

The Transformative Power of AUM: An Ancient Mantra for Healing, Meditation, and Holistic Health

Manoj Bishnoi^{1*}, Kalpana Jain², Jitendra Jeenger³

¹Department of Yoga, Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India

²Department of Psychology, Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India

³Department of Psychiatry, Geetanjali Medical College & Hospital, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India

Corresponding author:

Manoj Bishnoi,

Research Scholar, Department of Yoga, Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur, Rajasthan, Phone: 8619883640, **Email:** saran25794@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

AUM, the primordial sound, holds a profound place in ancient Indian traditions, serving as both a sacred syllable and a therapeutic tool. Rooted in the phonemes *Akara* (A), *Ukara* (U), and *Makara* (M), AUM generates vibratory resonance (*nāda*) that harmonizes the body and mind. Recognized as sound symbol (*dhvanilinga*) and resonance symbol (*nādalimga*), AUM is a self-revealed (*svayambhū*) principle of Brahman. It is synonymous with imperishable (*aksara*), liberator (*tāraka*), *onkāra*, cosmic chant (*udgītha*), lightning (*vidyut*), and primordial hum (*pranava*). This article explores the significance of AUM through scriptural references, phonemic measures, and therapeutic applications.

AUM is fundamental to Vedic rituals and spiritual practices, symbolizing cosmic vibrations that underlie creation and consciousness. The *Chāndogyaopanisad* identifies AUM with Vedic chant (*udgītha*) and the Sun, reinforcing its connection to divine energy. Various Upanisads describe AUM as the ultimate reality, integrating it into meditation, mantra therapy, and health interventions. The phonetic components of AUM correlate with the states of wakefulness (*jāgrat*), dreaming (*svapna*), deep sleep (*susupti*), and transcendence (*turiya*), as elucidated in the *Māmukyaopanisad*. Additionally, the Agnipurāna and other texts link AUM to the three worlds, the Vedas, and the trinity of *Brahmā*, *Visnu*, and *Śiva*, signifying its multidimensional impact.

The physiological and psychological benefits of AUM chanting have gained attention in contemporary research. Studies suggest that chanting AUM modulates autonomic nervous system responses, reduces stress, and enhances cognitive function. The vibratory frequency of AUM stimulates the vagus nerve, promoting emotional stability and mental clarity. Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* (1.28) prescribes AUM chanting with contemplation of its meaning, emphasizing its role in meditation and spiritual growth. The *Yogavāsistha* and

Skandapurāna describe AUM as a remedy for sorrow and suffering, while the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* extols AUM as the essence of healing and liberation.

The structured repetition of AUM, known as *japa*, is practiced in various forms, including audible (*vācika*), whispered (*upāsa*), and mental (*mānasa*). The *Manusmṛti* recommends chanting AUM after *prānāyāma* to purify the mind and enhance concentration. Ritualistic recitations often involve prolonged intonations (*dirgha* and *pluta mātrā*), mimicking the resonance of a bell and leading to meditative absorption. The therapeutic potential of AUM extends to integrative medicine, where its application in sound healing, Yoga, and mindfulness practices is explored. Research highlights AUM's impact on heart rate variability, respiration, and neural synchrony, reinforcing its efficacy in holistic well-being.

AUM's phonemic composition and vibrational resonance contribute to its therapeutic properties. The rhythmic intonation aligns breath with mental focus, reducing anxiety and fostering a state of deep relaxation. The connection between AUM chanting and neurophysiological processes suggests its potential for therapeutic applications in stress-related disorders, emotional regulation, and cognitive enhancement. In the modern era, AUM is integrated into wellness programs, combining ancient wisdom with scientific insights to promote overall health.

In conclusion, AUM transcends religious and cultural boundaries, serving as both a spiritual and therapeutic instrument. Its significance is deeply embedded in Indian philosophical traditions, and its potential applications in contemporary health sciences continue to be explored. As research advances, AUM's role in integrative medicine, mental health, and holistic therapy is gaining recognition. This study reaffirms AUM's status as a powerful mantra, resonating through the realms of consciousness, well-being, and transcendence.

Keywords: AUM, Mantra, Therapy, Spiritual Healing, Meditation

INTRODUCTION

Indian sages, immersed in profound states of meditative absorption (*samādhi*), experienced cosmic sound (*nāda*) as the reverberation of AUM. Just as churning yogurt (*dadhi*) yields its essence - butter (*ghṛta*) - AUM is the distilled essence of all speech (*vānī*) and the Vedas. This is why AUM precedes every mantra, signifying reverence, permission, auspiciousness

(*mangala*), and initiation. Known as *Pranava*, *Omkāra*, *Ekāksara*, *Aksarabrahman*, and *Udgītha*, AUM is elucidated in the *Chāndogyopaniṣad* as *Atha khalu ya udgītha sa pranava yah pranavah sa udgītha iti. Asau vā āditya udgītha eva pranava om iti hyesa svaranneti*. This means that the *Udgītha* is *Pranava*, and *Pranava* is *Udgītha*. This Sun (*āditya*) itself is *Udgītha* and *Pranava*, for it perpetually resounds with AUM as it traverses the cosmos [1]. The *Chāndogyopaniṣad* thus identifies AUM with the Sun's cosmic resonance. *Mahākavi Kālidāsa*, in the *Raghuvamśa* (8.9), analogizes AUM to the primordial Vedic meter (*chandas*): "*Vaivasvato manur-nāma mānaniyo manisinām. Āsīn-mahīksitām-ādyah pranavaś-chandasām-iva*." which states that just as the sage-king Manu was the first among rulers, so too was *Pranava* the primal essence of the Vedas [2]. AUM encapsulates the entirety of existence. Its utterance invokes all divine energies (*devatā*), serving as both homage and invocation. The *Guru Granth Sāhib* underscores its therapeutic potency: "*Sarab roga kā aukhadu nāmu*" means the divine name is the panacea for all ailments [3].

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to explore and assess the profound transformative power of the AUM mantra, as described in ancient Indian texts, with a particular focus on its therapeutic, spiritual, and holistic benefits. The study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the AUM mantra's role in personal growth, health, and spiritual upliftment, as outlined in the Vedic scriptures and the practices of Indian saints and sages. Through a thorough examination of the relevant texts and a detailed analysis of the methodologies associated with AUM, the study aims to highlight its significance in human life, both as a means of healing and as a path for achieving meditative clarity and self-realization. Furthermore, the research intends to uncover the lasting impact of the mantra on physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, providing insights into how ancient practices continue to offer valuable solutions to contemporary challenges.

METHODOLOGY

The primary objective of this research is to explore the profound significance of AUM (*Onkāra*) mantra connection with various spiritual practices, and its therapeutic benefits. The methodology is structured around textual analysis, interpretative synthesis, and contemplative practices involving AUM. The present study offers a comprehensive and in-depth review of the Om mantra, a fundamental concept in ancient spiritual traditions.

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.

RESULTS

The analysis of ancient Indian scriptures, primarily from the Vedic tradition, revealed profound insights into the transformative power of AUM (Onkāra) as a sacred mantra. These texts provide a comprehensive account of the mantra's therapeutic potential across various domains, including personal growth, health, and spiritual upliftment. AUM was consistently described as a powerful tool for mental and emotional well-being. Regular chanting and meditation with AUM facilitated deeper introspection, leading to a greater understanding of one's true nature. Ancient sages emphasized the practice of AUM as essential for cultivating virtues such as compassion, wisdom, and detachment, aiding in the process of personal growth and self-discovery.

Through a thorough analysis of the practices described by Indian sages and saints over thousands of years, the study found that AUM has been an integral part of spiritual disciplines. Sages such as Patanjali and Vyasa incorporated AUM into their meditation and yoga practices as a means of deepening their connection to the self and the universe. Various methods of chanting and meditative techniques involving AUM were described, each designed to awaken specific aspects of consciousness and facilitate spiritual growth.

AUM: Etymology and Meaning

In Sanskrit, the term AUM primarily signifies the ultimate reality (*Brahman*), the primordial sound (*Pranava*), the sacred syllable (*Onkāra*), and the Supreme Lord (*Īśvara*). AUM is indeclinable (*avyayavācaka*), meaning it transcends grammatical genders (masculine, feminine, neuter) [4]. The *Shiva Mahapurana* explains *Pranava* thus: "*Prah prapañco hi nāsti vo yusmākam pranavam viduh. Prakarsena nayed yasmān moksam vah pranavam vidur. Nūtanam vai karotīti pranavam tam vidur budhāh.*" which means that *Pranava* is that which dissolves worldly illusions (*prapañca*). It is called *Pranava* because it leads to liberation (*moksa*). The wise named it *Pranava* as it renews and purifies the practitioner. *Pranava* is also known

as the vital force (*prāna*) of all beings, from *Brahmā* down to the immobile world (*sthāvara jagat*) [5]. *Onkāra* is synonymous with *Pranava*. The chanting of *Pranava* is done by uttering AUM. The *Gopatha Brāhmana* states: "*Rsīnām tapasah sāro vedamantrāh; vedamantrānām sāro AUM*" - "The essence of the sages' penance lies in the Vedic mantras, and the essence of the Vedic mantras is AUM." AUM is the all-pervading Supreme Self (*Paramātmā*). Its etymology is derived from the roots *āpr* (to pervade) and *ava* (to protect). According to Sanskrit grammar, AUM signifies universal pervasion and eternal protection. It is a single syllable (*ekaksara*) formed by combining O (ॐ) and M (म्). The halanta in *m* (म्) transforms it into a dot (*bindu*), making AUM a unified syllable [6]. The *Taarasaropanisad* affirms: "*Omiti ekāksaram ātmasvarūpam*" - "AUM, this single syllable, is the very form of the Self. The *Vatukopanisad* explains why AUM is called *Onkāra*: "*Yasmād uccāryamāna eva prānān ūrdhvam utkrāmayati tasmād ucyate Onkārah*" - "It is called *Onkāra* because its mere utterance elevates the vital energies (*prāna*) upward [7]." The *Linga Purāna* states: "*Ūrdhvam unnāmayaty eva sa Onkāram prakīrtitah*" - "That which uplifts consciousness (*cetanā*) is celebrated as *Onkāra* [8]. The upward movement of consciousness grants humans joy and excellence. Hence, the *Yajurveda* declares: "*On krato smara*" means remember AUM as your resolve [9]. AUM's uniqueness and supremacy are renowned, as it symbolizes the Supreme Being. Worshipping AUM equates to worshipping the Divine. Chanting AUM pleases the Supreme, leading to divine surrender (*īśvara-pranidhāna*), which bestows meditative perfection (*samādhi-siddhi*), yogic accomplishments (*yoga-siddhi*), destruction of sorrows (*kleśa*), and removal of obstacles (*vighna*) [10].

AUM and Its Mātrās

The term *mātrā* is defined as "that by which something is measured" (*mīyate'nayeti mātrā*). Knowledge of *Onkāra*, or *Pranava*, arises from understanding its sequence of measures (*mātrākrama*) and meditating on AUM with awareness of its phonetic durations (*mātrās*). Yogic traditions emphasize that mastering these *mātrās* through contemplation and practice leads to diverse spiritual attainments (*phalāsiddhi*). Though AUM is a single syllable (*ekaksara*), its *mātrās* are multiple. Sanskrit grammar reveals that AUM is formed by combining A, U, and M, giving it three primary *mātrās*. These are analyzed in two contexts: phonetic articulation (*uccāraṇa*) and script-based structure (*varṇa*). In *Pranava* worship, practitioners meditate on these *mātrās* while chanting AUM, aligning with its

tripartite essence. According to Pānini's *sūtra* "omabhyādāne", the syllable AUM begins as prolonged (*pluta*), spanning three *mātrās*. In Sanskrit phonetics, a short vowel (*hrasva*) has one *mātrā*, a long vowel (*dirgha*) has two, and a protracted vowel (*pluta*) has three. Consonants like M with a halanta are half-measure (*ardhamātrā*). Thus, AUM comprises three *pluta mātrās* in "AU" and a *half-mātrā* in "M," totaling 3.5 *mātrās*. The *Gopatha Brāhmana* states: "Ādēs tisro mātrā abhyādāne hi plavatē makāraścaturthī" - "The initial three *mātrās* of AUM are *pluta*, while the fourth is the consonant M," rendering AUM quadripartite [5].

The *Māndūkyopanisad* diverges slightly, describing Om's four *mātrās* as symbolic of Brahman's four states [11]:

1. 'A' corresponds to waking state (*jāgrat*) and cosmic reality (*vaiśvānara*).
2. 'U' relates to dream state (*svapna*) and luminous consciousness (*taijasa*).
3. 'M' signifies deep sleep (*susupti*) and intuitive wisdom (*prājña*).
4. The fourth, *amātra* (measureless), transcends duality, embodying non-dual Śiva (*śivo'dvaita*) [12].

The *Agni Purāna* associates these *mātrās* with triadic cosmic principles: the three worlds (*loka*), Vedas, states of consciousness, and the Trimūrti (Brahmā, Visnu, Maheśvara) [13]. Meditating on Om's *mātrās* during *sādhana* (spiritual practice) yields distinct benefits: precise articulation enhances phonetic discipline, while focused *japa* (chanting) grants physical well-being, mental clarity, and spiritual peace. The *amātra* state, however, transcends desires, leading to realization of *Parabrahman* (Supreme Reality) [14].

Though scriptures do not prescribe isolated chanting of individual *mātrās*, their contemplative significance remains central. Om's *mātrās* serve as meditative anchors, harmonizing the aspirant's inner and outer realms.

The Chanting of AUM and Its Methodology

AUM is the most beloved appellation of God (Īśvara) and serves as an excellent means of worshiping the Supreme Being, both as a name and a symbol. Thus, *Maharsi Patañjali* states in the *Yoga Sūtra*: "*tajjapas-tadarthabhāvanam*." This means that the chanting (*japa*) of *Pranava* (AUM) should be done with an understanding of its meaning and accompanied by deep contemplation [15]. Here, the directive is given to chant the

divine name with awareness of its meaning and emotion. The process of repeatedly uttering a mantra is known as *japa*. The disciplined recitation of mantras is considered *japa*, which can be performed both audibly (*vācika japa*) and mentally (*mānasa japa*). The terms *veda adhyayana* (study of the Vedas), *svādhyāya* (self-study), and *japa* are synonymous. Hence, it is stated: "*svādhyāyan syāj japah*." This means that *svādhyāya* itself is *japa*. When any mantra is repeated multiple times, it is termed as *svādhyāya* or *japa*. *Maharsi Vedavyāsa* defines *svādhyāya* as the chanting of *Pranava* and other mantras, along with the study of scriptures concerning liberation [15]. By continuously chanting with devotion and sincerity, one attains the desired benefits of the *japa*. Moreover, one also receives the blessings of deities, sages, and *siddhas* (realized beings). Hence, it is said: "*japastu sarva-dharmebhyah paramo dharmacyate*." This means that among all religious practices, *japa* is considered the highest form of spiritual duty (*dharma*). In the *Bhagavadgītā*, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, while describing the greatness of *japa*, declares: "Among sacrifices, I am the sacrifice of *japa* [16].

In the eternal *vaidika* tradition (*Sanātana Vaidika Dharma*), the practice of *japa* has been an integral part of daily twilight worship (*Sandhyopāsana*). The scriptures of the Indian knowledge tradition prescribe the chanting of the AUM mantra, *Gāyatri Mantra*, and other Vedic mantras. Regarding the posture and method of chanting AUM, the *Manusmṛti* states: "*prākkūlān paryupāsinaḥ pavitrais caiva pāvitah. prānāyāmais tribhiḥ pūtas tata onkāram arhati*." This means that at dawn and dusk (*Sandhyā Kāl*), one should sit facing the east on a mat of sacred grass (*kuśāsana*) or any soft seat. After purifying the mind through three rounds of *prānāyāma* (breath control), one should chant *Onkāra* [17].

The chanting of a *mantra* can be done as per one's faith and intention. Regarding the repetition of *japa*, the scriptures frequently mention the practice of chanting a mantra 108 times. In the *Gopath Brāhmana*, the prescribed number of chants for AUM is mentioned: "AUM should be chanted one thousand times while seated on a *kuśa* mat, facing east, to fulfill one's desires [5]." The method of chanting OM is described as follows: "*tailadhārām ivācchinna dirgha-ghantāninādavat. avācyam pranavasyāgrah yah tam veda sa vedavit*."

This means that the pronunciation of AUM should be like an unbroken stream of oil (*tailadhārā*), resembling the prolonged resonance of a bell (*ghantānāda*). The initial part of *Pranava* is unspoken, and one who understands this knows the essence of the Vedas [18].

The recitation of AUM generates a prolonged vibrating sound originating from the heart, throat, and palate, which gradually dissolves into silence. The *Onkāra* is pronounced in *pluta mātrā* (elongated measure) from the throat in a raised tone (*udātta*). Hence, AUM should be chanted in a high tone, sustaining it until the sound completely dissolves. This is *vācika japa*, in which the pronunciation should always resemble the deep resonance of a bell. Mental chanting (*mānasa japa*) of AUM is performed internally by meditating upon its syllables.

Mānasa japa (mental chanting) and *svādhyāya* (self-study) are essential practices in *Astānga Yoga* as per *Maharsi Patañjali's Yoga Sūtra*. *Maharsi Vedavyāsa* describes the fruits of these practices as follows: "*devā rsayah siddhās ca svādhyāyaśīlasya darśanam gacchanti kārye cāsya vartanta iti*." This means that deities, sages, and siddhas (realized beings) manifest themselves before those who continuously engage in *svādhyāya (japa)* and help them accomplish their tasks through divine grace [19].

Pranava Mantra as a Mantra Medicine

AUM is a spiritual medicine (*bhaisajya*), as described in the *Gopathabrāhmaṇa*. *Onkāra* (AUM) is the medicine for the self (*ātmabhaisajya*) and the ultimate liberation (*ātmakaivalya*) [5]. The chanting (*japa*) of the AUM mantra promotes health and well-being. The *Agni Purāna*, in its 284th chapter titled *Mantrarūpāusadha-kathanam* (the discourse on mantra-based medicine), states: "The celestial beings (*nākada*) who are bestowers of longevity (*āyus*) and health (*ārogya*) have *Onkāra* as their foremost mantra. *Onkāra* is the supreme mantra (*parama mantra*); one who chants it attains a disease-free and long life [12].

OM chanting brings inner joy, as mentioned in the *Yoga Vāsīṣṭha*: "One should continue uttering AUM (*Onkāra*) until the mind attains complete tranquility and joy [20]. Similarly, in the *Bṛhad-Yoga-Yājñavalkya-Smṛti*, it is said: "*Onkāra* (AUM) is the means of self-worship (*ātmopāsana*), and through it, one attains inner contentment and peace." Just as a highly honored guest bestows immediate blessings through their presence, similarly, the chanting (*japa*) of the AUM mantra quickly grants contentment and joy. Additionally, it is stated: "For one who remains constantly engaged in *Pranava* (AUM), there is never any fear (*bhaya*) [18].

Regular chanting of AUM removes all kinds of fear from within an individual. The *Skanda Purāna* describes the power of *Pranava* (AUM) in dispelling sorrow: "The utterance of *Onkāra*

(AUM) is dear to the Divine (*Īśvara*), for it destroys immense suffering (*mahāduhkha-vināśana*). By meditating on *Pranava* as the embodiment of knowledge (*jñānarūpa*) and the abode of bliss (*sukhāśraya*), one attains happiness and peace [21].

The physical and mental health benefits of chanting AUM have been further elaborated by *Maharsi Patañjali* in the *Yoga Sūtra*: "Through the chanting (*japa*) of *Pranava* (AUM), one attains self-awareness (*pratyakcetanā*) and the removal of all obstacles (*antarāya*), including diseases (*vyādhi*), laziness (*ālasya*), bodily tremors (*anga-kampana*), irregular breath control (*śvāsa-praśvāsa-anīyantrana*), mental afflictions (*manasa-viksepa*), doubt (*samśaya*), delusion (*bhrānti-darśana*), inaction (*akarmanyatā*), failure (*asaphalatā*), instability (*asthiratā*), sorrow (*duhkha*), and distress (*daurmanasya*) [19]. Thus, OM is not only a sacred mantra but also a powerful remedy for physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

This study delves into the transformative power of the AUM mantra, a sacred sound deeply embedded in the ancient Indian spiritual and healing traditions. AUM, also known as *Onkāra* or *Pranava*, is considered the essence of all creation and is integral to Vedic philosophy and meditation practices. The research illustrates how the chanting and meditation on AUM can lead to profound benefits in physical, mental, and spiritual realms. The mantra is regarded as a therapeutic tool capable of promoting personal growth, health, and spiritual upliftment. Through the study of ancient scriptures and the teachings of Indian sages, the paper highlights how the utterance of AUM aids in mental clarity, emotional stability, and spiritual awakening. Additionally, the chanting of AUM is seen as a powerful remedy for alleviating physical ailments, dispelling fear, and promoting inner peace. The practice of *japa*, or repeated chanting of AUM, is recognized not only as a means of spiritual practice but also as a form of self-care, enabling one to attain liberation, self-awareness, and a harmonious connection with the universe. The etymology, phonetics, and spiritual significance of AUM were explored in detail, emphasizing its profound impact on consciousness and its essential role in the Vedic tradition.

CONCLUSION

This entire universe is AUM (*Onkāra*) itself. The *Śikṣāvallī* of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* states: "AUM (*Onkāra*) is *Brahman* (*Brahma*). AUM (*Onkāra*) is everything. This entire universe is AUM, and whatever exists is AUM alone. One who begins the

study of the supreme knowledge (*Brahmavidyā*, the science of life) with the utterance of AUM attains that knowledge [22].” Thus, AUM is the essence of life. Through its chanting (*japa*), obstacles in life disappear, all diseases (*vyādhi*) and ailments are destroyed, and sorrow (*śoka*) and fear (*bhaya*) are eradicated. It enhances wisdom (*jñāna*) and bliss (*ānanda*). By the recitation of AUM, one attains knowledge that elevates human dignity, fearlessness (*abhaya*), purity (*nirmalatā*), joy (*prasannatā*), peace (*śānti*), happiness (*ānanda*), and overall well-being (*ārogya*). AUM (*Onkāra*) is supremely beneficial. Whoever takes refuge in it reaps its immense rewards.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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