



International Journal of Sanskrit Research

ॐ

ISSN: 2394-7519

IJSR 2015; 1(2): 94-97

© 2015 IJSR

www.anantaajournal.com

Received: 12-11-2014

Accepted: 18-12-2014

Dr. Alka Tyagi

Teaches English at Department
of English, Dyal Singh (eve)
College, University of Delhi,
Delhi, India

Full span of human consciousness: readings and practices from Mandukya Upanishad, *Yoga Sūtra*, and the *Vijñānabhairava Tantra*

Dr. Alka Tyagi

Abstract

In this paper, we shall look into broader definition of *Praṇava* as given in the Tantric texts and shall describe the techniques and practices of AUM [and other tantric *Praṇava-s*] with special reference to the *Māndukya Upaniṣad*, the *Yoga Sūtra-s* and the *Vijñānabhairava Tantra*.

AUM, the *Praṇava* and its correlation with states of human consciousness has been established in the ancient *Māndukya Upaniṣad*. Later, it was developed in the traditions of Vedānta, Yoga and Tantra-s. The knowledge and realization of AUM (as a mantra) is equated with self-realization. Therefore, we shall look into the practice aspect of AUM with reference to the *Māndukya Upaniṣad*, *Yoga Sūtra* and the *Vijñānabhairava Tantra*.

Key Words: Human consciousness, AUM, *Praṇavaḥ*, tantric *Praṇavaḥ*, *Mantravīrya* (lit. power of mantra)

Introduction

Vedic *Praṇavaḥ* and Tantric *Praṇava*

The word *Praṇavaḥ* is derived from root 'ṇu' (*ṇu stute*) with prefix 'pra' and suffix 'apa' - it literally means 'to worship/praise profoundly'. *Praṇava* also indicates, as Prof. Mark Dyczkowski says ^[1], 'the flow of *prāṇa*' ^[2]. The exhalation is known as *prāṇa* (and the inhalation as *apāna*), hence, the seed sound syllables (*bija-s*) that are resounded with the exhalation are *Praṇava-s*.

As seen above, the AUM is the Vedic *Praṇavaḥ*, but the Tantra-s proclaim that a seed syllable (*bījākṣara*) that is sounded with the *prāṇa* (exhalation), including AUM, is a *Praṇava*. So there are many *Praṇava-s* in the Tantra-s (for instance, *aiṃ*, *hrīm*, *shrīm*, *klīm*, *hūm* and *hrīm* etc.) ^[3].

The Mandukya Upanishad mentions the flow of the sound from A to U and their merger into M and finally into *Adhyamātrā* also called as *Amātrā*, it is the soundless state into which all sounds (along with the names and forms that they represent) merge. In the Upanishad, this is the highest state and this is the state of pure consciousness. Shankaracharya commentary affirms the same ^[4].

In the Upanishad this is the highest summit of consciousness and the description of AUM (*Praṇava*) stops at this level of *Amātrā*.

¹ Lecture on OM August 2010 by Dr. Mark Dyczkowski. He explains the hidden aspects of AUM in Mandukya as well as *Vijñānabhairava*. Ref. website of Anuttara Trika Kula. www.anuttaratrikakula.org

² *Prāṇa* is a specific name for the exhalation, however, *prāṇa* is also a common noun used for the vital flow of energy in our body in yogic terminology. There are five *prāṇa-s*: *prāṇa apāna*, *samāna*, *vyāna*, and *udāna*. Here it is used in its specific noun.

³ The commentary to the verse 39 of the *Vijñānabhairava Tantra* explains that just as AUM is the Vedic *Praṇava*, in the same way, *hūm* is Śiva *Praṇava*, *hrīm* is Māyā *Praṇava*, and in this manner there are many *Praṇava-s*.

⁴ "The *Amātroh* (measureless) is that which has no parts (sound etc. or letters). The partless Aum, which is the fourth, is nothing but the Pure Ātman. It is incomprehensible because both speech and mind which correspond to the name or the object disappear or cease; the name and the object (that is indicated by the name) which are only forms of speech and mind disappear (in the partless Aum). It is the cessation (of the illusion) of the phenomenon, all bliss and is identical with non-duality" *Shankar Bhāṣya*. 1.12. Ref. Swami Nikhilananda, 1949, p83.

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Alka Tyagi

Teaches English at Department
of English, Dyal Singh (eve)
College, University of Delhi,
Delhi, India

The Tanta-s delve further into the depths of *Amātrā*, the soundless state and describes twelve stages of soundless subtle presence of *Praṇava*. It reveals the higher and higher stages of inner awareness in which the *mātrās* diminish into absolute void, the *Śūnya* ⁵. It is in fact a journey from sound (i.e. names and forms) to light (i.e. Pure consciousness). It is the journey of individual consciousness into fully expansive divine Consciousness. This is the span that human Consciousness can cover.

Twelve Levels of *Praṇava* in the Tantra-s

The *Svacchanda Tantra* ⁶ describes twelve levels of *Praṇava* as follows:

*Akāraśca ukāraśca makāro bindureva ca /
ardhacandro nirodhī ca nādo nādānta eva ca//
Svacchanda Tantram.4. 155*
*Śaktiśca vyāpinīcaiva samnaikādaśī smṛtā/
unmanā ca tato 'tītā tadatītam nirāmayam// Svacchanda
Tantram. 4.156*

Pandit Vrajvallabh Dwivedi has described these twelve levels with fine details as they are found in the *Yoginīhrdayam* ⁷, in his introduction to the *Vijñānabhairava Tantra*.

'Awareness' as Practice of *Praṇava* (A-U-M) in the *Upaniṣad-s*

In the *Upaniṣad-s*, AUM is intimately unified with the Supreme Consciousness named as Brahma. All the major *Upaniṣad-s* emphasize upon the connection between the Supreme Reality and AUM (*Praṇava*).

As we have seen, the *Māndukya Upaniṣad* recommends the practice of complete awareness of each syllable (*mātrā*) and its association with respective component (*pāda*).

The *Mundaka Upaniṣad* also ascribes the need to meditate on AUM and declares that the Yogi must use AUM as the bow, and make the meditation an arrow and the Supreme Brahma the goal ⁸. (II.2.4).

The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* gives an analogy of generating fire by rubbing two sticks of wood together. It emphasizes that one should make *Praṇavaḥ* the upper *Araṇi* ('upper piece of wood) and one's own body the lower *Araṇi* (lower piece of wood) and churn the two together with *dhyāna* (meditation)

then one would reveal that One [Brahma] which is hidden inside ⁹.

'Japa' (mantra repetition) with awareness as the Practice of *Praṇavaḥ* (A-U-M) in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra*

Patañjali recommends 'japa' (repetition) of *Praṇavaḥ* (A-U-M) for its truth to get revealed is the means (*Tajjapastadarthabhāvanam. Yoga Sūtra. I.28.*).

The commentator of the *Yoga Sūtra*, Vyāsa explains that mere chanting of AUM without a realized knowledge about the three states of consciousness that AUM represents cannot be helpful in opening the path for the fourth and the fifth blissful higher states of Consciousness. Only complete awareness of the states of consciousness brings absolute freedom from limitations posited by body, mind, senses, and time and space.

Insight into the power of mantra (*mantravīrya*) and meditation as Practice of *Praṇava* in the *Vijñānabhairava Tantra*

The *Vijñānabhairava Tantra* like other Tantra-s is revealed as a dialogue between *Bhairava* and *Bhairavī*. It begins with Devi's address to Bhairava where she asks him about the true nature of the Supreme Reality, the Bhairava. The fifth and sixth questions by the goddess are related to the twelve stages of *Praṇava*.

As the mantra gains power, the *mantravīrya* (power of mantra), this *vīrya* (power) leads to the ascent of the *Praṇava* mantra. The ascent of *Praṇava* - AUM or any other Tantric *Praṇava-s* like 'Hrīm', 'Hūm' etc. ¹⁰ - takes place on the path that stretches from heart to twelve finger space above the head. This is the subtle movement rising energy from *nāda* up to *unmanā* through stages that lie in between. These stages include the states of *ardhacandra*, *nirodhikā*, *nādānta*, *Śakti*, *vyāpini*, *samanā* and the last one of *unmanā*, as given in the *Svacchanda Tantram*.

In A-U-M, the vibration of 'a' is experienced at the navel, that of 'u' at the heart, and of the 'm' in the throat and the vibration of *ardhamātrā* is experienced in forehead and beyond. After the *ardhamātrā*, the sound becomes subtler and subtler. It diminishes into vibrations and finally into light. In the following table, we have put the description of measures of sound and the nature of experience that is induced by a particular measure of sound. So after the three syllables of A, U and M, we have:

⁵ The word *Śūnya* is different from the *Śūnya* related in the Buddhist philosophy. In non-dual *Śaiva Tantras* it is a state of Pure I-Consciousness in which there is only dynamic vibration of light. It is devoid of thought constructs. This state devoid of all content of names and forms is *Śūnya*. In the *Vijñānabhairava Tantra*, words '*Śūnya*' and '*Mahā Śūnya*' appear numerous times in the context of meditative techniques. According to Vrajvallabh Dwivedi, *Śūnya*' is the state upto *ardhamātrā* in *Samanā* and '*Mahā Śūnya*' is the state of last point of *Amātrā* in *Unmanā*. Ref. Vrajvallabh Dwivedi. 1978 rpt.2010, P-xxxvi.

⁶ The *Svacchanda Tantra* is the oldest foundational Trika Tantra (approx. 3rd century). It adheres to purely non-dualistic philosophy of Śaivism and focuses on the *upāsana* (meditation) and *kriyā* (ritual) dedicated to Supreme Bhairava in the *Dakṣiṇācara* discipline. KSTS no. 31.

⁷ A 14th century text that evolves from the Śakti dominated Trika Tantra-s.

⁸ *Praṇavo dhanu śarohyātām brahmā tallakṣyamucyate/apramattena veddhayam śarvattanmayo bhavet// II.2.4 Mundakopnishad.*

⁹ *Śvadehamarṇim kṛtvā praṇavam cottararaṇim/dhyāna nimarthnābhyāsād devam paśyennigūdhavat// I.14 Śvetāśvatara Upanishad.*

¹⁰ In personal experience, I feel that the most important sound that is common in the *Praṇava-s* is represented by 'bindu' in the alphabet. Like 'A' and 'U' merge into the 'M', the 'M' merges into the *bindu* in AUM. In fact, all *mātrās* of a *Praṇava* whether Vedic (AUM) or Tantric (Hrīm', 'Hūm') merge into the *bindu*. It may be heard as a long syllable (*pluta*) 'a...nng'

Names of the states given in the Tantra-s	Measure of Sound Mātrā	The Vision of the subtle sound	Point of experience in the body/mind	Nature of Experience
<i>Bindu</i>	½ Mātrā	Like a <i>bindi</i> that the Hindu women put at eye-brow center	Forehead Behind the eye-brows	Point of light
<i>Ardha-chandra</i>	¼ Mātrā	Half of <i>bindu</i> that appears like a tiny flame of an Earthen lamp	Forehead (<i>Lalāta</i>) Behind the eye-brows	Inarticulate sound (<i>anahat nāda</i>). The breath appears to stop
<i>Nirodhikā</i>	1/8 Mātrā	Triangle shines like moonlight	Upper forehead	Shines like moonlight
<i>Nāda</i>	1/16 Mātrā	Two points and a line in between		Shines like a crystal
<i>Nādānta</i>	1/32 Mātrā	Like a plough with a dot on the left side	<i>Brahmarandhra</i> , a little above the top of the head	Like the brightness of lightning
<i>Śakti</i>	1/64 Mātrā	A straight line drawn from the left point when two points are placed side by side	Above the <i>Brahmarandhra</i>	Like twelve sun-s shining together
<i>Vyāpikā / Vyāpini</i>	1/128 Mātrā	A triangle above a point, <i>bindu</i>	----	Same as above
<i>Samanā</i>	1/256 Mātrā	Two points (<i>bindu</i> -s) put above and below a straight line	----	Same as above
<i>Unmanā</i>	1/512 Mātrā		Upper <i>dvādaśānta</i> , Twelve fingers above the head	Same as above

In the following section, we would focus on the esoteric dimension associated with the practice of *Praṇava* in Trika Tantra-s with special reference to the *Vijñānabhairava Tantra* [Verse 39] along with Śivopādhyāya's commentary verse.

The verse 39 reveals a meditative technique (*dhāraṇā*) of chanting the *Praṇava* in a way that the whole path of the consciousness can be traversed from the heart to the upper *dvādaśānta* [twelve fingers above the crown of head]; from *bindu* to *unmanā*.

Praṇavādisamuccarātplutānte śūnyabhāvanāt/
śūnyaya paraya śaktyā śūnyatāmeti Bhairavī//
Vijñānabhairava Tantra. Verse. 39.

[O Bhairavī, by uttering the *Praṇava* and by meditating on the void at the end of the protracted sound [prolonged or *pluta* sound], one attains the state of Void [Pure consciousness] by means of the Supreme Śakti of the Void.]^[11]

The emphasis in the above verse is on uttering the first two syllables 'A-U' of the AUM with an extended sound. In the manner of utterance, the prolongations of other syllables like that of 'M' as Mmmm is also practiced.

Śivopādhyāya quotes from the *Atharvopnishad* to explain the manner of utterance. He describes, 'Ooom, Ooom, Ooom – reciting it three times and then reciting the fourth *ardhamātrā*, the yogi's experiences deep peace within.

The utterance of A, U and M and then prolonged utterance of *ardhamātrā*, leads the yogi from *ardhamātrā* to *bindu*, *bindu* to *nāda*, *nāda* to *śūnya*, *śūnya* to *Parā*, *Parā* to the *mahāśūnya* in the Parama Bhairava state i.e. the state of Supreme Consciousness.

The Supreme AUM (*Omkāra*) is four parts. In its gross form, it is short, long and protracted sound and the fourth is half measure, (*ardhamātrā*) which make it three and a half measures^[12].

The emphasis is on *pluta* (prolonged or protracted) utterance of the half-measure after the utterance of the three measures. As Swami Lakshman Joo demonstrates, "you must recite in *pluta*. "Oooooooooooooooooiiiiiii" (the *Praṇava*-s *hūm* and *hrīm* must also be recited in *pluta* measure only.)

By the protracted *pluta* utterance, the fourth state of realm of peace (*Śāntātmā*) is revealed and Yogi sees the light of the self (*ātmañyoti*)^[13] even after repeating it once (*sakridāvartya*).

AUM and So'ham: Unprompted Uccāra (Utterance)

The life energy (*Śakti*) exists in the creation in the form of *Prāṇa* (*Prāk Saṃvit Prāṇe Pariṇatā*). In the humans, *prāṇa śakti* moves up with inhalation and down with exhalation. Its movement is accompanied with a very subtle sound. In Inhalation the sound is 'So' and in exhalation, the sound is 'Ham'. Our own life energy, (*Prāṇa Śakti*) continuously sounds this natural mantra -*So'ham*.

This process of spontaneous repetition of *So'ham* mantra that is happening in all of us with every cycle of breath is known as *Ajapājapa*. When the yogi pays attention to this mantra and meditates on it, then repetition of *So'ham So'ham So'ham So'ham...* leads to reversal of sound as *Ham So, Ham So, Ham So, Ham So, Ham So, Ham So...* This is called 'Hansa' mantra^[14].

Maheśvarananda (14th century) in his famous work, *Mahārthamañjarī* quotes Acārya Śankara's verse to explain the unity of AUM (*Omkāra*) and *So'ham*^[15].

By removing the 'Sa' and 'Ha' from the 'Hansa' (reverse of *So'ham*), the mantra sound will remain in the form of AUM.

The ordinary movement of the breath is from heart to twelve fingers space out through the nostrils and downwards, and backs into the heart space. The heart space is the inner or the *antardvādaśānta*, and twelve fingers outside from the nostrils is known as the outer or *bāhyadvādaśānta*. Our breath is the vehicle for carrying the *Prāṇa Śakti*. In the normal breathing process, in our wakeful state, most of our energy (the *Prāṇa Śakti*) is dispersed and wasted on the external objectivity.

However, in the meditative state, when the yogi pays attention to breath, energy i.e. the *Prāṇa Śakti* gets straightened up. It moves straight between the heart space and the above the crown of head (upper *dvādaśānta*, twelve fingers above the

¹³ Cf. '*Prāṇa samācāre samdarśanam*'. (When the *Prāṇa* of the Yogi properly and slowly spreads out then he has an awareness of all being the same i.e. he has unity-consciousness.) *Śiva Sūtra*.III.22. Ref. Jaideva Singh, 1979.p-179.

¹⁴ In Sanskrit language, *So'ham* i.e. *Sa+ Aham* means 'He am I' and '*Ham Sa*' i.e. *Aham+Sa* means 'I am Him'. Although, the scriptures emphasize on the vibrations of the mantra and not on the meaning, here the mantra has a very potent meaning as well. It reveals an awareness of identity with the Divine in both ways- divine is myself and I am divine.

¹⁵ *Sakāraśca hakāraśca lopayitvā prayojayet / sandhi vai pūrvarūpākyam tatosau praṇavo bhavet//*

¹¹ Trans. Swami Lakshman Joo. 2007, 2nd edition. P-61.

¹² Kundalini Śakti is said to have three and half coils. And Dr. Mark Dyczkowski mentions in his lecture on OM, the three aspects of Kundalini Śakti are sound, breath and awareness in his lecture on OM (available on his website www.anuttaratrikakula.org).

head) and this is when the yogi gains access to higher and higher realms of consciousness and finally to the Supreme Consciousness^[16].

In conclusion, we can say that the entire scriptural tradition from the Upanishad-s to the Yoga and Tantra-s emphasizes on how the individual consciousness can expand into Supreme consciousness. The scriptures reveal one of the easiest tools to attain that. The means to the Supreme Consciousness is meditation on the mantra AUM.

Finally, let us quote the first verse of the *Śiva Śaḍākṣara Stotra* that celebrates AUM as the essence of everything:

*Omkāraṁ bindu sanyuktaṁ nityaṁ dhyāyanti yoginaḥ/
kāmadāṁ mokṣadāṁ caiva Omkārya namo namaḥ*

[Salutations to the sound of *Omkāra* that the yogis meditate upon always and that which brings fulfillment of *kāma* (desires) as well as *mokṣa* (liberation).]

References

1. Baba Bengali. *Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali* (with the commentary of Vyāsa). Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. 1976.
2. Dwivedi, Pandit Vrajvallabh. *Vijñāna Bhairava*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. 1979 rpt. 2010. [In Hindi].
3. Dyczkowski Mark SG. The Aphorisms of *Śiva (Śivasūtra)* with a commentary by Bhāskarācārya. Varanasi: Dilip Kumar Publishers. 1991.
4. Dr. Dyczkowski Mark. *Lectures on OM*. 27 August, 2010.
http://www.anuttaratrikakula.org/tantracontext/meditatin_gom/
5. *Ishadinou Upanishad*. Gita Press Gorakhpur.
<https://archive.org/details/mandukya-upanishad-gita-press-gorakhpur/page/n79/mode/2up>
6. *Kevalyopnishad*.
https://sanskritdocuments.org/doc_upanishhat/kaivalya.html
7. Lakshman Joo, Swami. [Trans. and commentary]. *Vijñāna Bhairava: The Practice of Centring Awareness*. Varanasi: Indica Books. 2007. [2nd edition].
8. Nikhilananda, Swami. (Trans. and annotated). *Māndukya Upaniṣad with Gaudapadās Kārikā and Shankar Bhāṣya*. Mysore: Sri Ramanna Ashram. 3rd edition 1949. [Downloaded from online Free Indological Collection].
<https://archive.org/details/MandukyaUpanishadKarikaWithShankaraBhashya-SwamiNikhilananda/page/n1/mode/2up>
9. Shāstrī, Paṇḍit Madhusudan Kaul.(ed with notes). *Svacchanda Tantram with Kṣemarāja's Commentary* (Udyota). KSTS No. 38. Bombay: 1923.
10. Singh Jaideva. (trans.) *Śiva Sūtras: The Yoga of Supreme Identity*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. 1979 rpt. 1998.
11. Saraswati, Swami Prakhara Prajnananda. [Translation and Commentary.] *Īśādinavopniṣad*. Varanasi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Sansthan, 2012.
12. [From the Teachings of] Saraswati, Swami Satyananda. (text, transliteration, translation and notes) *Nine Principle Upanishads*. Munger: Yoga Publications Trust, 2004.

13. Saraswati, Swami Satyananda. “*Yoga of Awareness*” in *Yoga*. Yoga Publications Trust. May 1978.
www.yogamag.net. (Archives).

¹⁶ The Yogic discipline, the same energy is also described as *Kundalini Śakti* which lies sleeping in the base center, the *Mulādhāra* chakra in three and half coils in an ordinary consciousness. In a meditative consciousness, the *Kundalini* begins to rise up. Rise of *Kundalini* also leads to fully awakened state of consciousness.