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The Effect of Chanting *Om Mantra* on Health: A Review

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ABSTRACT:

Today we are heading toward materialistic progress at the cost of our health, physical as well as mental. In this blind pursuit, instead of peace we end up in stressed life. Unfortunately, neither we understand that we are under stress nor get any training of stress management while we study or work. In this modern world there are many diseases, disorders and complications but some complications are commonest and almost each and every human being in this modern world has it, it is stress, depression and there are many medications which claims to get relief from it but only for some duration and that too has some of its side effects but, “OM” (*AUM*) chanting is such a traditional practice which has beneficial effects not just in relieving stress and depression but can also give relief from many mental and physical complications and has of course no side effects and once if learnt properly do not need any guidance. Regularly chanting of *OM* can be used in daily lifestyle can be more beneficial.

Present review compiles the studies which evaluated that chanting *OM mantra* has the positive effect on the human health.

Keywords *Om mantra*, Chanting *mantra*, Stress, anxiety.

INTRODUCTION

Chanting is a common traditional practice in almost every religion in this world. According to “*Mandukya Puran*” from Hindu religion “OM” is a divine sound which has its benefits to relieve from stress, psychological disorders, etc. Today we are heading toward materialistic progress at the cost of our health, physical as well as mental. In this blind pursuit, instead of peace we end up in stressed life. Unfortunately, neither we understand that we are under stress nor get any training of stress management while we study or work. Ayurveda theory of a healthy person is or ayurveda defines the health: “*Samdoshah samagnishcha ,samadhatu ,malakriyah, prasan natmendriya, manah,*

svastha ity abhidhiyate.” The one whose ‘*doshas*’ are balanced, whose metabolism is balanced, whose tissues and eliminations are normal, and whose senses and mind are centered in the self, is considered healthy and remains full of bliss.” According to WHO, Mental health is defines as a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. In today world people are so busy with their work, they don’t give priority to their health. So, how to deal with these in regular life, adding



chanting of mantra in daily routine will improve the physical health as well as the mental health. Consulting psychiatrist and mental health is still a taboo in India. Stress creates adverse effect on physical as well as mental health. The effect of “stressful situation” on our body is rapid pulse rate. Short term stress is easy to control. But long term stress may lead us to mental illness like anxiety, depression, breathlessness, sleep disorders, eating disorders etc. In this modern world there are many diseases, disorders and complications but some complications are commonest and almost each and every human being in this modern world has it, it is stress, depression and there are many medications which claims to get relief from it but only for some duration and that too has some of its side effects but, “OM” (AUM) chanting is such a traditional practice which has beneficial effects not just in relieving stress and depression but can also give relief from many mental and physical complications and has of course no side effects and once if learnt properly do not need any guidance. Regularly chanting of OM) can be used in daily lifestyle can be more beneficial.

Verse 13 of chapter 8th of *bhagwatgita* explain the meaning of om is who departs from the body while remembering me (Krishna), supreme personality, and chanting the syllable Om, will attain the supreme goal. In commentary by *swami mukundanda* explain the upper verse that, the Vedic scriptures states that at the beginning of creation. God first created sound, with sound, he created space and then continued with the rest of creation process, that primordial sound was the sacred syllable Om it is called *Pranav*-the sound manifestation of the Brahman.

In 17th chapter of the *Bhagwatgita*, from verses 23 to 28, Lord Krishna discussed the meaning and the importance of *mantra Om, Tat, Sat*. He said that *Om Tat Sat* is a threefold name of the supreme soul with which, at the start of the universe, the *Brahman, Vedas* and *Yajna* were made. the word ‘Om Tat Sat’ have been declared as symbolic absolute truth, from the beginning of creation. From them came the priests, scriptures, and sacrifice. (17.23). therefore, whenever people performed the acts of sacrifice, offering charity, or undertaking penance, expounders of the Vedas always begin by the prescription, of Vedic injunctions. (17.24)

Chanting of mantra is a part of *Ayurveda* treatment and helps in rise the *satva guna* in the body, which heal the body. OM is universal wave, it’s the most powerful vibrations that lies within us. In Santana dharma every mantra starts with the Om, which creates a major impact on body. present study aims at reviewing the effects of Om

mantra chanting on health as well as to review the concept of *Mantra chikitsa*.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A narrative review was carried out on the previous studies done on the selected topic from all the available sources of classical texts as well as online publications. The material hence collected was analysed and presented under results.

RESULTS

Past studies on om mantra effect on health:

Om mantr chanting shows positive effects in covid patients¹:-

Result show that Practice of OM chanting will be effective in reducing stress, anxiety, depression and improving the quality of life and quality of sleep in asymptomatic COVID 19 patients in the home care system.

Effects of Om Mantra chanting on anxiety level of young adults.²

In that study selected 50 subjects (male and female age 18-25 years) and classified into two groups Experimental group (N=25) and Control group (N =25). After one month of Yogic intervention (Om Chanting) in experimental group only. Result show significant decrease in Anxiety level of young adults in experimental group but no any significant difference in control group was found. Which indicates a significant effects of Om Mantra chanting on anxiety level of young adults.

Effect of Om chanting and Yoga Nidra in reducing depression, anxiety, stress and improving sleep quality and autonomic functions in hypertensive patients³

Rajagopalan, A. et al (2022). have done a study on Effect of Om chanting and Yoga Nidra on depression anxiety stress, sleep quality and autonomic functions of hypertensive subjects—a randomized controlled trial in which they concluded That the current study validates the effectiveness of Om chanting and Yoga Nidra in reducing depression, anxiety, stress and improving sleep quality and autonomic functions in hypertensive patients.

Effects of OM chanting on heart rate⁴ :-

Inbaraj, G., et al (2022) in their study showed that a brief chanting of OM (5 min) might enhance parasympathetic nervous system activity, promote relaxation, and provide calmness.

Effect of om mantra on memory power⁵:- in this study The sample of 50 students was selected by using Quota sampling technique for the purpose of the study from

Kumaun University (HNBPG College, Khatima, US Nagar, Uttarakhand). On month yogic practice of 30 minutes in which *Nadishodhana Pranayama* 20 min & Om chanting 10 min was practiced. Result of this study show that there is a significant positive effect on memory of the students practicing *Nadishodhana Pranayama* & Om chanting.

Effect of Mahamantra Chanting on Autonomic and Cognitive Functions⁶:-Interventional Study in which 30 subjects with severe stress were selected and divided into two groups *mahamantra* group and control group each having equal 15 subjects. *Mahamantra* chanting was practiced in first group but control group did not practice the chanting of *mahamantra*. Result show that the significant decrease in cortisol levels of *mahamantra* group. Which highlight the positive effect of *mahamantra* chanting in reducing stress level of nursing professionals.

Om Meditation Studies Using Neuroimaging Methods

Table 1 summarizes the findings of studies on Om meditation based on neuroimaging method:-⁷⁻¹⁰

Om Meditation Studies Using Eeg Methods

Table 2 summarizes the findings from EEG Om meditation studies:-¹¹

Om Meditation Studies Using Middle Latency Response (MLr)

Table 3 summarizes the studies conducted on MLR to examine the effect of Om meditation¹²⁻¹⁴

Study On Autonomic And Respiratory Variables.

The autonomic and respiratory variables were studied in seven experienced **Om** mediators (with the experience ranging from 5 to 20 years). Each subject was studied in two types of sessions—meditation (with a period of mental chanting of **Om**) and control (with a period of non targeted thinking). The mediators showed a statistically significant reduction in the heart rate during meditation compared to the control period. During both types of sessions, there was a comparable increase in the cutaneous peripheral vascular resistance. This was interpreted as a sign of increased mental alertness even while being physiologically relaxed¹⁵. Subsequently, a comparison study was done to see the physiological effects which reported that when repetition of **Om** was compared with the repetition of **One** in 12 mediators, there was a difference in the autonomic and respiratory responses. Both types of sessions resulted in a decrease in the heart and breath rates, but the repetition of **Om** alone reduced the skin resistance,

suggesting a subtle change in the mental state, related to the significance of the syllable.¹⁶

Yoga **mantras** and prayers have been found beneficial for many physiological and psychological functions of the body.¹⁷ A study was conducted to test whether rhythmic formulae, namely, recitation of the rosary and yoga mantras can synchronize and reinforce inherent cardiovascular rhythms and modify baroflex sensitivity. There were 23 healthy volunteers. It was observed that during both prayers and mantras, there was an increase in the synchronicity of cardiovascular rhythms when they were recited six times a minute. There was also an increase in baroflex sensitivity. These findings suggested that the recitation of the rosary and certain yoga mantras, at specific frequencies, induce favorable psychological and physiological effects.

DISCUSION

In *Ayurveda*, different *acharyas* classified the treatment of diseases in three major divisions:

1. *Daivavyapasraya*:- Mantra, Aushadhi (teeing medicinal plant), *Mani*(wearing of gems),*Mangala* (performing auspicious things),*Bali*(oblation), *Upahara*(offering),*Home*(performing yajnas),*Niyama*(religious observance),*Prayaschitta*(atonement), *Upavasa*(implementing good qualities),*Swastyayana*(recitation of hymns),*Pranipata*(falling at the feet of God etc.)and *Gamana*(going of pilgrimage).

2. *Yuktivyapsraya*:- refers to management by proper administration of *Ahara Dravya* (proper diet) and *Ausadha dravya* (medicinal drugs).

3. *Sattvavyapsraya*:- refers to management by *Mano nigraha*(control the mind from *Ahita artha*(unwholesome objects).)

There are certain challenging diseases, which is refers as an idiopathic origin. their causes, mode of onset, symptoms, severity and the managements are different from others disorders. In ayurvedic science such entities are refers to *Daivika shakti*,*Poorva-janamakrita karma*,*Adhibhala Vyadhis*,*Grahadosa*,*etc.* to treat this entities Ayurveda mention *Daivavyapasraya chikitsa*. The term *Daivavyapasraya* ,consists of two words *Daiva* +*Vyapasraya*, *Daiva* relates to all the unknown circumstances (those cannot be explained by the existing human knowledge , *Vyapasrya* literally means taking resources. Thus, it is related to spiritual therapy.¹⁸

Om is the eternal sound; Om is the sound which is present in the universe all the time. One can receive the positive benefits by chanting the mantra. For example, by chanting 'aaaaaaaa' one can experience the sensation and hence resonance in the nervous system in the stomach and the chest region. Chanting 'oooooooo' produces sensation in the throat and the chest region and resonates with them similarly, chanting 'mmmmmm' resonates with the nasal cavity as well as skull region. Whenever we join these syllables together into one mantra, we get the 'Om mantra', when we chanted the Om sequentially activates the stomach, spinal cord, throat, nasal and the brain regions. While chanting, the body's nervous system slows down and creates a calming effect on the mind, by doing so, the condition of heart improves as a direct result of a relaxed mind and decreasing blood pressure.

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (PYS) is one of the classical yoga texts in which the explanation on **Om** is well defined. In PYS, there is a single direct mention about *Pranava* (Om). That is *Tasya vachakah pranavah* (Ch: I; V: 27), which means that *pranava* is virtually *Ishwara or Om*, where *Ishwara* is the word denoting God. Since PYS has described *pranava (Om)* as an *Ishwara*, in *Sutra 28* describes what *sadhana* requires for *Ishwara* realization. *Sutra 28* states *Tajjapastadartha bhavanam* (Ch: I; V: 28). Means that mental repetition of *Om* (although *Om* is not specifically mentioned) should be carried out while dwelling on its meaning.

OM Mantra and Methods of Practice

It is proposed by Swami Jnaneshvara Bharti that there are many rhythms in the body and mind, both gross and subtle. The sound of OM, rising and falling, at whatever speed is comfortable and natural. It may be very fast, several cycles per second. Or it may be slower, several seconds for each cycling of OM Mantra. Or it might become extremely slow; with the mmmmm... sound continuing in the mind for much longer periods, but still pulsing at that slow rate. It is somewhat like one of these vibrations:

OMmmOMmmOMmm...

OMmmmmOMmmmmOMmmmm...

OMmmmmmmmmOMmmmmmmmmOMmmmm.

This kind of awareness of the OM mantra can be used both at meditation time and during daily life. The OM mantra is allowed to be somewhat of a constant companion. It brings a centering, balancing quality to daily life. This does not mean being in a dull, lethargic state. Rather, done well, it brings clarity of mind and a greater ability to be in the world, and selflessly serving

others. This is not intended as a blocking mechanism to prevent dealing with one's thought process or with the challenges of life. It is not a method of escapism. However, it definitely can have the effect of bringing focus to the mind, which can break a pattern of disturbing or distracting thoughts coming from the noisy or chattering mind. In this way, one has a greater openness to being aware of positive thoughts and spiritual realities that are always there, different methods are proposed to practice OM mantra.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

From this we could conclude that chanting OM mantra results in stabilization of brain, removal of worldly thoughts and increase of energy. It means that repetition of OM result in physiological state, reduce the anxiety, stress, and help the body to heal. Every mantra in *sanatan dharma* it is a type of *Asuhadha*. It helps to reduce the negativity from the body and help in detox the sub-conscious mind.

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Table 1 summarizes the findings of studies on Om meditation based on neuroimaging method:-

Om chanting type	Subjects	Type of meditators	Method/ Signal Processing	Experimental Design	Findings
Loud Om chanting ⁷	20	Naïve	Functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS)	Subject exposed to mobile phones (30 min) → Om chanting (5 min)	Deactivation of pre-frontal cortices due to the vibrations produced by the sound ‘Om’; Study suggests that Om chanting may have a stimulating effect on branch of vagus nerve in the ear canal.
Listening Om mantra ⁸	21 (All male)	-	Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI)	Listening OM (12 ms) → No sound (12 ms) → Listening AAM (12 ms) → No sound (12 ms) → Listening TOM (12 ms) → No sound (12 ms)	Neural regions activated during listening to “Om” sound in contrast to non-meaningful word (TOM); The common activated region DMFC supports the emotional empathy of “Om” sound, while SMG implicates phonological processing of “Om” syllable.
Mental Om mediation ⁹	22 (All male)	Experienced	fNIRS	Random thinking → mental chanting and effortless defocusing on syllable “Om”	Oxygenation levels are increased in the PFC during meditation
Loud Om Chanting ¹⁰	12	4 experienced and rest naïve	fMRI	15 Seconds REST → Om 15 Seconds → REST 15 Seconds → SSSS 15 Seconds	Significant deactivation in the amygdala, anterior cingulate gyrus, hippocampus, insula, orbitofrontal cortex, Para hippocampal gyrus and thalamus during 'Om' chanting. It suggests that Om chanting can be another therapy in depression and epilepsy

Note* DMFC = Dorsal Medical Frontal Cortex, SMG = Supramarginal Gyrus, ms = millisecond, PFC = Pre Frontal Cortex, AAM and TOM and SSSS = any random sound other than Om selected by author, REST = rest state as defined and used by author in respective study.

Table 2 summarizes the findings from EEG Om meditation studies:-

Om chanting type	Subjects	Type of meditators	Method / Signal Processing	Experimental Design	Findings
Loud Om mantra chanting ¹¹	10	Naïve	Time domain Analysis (Higuchi Fractal Dimension (HFD))	Rest → Om Chanting → Rest	Om chanting reduces the complexity of EEG signal.

Table 3 summarizes the studies conducted on MLR to examine the effect of Om meditation

Om chanting type	Subjects	Type of meditators	Method / Signal Processing	Experimental Design	Findings
Mental Om meditation ¹²	18	Both naïve and experienced	AEP- MLR	Two sessions Relax (6 min) → Mental Om meditation → Relax (6 min) → Mental repeating word ‘One’	Study revealed differences among senior and naïve meditators, naïve meditators require extra effort to practice meditation.
Mental Om meditation ¹³	14	Both naïve and experience	MLR	Relax (6 min) → Mental Om meditation → Relax (6 min) → Non targeted Thinking	Reduce HR indicate psychophysiological relaxation.
Mental Om meditation ¹⁴	12	Both naïve and experienced	MLR	Three sessions Mental Om meditation (MOM) (15 min) → Mental repeating word (COM) (15 min) → Neutral thinking (15 min)	Skin resistance level reduces during mental Om meditation; Heart rate (HR) reduce; Respiratory rate (BR) reduce