



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Liberation through the sound and silence: The AUM

M.S. Rajani Kanth¹, Surabhi Ramadevi¹, P. Guru Murthy²

Abstract

The concept of AUM, also known as Om, is a profound symbol rooted in ancient Indian spiritual traditions and is considered the NADA BRAHMA of the universe, representing the FACT (SATYA), PURE INTELLECT (CHIT), BLISS (ANANDA) and PERPETUAL (NITYA). AUM embodies the interplay of sound and silence as pathways to liberation. This paper explores the philosophical and metaphysical dimensions of AUM, examining its significance in various texts, including the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. It delves into the vibrational impact of AUM on the human psyche, its role in meditation practices, and its ability to transcend dualities. The study highlights how chanting AUM facilitates a connection with the inner self, fosters mental clarity, and serves as a bridge to spiritual awakening. By analyzing both the vibratory effects of sound and the contemplative power of silence inherent in AUM, this paper underscores its transformative potential in achieving liberation and harmony with the cosmos.

Keywords: AUM, Omkara, Pranava, Moksha, Spiritual Liberation, Self-Realization, Indian Knowledge System

Introduction

There are innumerable paths to liberation. One can attain liberation through Bhakti^[10], a profound devotion to the Divine. Bhakti itself is further classified into two types: 1) Sākāra Bhakti (devotion with form) and 2) Nirākāra Bhakti (devotion without form). Additionally, Bhakti manifests at various levels, such as Sādhana Bhakti (devotional practice), Sādhya Bhakti (realized devotion), and Śaraṇāgata Bhakti (complete surrender)^[4]. Liberation can also be achieved through other means, including Kāma (love) as expressed by Gopikas in Bhagavatham, Krodha (anger) expressed by Kamsa, Hiranya Kasipa, etc, Nişkāma Karma (performing one's duties without expectations)^[1], and the Jñāna (self-knowledge). Regardless of the path chosen, meditation is a central component integrated into all these approaches. While these paths may initially appear distinct, they converge and intertwine over time.

Each sādḥaka (practitioner) treading these paths undergoes unique experiences, and even practitioners following the same route may have diverse realizations. At a particular stage in their spiritual journey, the sādḥaka may be initiated into the practice of japa (chanting) or tapas (penance), often centered on Omkāra (the sacred syllable "Om").^[9]

The syllable AUM, often written as Om, holds a place of unparalleled significance in Indian spiritual and philosophical traditions. Regarded as the primordial sound from which the universe originates, the AUM is much more than a simple vocalization. It represents the essence of ultimate reality, encompassing creation, existence, and dissolution. Revered in the Upanishads^[5] and the Bhagavad Gita^[2], AUM is described as both a symbol and a vibration that bridges the physical and metaphysical, connecting the individual self (Atman) with the universal consciousness (Brahman). Its triadic structure—comprising the sounds "A" (अ), "U" (उ), and "M" (म) and its continued vibration—is often interpreted as embodying the three fundamental states of consciousness: manifestation (Srushti), Existence (Sthithi) and Un-Manifestation (Laya) and continuity of all the stages i.e. resonance of all the three states.

The Omkara has been studied by scholars in various ways and for diverse purposes, like

- A Comparative Study with Languages^[7]
- EFFECT OF SHAVASANA AND OMKARA^[6] etc

In scripts, it is referred to as OMKARA, PRANAVA, UDGITHA, AKSHARA, and EKAKSHARA. Something interesting is that the AUM leads to silence and further liberation (Moksha). The Moksha attained with silence

¹Assistant Professor, Shri Gnanambica Degree College (A), Madanapalle.

²Sanskrit Scholar, Soham Ashram, Haridwar.

***Corresponding Author:** M.S. Rajani Kanth, Assistant Professor, Shri Gnanambica Degree College (A), Madanapalle., E-Mail: rajanikanthms@gmail.com

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within the self is yoga^[1]. It is reaching the state from which we come out^[3].

The PRANAVOPASANA is not suggested to Brahmachari, as it leads life getting into Sanyasa Ashrama directly with jnana and vairagya bypassing Grihasthasrama, where the Grihasthasrama is considered to be the best ashrama for sādhana in the four ashramas.

Literature Review

*"Karmanyevadhikaraste maphaleshu kadachana
makarma phalahethurbhu mate songothostvakarman"*
(Bhagavad Gita:2-47)

This Sanskrit Sloka is divided in different ways for practitioners of different levels of sādhana. The breakdown that the author was blessed is,

"armana eva adhikara asthi ma" you have no right to karma;
"hala ishu kada cha na" =how can you expect right on results?NO; *"a karma phala hethuh bhu"* =you are not the cause/ reason of karma; *"a te sangosthu akarmani"* =As you have no right to be the cause of karma, you cannot avoid karma as you have no ownership of karma.

You have no right on karma, how can you expect right on results? As you have no right to karma, you are not the reason of karma and so also you can NOT avoid karma.

*"Aum ityekāksharam brahma vyāharan mām anusmaran
yay prayāti tyajan deham sa yāti paramām gatim"*
(Bhagavad Gita:8-13)

The one who always thinks of Me (Om), the vibration of Brahman, will leave behind bodily attachment and merge into Me, the Supreme Reality.

*"na tad bhāsayate sūryo na śaśāṅko na pāvakaḥ
yad gatvā na nivartante tad dhāma paramam mama"*
(Bhagavad Gita:15-6)

That supreme abode of Mine is not illumined by the sun or moon, nor by fire or electricity. Those who reach it never return to this material world.

*"tam eva śharaṇam gachchha sarva-bhāvena bhārata
tat-prasādāt parām śhāntim sthānam prāpsyasi
śhāshvatam"* (Bhagavad Gita:18-62)

Surrender exclusively unto Him with your whole being, O Bharat. By His grace, you will attain perfect peace and an eternal abode.

*Aum ityetad akṣaram udgītham upāsīta |
Aum itī hyudgāyati tasyopavyākhyānam
||*(Chandogyopanishad:1-1-1)

One should meditate upon the syllable Om, for it is the essence of the entire universe. The sound 'Om' is the ultimate expression of the divine, and its utterance is a profound explanation of the Supreme."EFFECT OF SHAVASANA AND OM KARA ON OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT OF GAZETTED ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER" (Dr. BHASKAR SHUKLA, available at: https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/EFFECT_OF_SHAVASANA_AND_OM_

KARA_ON_OCCUP/fyJAEAAQBAJ?hl=en)"OMKARA AS RECODIFICATION: A COMPARATIVE STUD"

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"Bhavanaa-Matra-Santushta-Hrudayayai" (Lalita Ashtothara – 71Mantra)

The one who gets satisfied only with the 'Bhavana' of the Practitioner (Sadhaka)

*"Aum ityetad akṣaram idaṃ sarvaṃ tasyo-pavyākhyānam |
bhūtaṃ bhavad bhaviṣyad iti sarvaṃ oṅkāra eva |
yacchānyat trikālātitaṃ tad apy oṅkāra eva|"*
(Mandukyopanishad SLOKA-1)

The verse describes the profound significance of the sacred syllable "ॐ" (Om) as the essence of all existence and time. In essence, this verse signifies that "Om" is the ultimate reality, representing all that exists within time and beyond it. It is a timeless, all-encompassing sound symbolizing the infinite, the eternal, and the transcendent.

"Sa tvasmin parama-prema-rupa" (Narada Bhakti Sutra 1-22)

That (devotion), verily, is of the nature of the supreme Love of God. The term Bhakti comes from the root "Bhaj", which means "to be attached to God". Bhajan, worship, Bhakti, Anurag, Prem, and Prithi are synonymous terms

"Yogaścitta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ" (Pathanjali yoga Sutra 1-2)

Yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind
"tīvrā-samvegānām āśannai" (Pathanjali Yoga Sutra 1-.21)

For those who are intensely eager, the goal is near
*"yama-niyama-āsana-prāṇāyāma-pratyāhāra-dhāraṇā-
dhyāna-samādhiḥ aśtāṅgāni"* (Pathanjali yoga Sutra 2-29)

The eight limbs of yoga are Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi.

"Te samādhav-upasargāḥ vyutthāne siddhayaḥ" (Pathanjali yoga Sutra 3-38)

These (powers) are the results of distractions in samadhi, and they manifest when the mind is disturbed or when the practitioner exits from deep meditative states.

"Yato vāco nivartante | aprāpya manasā saha |

**ānandaṃ brahmaṇo vidvān | na bibheti
kutashchanéti |**

*etaṃ ha vāva na tapati | kim ahaṃ sādhu na akaravam |
kim ahaṃ pāpam akaravam iti | sa ya evaṃ vidvānetē
ātmān sprṇute |*

*ubhe hy evaiṣa etē ātmān sprṇute | ya evaṃ vēd | ity upaniṣat
|"* (Taithiriyopanishad 2-9)

Where speech returns, unable to reach, along with the mind—Brahman is beyond the grasp of words and thoughts, The enlightened one who realizes the bliss of Brahman is free from fear—fear of anything whatsoever. Such a person does not grieve or feel remorse, thinking, "Why did I not do well?" or "Why did I commit wrong? The one who knows thus

touches both aspects of the self—the doer of both correct and wrong—and transcends them. The one who knows this truth attains liberation. Thus says the Upanishad.

All the above literature leaves a gap in how the Omkara is used in liberation and other aspects, but the experienced siddhas (who achieved liberation) expect practitioners (Sadhaka) to learn by practicing.

The author's methodology bridges the gap between theoretical analysis and the practical implementation of AUMKARA, demonstrating its potential as a regular practice for students. Beyond its role in achieving liberation, the practice yields numerous positive outcomes.

Methodology

The author began practicing Pranayama under the guidance of their gurus and continued diligently for three years. After this steady progress, the practice became more intense, with a disciplined six-month routine. Following this phase, the focus shifted to Pratyahara, the withdrawal of the senses. Mastering Pratyahara requires significant Vairagya (detachment) and is a gradual process. As Pratyahara is just one step in the journey of Sādhana (spiritual practice), the author progressed to the sixth limb of Ashtanga Yoga^[13] the Dharana (concentration).

In Dharana, the mind focuses entirely on a single point or object, naturally withdrawing the senses from external distractions. When practiced correctly, Dharana leads to Pratyahara without additional effort. This focus allows the practitioner to disconnect from disturbances and fully direct their attention. The author practiced Dharana for more than seven years. After mastering it, they naturally progressed to Dhyana (meditation), the seventh limb of Ashtanga Yoga. The time required to achieve this varies for each individual.

In the state of Dhyana, the mind detaches from the body and remains focused on either the object of concentration or experiences deeper phenomena. At this stage, the subtle mind engages with Bhavana (inner feeling or visualization)^[8] and disconnects from the physical body. This state is known as Yoga Nidra. Although Yoga Nidra may last only 10 to 15 minutes in real-time, the practitioner might perceive it as several hours of deep rest, depending on the intensity of their practice^[12].

At this stage, the practitioner develops the conclusion that humanity can be broadly classified into two philosophical categories: atheism (nāstika) and theism (āstika). Despite these differing beliefs, both atheists and theists exist within and are governed by the principles of nature. In Indian philosophy, nature is understood as the manifestation of Parabrahma, the ultimate, infinite reality or supreme consciousness.

From an atheistic standpoint, nature is seen as something that exists independently, with no divine explanation: "It is naturally so." On the other hand, the theistic view interprets

nature as a direct expression of God, as the will and creative power of Parabrahma.

Indian philosophy recognizes 33 crore deities, each representing a unique aspect of Parabrahma's infinite expressions. These deities are symbolic of various natural and cosmic phenomena, reflecting the diverse ways in which the ultimate reality is manifested. However, regardless of the specific number or forms of these deities, Indian thought emphasizes their unity in the primordial syllable AUM (Om). AUM symbolizes the interconnectedness of all things, bridging the gap between different philosophical and religious perspectives, and encapsulating the essence of Parabrahma.

At this level of Bhavana, the practitioner may be introduced to Omkara (the sacred syllable "O"). Over time, Omkara can be understood as its three components—A (ॐ), U (उ), and M (म)—or the practitioner may be guided to chant these syllables sequentially.

The vibration of "A," "U," and "M," with the prolonged resonance of "M," combine to form the akshara or Pranava (the sound of AUM). Repeated chanting of these syllables symbolizes the cycle of Srishti (creation), Sthiti (sustenance), and Laya (dissolution), which continues endlessly. This cycle mirrors the ongoing process of manifestation, existence, and un-manifestation within the universe. When this cycle stops, it marks the end of creation, known as Kalpanta where everything is unmanifested. This universal cycle is reflected within the practitioner's own experience^[15].

After four years of practicing the syllables "A," "U" and "M" the practitioner begins to sense this phenomenon internally. Thoughts arise, are acted upon through the body, and then dissolve. However, if the practitioner becomes attached to this process of manifestation and physical action, it can mislead their practice^[14], it is essential to avoid fixating on results.

At a key moment in practice, the sequence of "A, U, M" transitions into the prolonged vibration of "M," which leads back to "A" (manifestation), then "U" (sustenance), and again to "M" (un-manifestation). Over time, the 'a' 'u' 'm' 'a' 'u' 'm' 'a' 'u' the concentration when shifted from manifestation to un-manifestation, then the practitioner experiences "AU" evolving into "MAU" which represents the cycle from unmanifested to manifested and sustained existence. It is identified by the practitioner (Sadhaka) that the manifestation starts from the unmanifested. If this cycle continues indefinitely, it traps the practitioner in the cycle of creation, preventing liberation.

In Sanskrit, the letter "N" signifies negation or non-existence. When "MA" ceases—meaning there is no longer manifestation, sustenance after un-manifestation—the state is called Mauna (silence). A mind that practices Mauna detaches from worldly cycles and attains inner stillness. Such a practitioner is referred to as a Muni (a silent sage). A muni oneself is referred to as the OMKARA.

Results

Enhanced Focus and Concentration

Through the practice of Pranayama and Dharana, the practitioner achieved heightened mental focus and an ability to concentrate deeply on a single point or object. This steady discipline laid the foundation for advanced spiritual practices.

Natural Withdrawal of Senses (Pratyahara)

The consistent practice of Dharana led to an automatic and effortless withdrawal of the senses from external distractions, resulting in a state of deep inner focus. This transition demonstrated that correct concentration practices can facilitate sensory withdrawal.

Development of Yoga Nidra

During the state of Dhyana, the practitioner experienced Yoga Nidra, a condition of profound rest and detachment from the physical body. This state often appeared to last much longer than its actual duration, providing evidence of an altered perception of time during advanced meditation.

Understanding the Cycle of AUM

Prolonged meditation on the syllables "A," "U" and "" revealed a deeper comprehension of the cosmic cycle of Srishti (creation), Sthiti (sustenance), and Laya (dissolution). The practitioner also identified parallels between this universal process and the inner cycle of thought manifestation and dissolution.

Overcoming Attachment to Physical Manifestation

The methodology highlighted a common challenge—the tendency to fixate on physical manifestations of thought. Overcoming this attachment was crucial for advancing in the spiritual path and avoiding stagnation in the cycle of creation.

Realization of Mauna (Inner Silence)

The practice of transitioning from "AU" to "MA" and eventually ceasing the cycle led to the realization of Mauna, the state of complete inner silence and detachment. This cessation of the creation-sustenance-dissolution cycle within the practitioner marked a significant step towards liberation (Moksha).

Spiritual Liberation and Transformation

By integrating the above practices, the practitioner demonstrated an ability to transcend the continuous cycle of worldly existence. The detachment achieved through Mauna brought a transformative state of awareness and alignment with the ultimate goal of spiritual practice.

Creates Unity in Society

The sacred sound AUM acts as a powerful unifying force, transcending the diverse forms of the Para Brahman that

individuals may worship. Regardless of their chosen deity or tradition, people come together through the shared reverence for AUM, recognizing its universal significance as the primal sound of creation and a symbol of spiritual oneness in society.

Useful for younger generations like students

Understanding the importance of AUM helps students respect different beliefs, promoting inclusivity in diverse academic settings. It can also encourage practices like meditation, which improve focus, reduce stress, and boost mental clarity—key to academic success. For students in philosophy, religious, or cultural studies, AUM offers a real example of how spiritual ideas shape society and unity.

Further Scope

This further can lead to different states like

- Dissolved into Para Brahman (got liberated by leaving the body)
- Can live like Jeevan Muktha
- Can practice SOHAM sādhanā to support Disciple
- Can coordinate the nature for balancing the manifestation, etc
- Social Impact: AUM-inspired practices can lead to greater compassion and understanding, enabling students to contribute positively to society and engage in social causes.
- Holistic Education: These practices encourage a balanced approach to learning, combining intellectual growth with emotional and spiritual well-being, contributing to well-rounded individuals.

Conclusion

The outlined methodology demonstrates a structured progression through the stages of Ashtanga Yoga, leading from the disciplined practice of Pranayama to advanced states of meditation and spiritual realization. Through consistent effort, the practitioner achieves enhanced concentration, natural sensory withdrawal, and a deeper understanding of the cosmic cycles represented by the syllable AUM. The culmination of this practice results in the realization of Mauna (inner silence) and detachment from the endless cycle of creation, sustenance, and dissolution. This transformative journey highlights the potential of dedicated Sādhanā to guide practitioners toward spiritual liberation and inner peace.

Sages like Narada Maha Muni, Valmiki Maha Muni, Agastya Maha Muni, and modern seers such as Ramana Maharshi exemplify the state of being true Munis. Their profound spiritual realization and mastery of Mauna (silence) signify their transcendence of the cyclic processes of creation, sustenance, and dissolution represented by MAU-NA. By halting this cycle and embodying the stillness of AUM, these sages reached the ultimate state of detachment and liberation. Their lives and teachings are

living embodiments of the deep spiritual truths encoded within the practice of Ashtanga Yoga and the sacred syllable AUM, offering guidance and inspiration for seekers on the path to self-realization.

Once one gets initialized into spiritual practice, which is the basic practice in Indian culture, one never indulges in 'being the cause of disturbance' to society and nature.

Something very interesting is that this is NOT only the procedure of getting liberated in Indian culture.

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Conflict of Interest

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