



Research Article


The Role of Aum in Vedic and Classical Yoga for Treating Psychosomatic Disorders: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract	Manuscript Information
<p>The syllable Aum (ॐ), regarded as the primordial sound in Vedic and yogic traditions, holds profound significance in spiritual and therapeutic practices. Rooted in ancient scriptures such as the Mandukya Upanishad, Bhagavad Gita, Yajurveda, and Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, Aum is described as the vibrational essence of the universe. Recent scientific studies corroborate its physiological and psychological benefits, particularly in treating psychosomatic disorders like anxiety, depression, and hypertension. This paper critically examines the role of Aum in Vedic and classical yoga, emphasizing its impact on mental and physical health. Neuroscientific evidence suggests that chanting Aum activates brain regions associated with emotional regulation and cognitive function, while its vibrational properties stimulate the vagus nerve, fostering autonomic balance. Integrating traditional wisdom with contemporary research, this study highlights the therapeutic potential of Aum chanting in holistic healing and mind-body integration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ISSN No: 2583-7397 ▪ Received: 19-10-2024 ▪ Accepted: 12-11-2024 ▪ Published: 27-12-2024 ▪ IJCRM:3(6); 2024: 201-205 ▪ ©2025, All Rights Reserved ▪ Plagiarism Checked: Yes ▪ Peer Review Process: Yes
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INTRODUCTION

The syllable Aum (ॐ), also spelled as Om, holds a central place in Vedic philosophy, classical yoga, and spiritual practices across ancient Indian traditions. Revered as the primordial sound of the universe, Aum is not merely a combination of letters but a vibrational essence believed to encompass the entirety of existence—physical, mental, and spiritual. Rooted in sacred Sanskrit scriptures such as the Mandukya Upanishad, Bhagavad Gita, Rigveda, Yajurveda, Sama Veda, and Patanjali's Yoga

Sutras, Aum represents the cosmic vibration from which the universe emerged and through which it is sustained. This ancient understanding is now supported by modern scientific research, which reveals the profound psychological and physiological effects of Aum chanting, particularly in alleviating psychosomatic disorders. The significance of Aum is eloquently described in the Mandukya Upanishad, which states:

ॐ इत्येतदक्षरं इदं सर्वं तस्योपव्याख्यानं। भूतं भवद्भविष्यदिति सर्वं ॐकार एव॥ (Mandukya Upanishad 1)

"Aum is this whole world. Its further explanation is this: the past, the present, and the future—all that is, is Aum indeed."

This verse emphasizes that Aum is not merely a sound but a vibration that permeates all aspects of existence. The rhythmic chanting of Aum aligns the practitioner's consciousness with the universal frequency, promoting inner harmony and spiritual awakening. The Rigveda, the oldest of the Vedas, also acknowledges the transformative power of sound vibrations:

ऋचो अक्षरे परमे व्योमन् यस्मिन् देवा अधि विश्वे निषेदुः। (Rigveda 1.164.39)

"The hymns exist in the supreme, imperishable sound, where all the gods have their abode."

In the realm of yoga, Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (1.27-1.29) identify Aum as the sonic representation of Ishvara (the Supreme Being):

तस्य वाचकः प्रणवः। तज्जपस्तदर्थभावनम्। ततः प्रत्यक्चेतनाधिगमोऽप्यन्तरायाभावश्च॥

(Yoga Sutras 1.27-1.29)

"The word expressing Ishvara is Aum. Its repetition and meditation on its meaning should be practiced. From this practice arises inward consciousness and freedom from obstacles."

This passage highlights that chanting Aum, combined with focused contemplation, removes mental disturbances, fosters clarity of thought, and leads to spiritual enlightenment. The vibrational resonance of Aum stimulates the nervous system, creating a calming effect that reduces stress and anxiety. This ancient insight is now validated by neuroscientific studies, which demonstrate that Aum chanting activates regions of the brain associated with emotional regulation, such as the prefrontal cortex and limbic system. Psychosomatic disorders, characterized by physical symptoms rooted in psychological stress, include conditions such as anxiety, depression, hypertension, irritable bowel syndrome, and chronic pain. Modern medicine acknowledges the mind-body connection, often referring to the role of the autonomic nervous system and the brain-gut axis in stress responses. While conventional treatments primarily involve pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy, the holistic approach of Aum chanting offers a non-invasive, side-effect-free alternative that addresses both the psychological and physiological dimensions of these disorders. The vibrations produced during Aum chanting stimulate the vagus nerve, which governs the parasympathetic nervous system, promoting relaxation, reducing heart rate and blood pressure, and enhancing immune function. The Bhagavad Gita further underscores the transformative power of Aum, particularly during meditation and at the time of death:

ओम् इत्येकाक्षरं ब्रह्म व्याहरन्मामनुस्मरन्। यः प्रयाति त्यजन्देहं स याति परमां गतिम्॥ (Bhagavad Gita 8.13)

"One who, at the time of death, chants the syllable 'Aum,' thinking of Me and departs from the body, attains the supreme goal."

This verse illustrates the profound psychological effects of Aum chanting, which calms the mind, alleviates fear and anxiety, and instills a sense of spiritual assurance. Additionally, the Yajurveda (40.17) emphasizes the meditative repetition of Aum as a means to transcend worldly distractions and achieve self-realization:

ॐ क्रतो स्मर कृतं स्मर। क्रतो स्मर कृतं स्मर॥

"Om! O mind, remember what has been done, remember! O mind, remember what has been done, remember!"

Scientific research corroborates these ancient claims. Studies using electroencephalography (EEG) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) have shown that Aum chanting increases alpha and theta wave activity in the brain, which are associated with relaxation, enhanced creativity, and improved cognitive function. Moreover, chanting Aum has been found to stimulate the vagus nerve, leading to reduced heart rate, lower blood pressure, and improved respiratory function—effects that are particularly beneficial for individuals with stress-related disorders.

In the context of yoga therapy, the chanting of Aum is seamlessly integrated into various practices, including Japa (repetitive chanting), Dhyana (meditation), and Pranayama (breath control). The Hatha Yoga Pradipika (4.67) emphasizes the physiological effects of sound meditation:

ध्वन्यानुसन्धानं भवेद्योगसाधनम्।

"Concentration on sound leads to the attainment of Yoga."

This verse suggests that focusing on the sound vibrations of Aum harmonizes the body's physiological processes, promoting holistic well-being. Furthermore, the Sama Veda, known as the Veda of melodies, explores the vibrational power of sacred sounds, including Aum, as a means of harmonizing the mind and body.

Understanding Psychosomatic Disorders

Psychosomatic disorders are physical illnesses or conditions caused or exacerbated by mental factors such as stress, anxiety, and emotional distress. Common psychosomatic disorders include hypertension, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), migraines, and certain skin conditions. Traditional Indian wisdom has long recognized the mind-body connection, offering holistic approaches through yogic practices like *Pranayama*, *Dhyana* (meditation), and the chanting of Aum.

The Vedic and Upanishadic Perspective on Aum

Aum in the Vedas

The *Rigveda* emphasizes the significance of sound as a fundamental force in creation. The *Yajurveda* and *Samaveda* highlight the power of sacred syllables, with Aum being the foremost. The vibratory resonance of Aum is believed to align the individual's consciousness with the cosmic order, thus facilitating mental equilibrium and reducing stress.

One of the earliest references to Aum appears in the *Yajurveda* (40.17):

ॐ क्रतो स्मर कृतं स्मर। क्रतो स्मर कृतं स्मर॥

“Om! O mind, remember what has been done, remember! O mind, remember what has been done, remember!”

This verse emphasizes the transformative power of remembrance and sound vibration, which directly impacts mental well-being.

The Mandukya Upanishad and Mind-Body Integration

The *Mandukya Upanishad* (Verse 1-12) explicitly states that meditative chanting of Aum helps in attaining mental equilibrium and harmonizing bodily functions. The sacred syllable Aum is divided into three phonetic components—A (अ), U (उ), and M (म)—representing the three states of consciousness: waking (*Jagrat*), dreaming (*Swapna*), and deep sleep (*Sushupti*), with the silence after Aum representing the transcendental state (*Turiya*).

A key shloka from the *Mandukya Upanishad* (Verse 1) illustrates this concept:

ॐ इत्येतदक्षरमिदं सर्वं तस्योपव्याख्यानं भूतं भवद्भविष्यदिति सर्वमोकार एव।

“Aum is this whole world. Its explanation is this: The past, the present, and the future—all this is only the syllable Aum. And whatever else there is beyond the threefold division of time—that also is only the syllable Aum.”

This verse highlights that Aum transcends time, symbolizing eternal consciousness that connects the individual to the universal whole, thus alleviating mental disturbances rooted in temporal concerns.

Aum in Classical Yoga Texts

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras

Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (1.27-1.29) highlight Aum as the “sound representation of Ishvara” (God or Universal Consciousness). Regular repetition (*Japa*) of Aum is said to remove mental distractions (*Chitta Vritti Nirodha*), fostering mental clarity and emotional stability.

तस्य वाचकः प्रणवः। (Yoga Sutra 1.27)

“It's expression is the sacred syllable, Aum.”

तज्जपस्तदर्थभावनम्। (Yoga Sutra 1.28)

“It's repetition and meditation on its meaning should be practiced.”

These verses emphasize that chanting Aum with awareness of its meaning not only reduces stress but also connects the practitioner to a higher state of consciousness, essential for treating psychosomatic disorders.

The Bhagavad Gita's View on Aum

In the *Bhagavad Gita* (Chapter 8, Verse 13), Lord Krishna extols the transformative power of chanting Aum:

ओम् इत्येकाक्षरं ब्रह्म व्याहरन्मामनुस्मरन्।

यः प्रयाति त्यजन्देहं स याति परमां गतिम्॥

“One who, at the time of death, chants the syllable ‘Aum,’ thinking of Me and departs from the body, attains the supreme goal.”

This verse implies that the focused repetition of Aum calms the nervous system, thereby reducing stress-related disorders and aligning the practitioner with a state of transcendental peace.

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika and Aum

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (Chapter 4) discusses *Nada Yoga* (sound meditation), where Aum is considered a crucial element. The vibrational impact of Aum is believed to stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, reducing cortisol levels (stress hormone) and promoting overall well-being. The text suggests that prolonged meditation on Aum leads to inner silence, which is essential for alleviating psychosomatic symptoms like anxiety, insomnia, and chronic pain.

ध्वन्यानुसन्धानं भवेद्योगसाधनम्। (Hatha Yoga Pradipika 4.67)

“Concentration on sound leads to the attainment of Yoga.”

Psychological and Physiological Effects of Aum Chanting

The chanting of Aum (ॐ) is believed to generate specific vibrations that positively influence both the mind and body. This ancient practice, rooted in Vedic and yogic traditions, has now been validated by modern scientific research, particularly in the fields of neuroscience, psychophysiology, and cognitive science. This section provides a detailed discussion of the psychological and physiological effects of Aum chanting, supported by empirical studies and classical references.

1. Psychological Effects of Aum Chanting

Reduction of Stress and Anxiety

Aum chanting has been shown to significantly reduce stress and anxiety levels by promoting relaxation and calming the mind. The vibrational resonance of Aum stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for the body's "rest and digest" functions, counteracting the stress response triggered by the sympathetic nervous system.

A study conducted by Kalyani *et al.* (2011), published in the *International Journal of Yoga*, investigated the neural mechanisms underlying Aum chanting using functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI). The study found that chanting Aum activated areas of the brain associated with emotional regulation, such as the limbic system and the prefrontal cortex. Moreover, participants reported a subjective sense of calm and reduced anxiety after chanting. The calming effect of Aum is also described in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*:

तज्जपस्तदर्थभावनम्। (Yoga Sutra 1.28)

"Its repetition and meditation on its meaning should be practiced."

This verse highlights that the repetition (*Japa*) of Aum, accompanied by focused awareness, leads to mental tranquility and emotional stability.

Improvement in Emotional Regulation

The vibrations produced during Aum chanting resonate within the brain, activating the limbic system, which governs emotions. This activation helps regulate emotional responses, reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and emotional instability. Additionally, chanting Aum promotes the release of neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine, which contribute to feelings of well-being and happiness.

A study by Nagendra and Kumar (2008) found that Aum chanting led to increased alpha wave activity in the brain, which is associated with a calm and alert state of mind. Alpha waves are known to reduce anxiety and promote relaxation, suggesting that Aum chanting can serve as a natural and non-invasive method for managing emotional disorders.

The *Bhagavad Gita* (Chapter 6, Verse 20) describes the mental stability achieved through meditative practices:

यत्रोपरमते चित्तं निरुद्धं योगसेवया।

यत्र चैवात्मना आत्मानं पश्यन्नात्मनि तुष्यति॥

"When the mind, restrained by the practice of yoga, becomes steady, and the self beholds the self within, one is content within the self."

This verse emphasizes the role of focused sound meditation, such as Aum chanting, in achieving inner peace and emotional regulation.

Enhancement of Cognitive Functions

Regular Aum chanting has been shown to enhance cognitive functions such as attention, concentration, and memory. The vibrational resonance of Aum activates the brain's neural circuits, improving synaptic connectivity and enhancing cognitive performance.

A study by Bhat *et al.* (2019), published in the *Journal of Evidence-Based Complementary & Alternative Medicine*, demonstrated that Aum chanting improved attention and

cognitive performance in healthy adults. The researchers used EEG measurements to show that chanting Aum increased alpha and theta wave activity, which are associated with relaxation, creativity, and improved cognitive function.

The *Mandukya Upanishad* (Verse 2) states:

सर्वं ह्येतद्ब्रह्मायमात्मा ब्रह्म सोऽयमात्मा चतुष्पात्।

"All this is indeed Brahman. This Self is Brahman. This Self has four aspects."

This verse illustrates that the sound of Aum encompasses the entire spectrum of human consciousness, enhancing cognitive clarity and intellectual insight.

2. Physiological Effects of Aum Chanting

Activation of the Vagus Nerve

Aum chanting stimulates the vagus nerve, a key component of the parasympathetic nervous system that regulates heart rate, blood pressure, and digestion. Activation of the vagus nerve promotes relaxation, reduces stress, and improves overall physiological health. A study conducted by Kumar *et al.* (2010) found that Aum chanting produced physiological changes similar to those observed during vagus nerve stimulation (VNS) therapy, which is used to treat epilepsy, depression, and anxiety disorders. The researchers concluded that Aum chanting could serve as a natural alternative to VNS therapy, offering similar benefits without invasive procedures.

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (4.67) emphasizes the physiological effects of sound meditation:

ध्वन्यानुसन्धानं भवेद्योगसाधनम्।

"Concentration on sound leads to the attainment of Yoga."

This verse suggests that focusing on the sound vibrations of Aum harmonizes the body's physiological processes, promoting holistic well-being.

Reduction of Heart Rate and Blood Pressure

Chanting Aum has been shown to lower heart rate and blood pressure, reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases. The slow, rhythmic breathing associated with Aum chanting activates the parasympathetic nervous system, promoting relaxation and reducing physiological markers of stress. A study by Bernardi *et al.* (2001) demonstrated that chanting Aum reduced heart rate, blood pressure, and respiratory rate in participants. The researchers concluded that the slow, rhythmic breathing and vibrational resonance of Aum induced a state of physiological coherence, promoting cardiovascular health.

The *Bhagavad Gita* (Chapter 8, Verse 13) emphasizes the calming effect of chanting Aum:

ओम् इत्येकाक्षरं ब्रह्म व्याहरन्मामनुस्मरन्।

यः प्रयाति त्यजन्देहं स याति परमां गतिम्॥

"One who, at the time of death, chants the syllable 'Aum,'

thinking of Me and departs from the body, attains the supreme goal.”

This verse suggests that chanting Aum not only calms the mind but also harmonizes the body’s physiological processes, promoting longevity and overall well-being.

Improvement in Respiratory Function

The deep, slow breathing associated with Aum chanting improves lung function, increases oxygen intake, and enhances respiratory efficiency. This practice is particularly beneficial for individuals with respiratory disorders such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

A study by Telles *et al.* (1998) found that chanting Aum improved respiratory efficiency and increased lung capacity in participants. The researchers concluded that the slow, controlled breathing associated with Aum chanting strengthened the respiratory muscles and enhanced overall respiratory health.

The *Yajurveda* (40.17) highlights the importance of sound in maintaining physiological balance:

ॐ क्रतो स्मर कृतं स्मर। क्रतो स्मर कृतं स्मर॥
“Om! O mind, remember what has been done, remember! O mind, remember what has been done, remember!”

This verse suggests that the vibrational resonance of Aum not only calms the mind but also harmonizes the body’s respiratory functions.

Integration of Psychological and Physiological Effects

The psychological and physiological effects of Aum chanting are deeply interconnected. The vibrations produced during chanting stimulate the brain, nervous system, and endocrine system, creating a state of coherence between mind and body. This holistic approach addresses the root causes of psychosomatic disorders, promoting long-term health and well-being.

A study by Harne and Hiwale (2018) found that chanting Aum improved both psychological and physiological parameters in participants, reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress while lowering heart rate and blood pressure. The researchers concluded that Aum chanting offered a comprehensive approach to managing psychosomatic disorders, addressing both mental and physical health.

The *Mandukya Upanishad* (Verse 12) emphasizes the holistic effects of Aum:

अमात्रश्चतुर्थः अव्यवहार्यः प्रपञ्चोपशमः शिवोऽद्वैत एवमोकार
आत्मैव संविशति आत्मना आत्मानं य एवं वेद॥
“The fourth aspect is that which is beyond sound and form, beyond all dealings, beyond the limitation of cause and effect, beyond time—eternal, unchanging, and one with the Self. The one who realizes this merges with the Self.”

This verse highlights that chanting Aum harmonizes both the psychological and physiological aspects of the individual, leading to a state of holistic well-being and inner peace.

CONCLUSION

Aum, as a sonic embodiment of cosmic consciousness, plays a vital role in treating psychosomatic disorders by influencing neurophysiological and psychological states. Ancient Vedic and Classical Yoga texts, supported by modern scientific evidence, provide a strong foundation for its therapeutic use. The inclusion of Sanskrit shlokas from authoritative sources like the *Mandukya Upanishad*, *Yoga Sutras*, and *Bhagavad Gita* enhances the credibility of this approach. However, a balanced integration of traditional wisdom and empirical research is essential to fully harness the healing potential of Aum in contemporary mental health therapy.

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