

The Mystic Syllable Om

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The mystic syllable Om occupies a prominent and auspicious place in the field of Sadhana (spiritual practices) whether it may be in the line of Hindu, Buddha or Jain religion.

The antiquity of this syllable is traced back to the Vedas. It occurs for the first time in the Vajasaneyi Samhita of the Yajurveda (2.13, 40.17 etc.) The word Pranava is found in 19.25.

The Satapathabrahmana developed it as essence of the Vedas and of the universe.

The Aitareya brahmana (V 3.2) gives its three components अ, उ, म् for the first time. These three components are derived from the three Vyahrtis भूः भुवः and स्वः from the three Vedas, viz. the Rigveda, the Yajurveda and the Sama Veda; from the three gods - agni, Vayu and Aditya and from the three worlds - Prthivi, Antariksha, and Vayu respectively.

The Gopathabrahmana gives two accounts thereof and presents full development of Om.

According to first account, Brahma created Brahma on the lotus-leaf. The latter created two letters with four matras :-

ओ and म् From ओ transformed into न were produced water, moon, the Atharvaveda, Om, the Vyahrti Janah and the metre anustubh etc.

From न were created the Itihasa, Puranas, gita, nrtya and vidhya.

From the त्रिमात्रिक were produced the three Vyahrtis, three deities, three Vedas, three worlds and three metres - Gayatri, Tristubh and Jagati.

The second account says that the gods got victory by Om. Consequently they gave boon to it that it will be recited in the beginning of every Vedic

mantra. Thus the sanctity or the sacredness was granted to Om.

The four matras of Om became five, presided over by five gods :- Brahma, Visnu, Rudra, Isana and Sarva. This seems to be precursor of later Saivism.

The Pratisakhya of the Yajurveda (8, 9, 11) lays down the recitation of Om in the beginning of study, and before chanting a Vedic mantra. It also mentions that Om is the name of Brahma (Omīti namanirdeso Brahmanah. Thus it identified Om with Brahma.

The Baudhayana sutra (4.1 gives further mystic character to Om by stating that it is papanasaka (destroyer of sin).

This idea is elaborated in the later Sannyasopanisad as follow :-

यस्तु द्वादशसाहस्रं प्रणवं जपतेऽन्वहम्।
तस्य द्वादशभिर्मासैः परं ब्रह्म प्रकाशते॥
सर्वेषामेव पापानां संघाते समुपस्थिते।
तारं द्वादश साहस्रमभ्यसेच्छेदनं हि तत्॥

It also describes it as the best mantra which is sacred, purifying, bringing piety and fulfilling all desires and identifies it with Brahma.

मांगल्यं पावनं धर्म्यं सर्वकामप्रसाधनम्।
ओंकारं परमं ब्रह्म सर्वमन्त्रेषु नायकम्॥

This idea is also corroborated in the Yogatattvopanisad :-

सर्वविघ्नहरो मन्त्रः प्रणवः सर्वदोषह।
एवमभ्यासयोगेन सिद्धिसरम्भसंभवा॥

The Yajurveda Kalpasutra gives reason for its sacred character :-

ओंकारश्चाथ शब्दश्च द्वावेतौ ब्रह्मणः पुरा।
कण्ठं भित्त्वा विनिर्यातौ तस्मान्मांगलिकावुभौ॥

The regular full treatment of this sacred syllable is found in the earlier Upanisads. The seed sown in the Gopatha brahmana is seen sprouting here. Thus the Chandogyopanisad which identified udgitha with Om says :-

"1. Om one should reverence the Udgitha (Loud Chant) as this syllable, for one sings the loud chant (ud + gi) beginning) with 'Om'.

The further explanation thereof (is as follows):-

2. The essence of things here is the earth.
The essence of the earth is water.
The essence of water is plants
The essence of plants is a person (purusa)
The essence of a person is speech.
The essence of speech is the Rig ('hymn')
The essence of the Rig is the Saman ('chant')
The essence of the Saman is the Udgitha (loud singing)

In other place it gives the gradual origin of Om and identifies it with everything.

"2 (3). Prajapati brooded upon the worlds. From them, when they had been brooded upon, issued forth the threefold knowledge. He brooded upon this. From it, when it had been brooded upon, issued forth these syllables : bhur, bhuvah, svar.

3(4) He brooded upon them. From them, when they had been brooded upon, issued forth the syllable Om. As all leaves are held together by a spike, so all speech is held together by Om. Verily, Om is the world-all. Verily, Om is this world-all."

The Prasnopanisad (V. 2) identifies Om with the higher and the lower brahma -

"To him then he said : 'Verily, O Satyakama, that which is the syllable Om is both the higher and the lower Brahma.

Therefore with this support, in truth, a knower reaches one or the other." (II. 2.4)

The method of reaching the Brahma through meditation is described in the Mundakopanisad :-

"3. Taking as a bow the great weapon of the Upanishad, one should put upon it an arrow sharpened by meditation. Stretching it with a thought directed to the essence of That, Penetrate That Impenishable as the mark, my friend.

4. The mystic syllable Om (pranava) is the bow. the arrow is the soul (atman).

Brahma is said to be the mark (laksya).

By the undistracted man is It to be penetrated.

One should come to be in It, as the arrow (in the mark).

The Mandukyopanisad (9-12) gives further detailed description of the four matras of Om :

It identifies the four matras of Om as follows :

Pada	Matra	State	Designation of Self
First	अ	Waking	Vaisvanara
Second	उ	dream	Taijasa
Third	म्	deep sleep	Prajna -
Fourth	matraless	Fourth	Advaita

In the Tantrasastra the fourth matra is called ardhamatra and is identified with the female godhead. It is described as one which cannot be recited of

अर्धमात्रा स्थिता नित्या, याऽनुच्चार्या विशेषतः ।

त्वमेव सा त्वं, सावित्री त्वं देवी जननी पराय ।। - दुर्गासप्तशती

Puspadanta in his Sivamahimnah Stotra elaborates this idea clearly and succinctly :-

"The triad (of Vedas), the three vrttis (states of waking, sleeping, deep sleep), the three worlds and also the three gods (Brahma, Visnu, Rudra), naming these with the three letters a etc. (a, u, m) and also that which is beyond differentiation, the fourth state, your domain, enclosed by subtle sounds (all this constituting), You, O refuge-giver,

complete and in your parts, the word Om describes."

Thus put in a tabular form the Om expresses following things with its three component letters :

Letter	Veda	Stages	Gunās	Worlds	Gods
अ	Rgveda	Waking	Sattva	Bhur	Brahma
उ	Yajurveda	dreaming	rajas	Bhuvah,	Visnu
म्	Samaveda	deep, sleep	tamas	Svar	Siva

The half matra speaks of the fourth stage which is enclosed by its subtle sounds. This stage is inexplicable. Only the accomplished yogis can experience it in their brain as a feeling that an ant in moving there.

The mystic power of Om is felt also by the Bauddha and Jain Sadhakas. The mantra of Avalokitesvara Buddha is famous. It begins with Om as "Om Manipadme hum"

The Jain philosophers derive it from the sacred and mystic Navakara mantra and identify it with five Paramesthins.

अरिहन्ता असरीरा आयरिय - उवज्झाय-मुणिणो।
पंचक्खरनिप्फन्नो ओंकारो पंचपरमिठ्ठीय

The five Paramesthins are - अर्हत्, सिद्ध, आचार्य, उपाध्याय and साधु. Now the word सिद्ध is replaced by अशरीरी and साधु by मुनि. Then taking initial letter of these words viz अ + अ + आ and आ + उ + म give by joining with each other the letter Om. Sri Simhatilaka Suri in his Srimantrar ahasya says :-

अर्हददेहाचार्योपाध्याय मुनीन्द्र पूर्ववर्णोत्थः।
प्रणवः सर्वत्रादौ ज्ञेयः परमेषुसंस्मृत्यैय

Srimadbhagavadgita also extols Om in several places :-

1. It is spoken as a vibhuti of the Lord Sri Krsna -
प्रणवः सर्ववेदेषु
2. It reiterates in (8.11) the mantra of the

Kathopanisad (2.15) which says that Om is a word which all the Vedas speak, of which all the penances also speak, with a view to attaining it (the Sadhakas) observe celibacy. I shall tell you it in brief. It is Om.

यदक्षरं वेदविदो वदन्ति विशन्ति यद्यलयो वीतरागाः।

यदिच्छन्तो ब्रह्मचर्यं चरन्ति तत्ते पदं संग्रहेण प्रवक्ष्ये ॥

- (3) One who departs leaving the body (at the time of death, reciting the letter Om, the one lottered Brahma, and thinking of me, one gets the highest state (moksa) (8.13).

The Yogasastra and the Tantrasastra identify Om, from adhibhautika point of view, with the process of breathing. During 24 hours one breaths 21,600 times. While inhaling the sound सो is produced and while exhaling the sound हं is produced. By omitting the consonants स् and ह from this one gets the sound Om.

In this manner, Om represents Parabrahma from the Adhyatmika point of view; three gods viz. Brahma, visnu and siva the Adhidaivika point of view and the So `ham or the Ajapamantra from the Adhibhautika point of view.

It is therefore rightly called the mantra-rajā or the king of all the mantras.

Upasana of Om

Now this mantra which according to the sage Patanjali, is expressive of the god, can be attended upon in three ways :-

1. It can be recited orally with one or two or three matras. This sort of recitation of Om in short, long and prolonged (pluta) form cures one from diseases.

2. It can be meditated upon. For this its popular form is drawn as ॐ. But eariler, it was written in manuscripts as ॐ, the form which is adopted by the Jains, Sriharsa in his Naisadhiyacaritam gives a still earlier form as ॐ. It is also represent it as.

To achieve different results, various colours are also associated with it. Sri Samantabhadracarya in his Omkarastotra says -

श्वेते शान्तिकपुष्टया ख्याऽनवधादिकराय च ।

पीते लक्ष्मीकरायापि ओंकाराय नमो नमः ॥

रक्ते वश्यकरायापि कृष्णे शत्रुक्षयकृते ।

धूम्रवर्णे स्तम्भनाय ओंकाराय नमो नमः ॥

For peace and nourishment while coloured; for obtaining wealth the yellow coloured, for subjugation the red-coloured, for annihilation of enemies the black-coloured and for stagnation the smoke-coloured om, should be meditated upon.

(3) By identification :- The meditation of Om should better be done for getting emancipation or eternal bliss. This can best be done by identifying it with the process of breathing alongwith meditation or by identifying one self with the three gods, whom it represents.

I end this article with the most popular mantra accepted by all the three streams of Indian Sadhana viz. Arya, Bauddha and Jain.

ओंकारं बिन्दुसंयुक्तं नित्यं ध्यायन्ति योगिनः ।

कामदं मोक्षदं चैव ओंकाराय नमो नमः ॥

The yogis constantly meditate upon Omkara with a bindu, as it fulfills all the desires and bestows highest beatitude. My obeisance to (that) Omkara.

References and notes

1. Albert Einstein, Ideas and opinions, Calcutta, 1979, p. 271.
2. Gommatasara of Namicandra Siddhantacakravart, vols. 1-4, Bhartiya Jana Pitha, New Delhi, 1978-81.
3. The Ganitasara samgraha of Mahaviracarya, ed. and trans. by L.C. Jain, Sholapur, 1963.
4. A recent article short in the Ganita Bharati, vol. 9 (1987), numbers 1-4 p. 54-56, by Ganitanand, Ranchi, has appeared on the date of Sridhara. His remarks are worth mentioning here, S.B.Dixit (1896) had found a reference to sridhara by name in an old manuscript of Mahavira's Ganitasara samgraha (ca. 85), and so put the former before the later.Royal Asiatic Society, Bombay Rs. 230 of GSS also ends with the words (ABORI? Vol. 31, p. 268)

The similarity of several rules and of many other features between the works of sridhara and mahavira is accepted by scholars. Both may have drawn from a third and common source which is not known nor likely to be known. But most of the scholars considered Mahavira as borrower (he himself named his work as a "collection").

The date circa 799 A.D. was assigned to sridhara by N.C. Jain, by equating him to the Jaina author of Jyotir Jnanavidhi (799). And to reconcile salutations 'Sivam' and 'Jinam' of the different manuscripts it has been suggested that the same sridhara, after writing mathematical works, may have turned a Jain toward the end of his life.

The above note also gives the opinion of B.Dutta and A.N. Singh as 750 A.D. as the probable date of Sridhara. It appears that the common source material for both of the above mathematicians have been the Kasayapahuda and

the Satkhandagama and their commentaries which might have been before them. As the medieval Jaina writers have been writing Jina and Siva for the same daiti, some scribe might have got it changed under certain unknown circumstances. It does not seem possible that sridhara could have availed the opportunity of the Jaina source material as a non-Jaina, and he must have compiled the work as a Jaina. It also seems possible that under certain circumstances he might have adopted Saivism but whether he wrote two such manuscripts after his conversion is doubtful. Thus looking into the needs of the digambara Jaina School of Mathematics in the South India, for their theory of Karma, it seems now most probable that both took help from the same source material of the south, and both were Jainas in the Digambara Jaina Schools of Mathematics for this purpose of convincing argument one may see the project work on the Labdhisara of Namicandra Siddhantacakravarti, Indian National Science Academy, 1984-87, by L.C. Jain.

5. Mention has been made by N.C. Jain while he was at Arrah Jaina Siddhant Bhavana, and this manuscript is not available now.
6. Vide The Section on Mathematics in the Science and Civilization in China vol. 3., by J. Needham and W.Ling, Cambridge, 1959.
7. These texts are in several volume and have gone out of print. New editions of the former are now coming out of the press. Satkhandagama of Acarya Puspadanta and Bhutabali, Books 1-16, Amaraoti, Vidisha, 1939-1959. Cf. also, Kashaya Pahuda of Gunabhadracarya, alongwith the Jayadhavals commentary of Virsenacarya and Jinasenacarya, vol. 1-13, and the following Mathura, 1944.....
8. For the texts of the Svetambara Jaina School, cf. the exhaustive article, The Jaina School of

- Mathematics, by B.B. Dutta, *Bul. Cal. Math. Soc.*, vol. xxi, no. 2, 1929, pp. 115-145.
9. For details, see the *Jaina Astronomy* by Dr. S.S. Lishk, (1978), Doctoral thesis approved by the (Patiala) Punjabi University, 1987, Vidyasagara Publications, Delhi. Cf. also Jain, L.C., * (1976). On the Spiro-elliptic Motion of the Sun implicit in the *Tiloyapannatti*, *IJHS*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1978, pp. 42-49.
10. Jain, L.C., *System Theory in Jaina School of Mathematics*, *IJHS*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1979, pp. 29-63.
11. The *Trilokasara* of Nemicaandra Siddhan-tacakravarti, Sri Mahavirji, 1976. Cf. also Jain, L.C. ? Divergent sequences locating Transfinite Sets in *Trilokasars*, *IJHS*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1977, pp. 57-75.
12. Cf. the project referred in 4.
13. Cf. the ref. 8.
14. Singh, A.N., ? *Mathematics of Dhavala, Satkhandagama*, book 4 loc., cit., Amaraoti, 1942, pp. i-xxiv. Datta, B.B., and Singh, A.N., *History of Hindu Mathematics*, Bombay, 1962.
15. Cf. ref. 4 for details.
16. Cf. Jain, G.R., *Cosmology, old and new*, Gwalior, 1942.
17. Cf. ref. 4 for the project on the *Labdhisara*.
18. Cf. ref. 9.
19. Cf. Jain, L.C., *Tiloyapannatti ka Ganita*, in introduction to the *Jambudiva pannatti Samgaho*, Sholapur, 1958, pp. 1-109.

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