OM' is of the form of fearlessness and immortality. Knowing this, one who chants 'OM' praises the form of immortality and becomes fearless [25]. In the Linga Purana, it is said that by sitting in the north direction and chanting 'OM', one attains peace, and chanting 'OM' 27 times brings vitality [24]. In Śiva Mahāpurāṇa it was said "sahasramomiti japetsarvābhīṣṭam śivājñayā", it means that

by chanting 'Om' thousand times, lord shiva blessing helps in getting all desires fulfilled⁸. According to the Yogavāsiṣṭha, by the utterance of 'OM', one experiences the essence of sound up to the end of Prana. When consciousness becomes unified in the state of deep sleep, the vibration of the breath ceases [19].

In the Agni Purāṇa, the benefits of 'OM' chanting are described. 'OM' is capable of giving health and longevity. When 'OM', the great mantra, is chanted, it leads to immortality. Furthermore, the Agni Purāṇa states that through the practice of 'OM' chanting, peace is attained on the divine, celestial, and earthly levels. Even disturbances caused by demons are pacified [9]. In the Gopatha Brāhmaṇa, the benefits of 'OM' chanting are explained that whoever chants 'OM' a thousand times has all his desires fulfilled and all actions and aspirations are accomplished [17]. The Nārada Purāṇa states those who chant 'OM' daily are freed from all sins. By this practice, they attain the ultimate liberation [26]. The Patañjali Yoga Sūtra states that "tataḥ pratyakcetanadhiyamō apyantarāyābhavaśca" It means that Recitation of Pranav bring knowledge of the self and the removal of obstacles. Diseases, despair, doubt, negligence, laziness, indulgence, false perception, failure to attain concentration, and instability of the mind are obstacles in yoga. The absence of these obstacles is achieved through 'OM' chanting [27]. The daily practice of Om mantra is beneficial for mental health and physical as well.

The Bṛhadayogī Yājñavalkya Smṛti mentions the benefits of 'OM' chanting -one who is always engaged in the practice of 'OM' is never afraid of anyone. In times of suffering or danger, one should always remember 'OM' [2]. Gopatha Brāhmaṇa has described Omkar as the medicine of the soul, it is the salvation of the soul. Therefore, Om is used everywhere or permission, acceptance, study, teaching, auspicious meditation, initiation, in the beginning of mantras, in the beginning of scriptures, in yagya, penance, charity, self-study, evening prayers etc [17].

CONCLUSION

Pranava is the great sound of Brahmā, it is God, the Supreme signifier and auspicious. In addition, it is the beginning and end of Vedic teaching and education. 'OM' is the seed of all mantras and Upaniṣad, recitation of which leads towards attainment of yoga, liberation from sorrows and fears. Pranava is a monosyllabic mantra and is beneficial, through the chanting of 'OM', the praise of all the deities is accomplished. Mental peace is attained through the prolonged utterance of 'OM' in the Pluta tone, health is protected, and all aspirations

are fulfilled. Chanting 'OM' is study of self, its continuous repetition destroys all the sorrows of the practitioner.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

Author declares that there is no conflict of interests.

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