

Eminence of OM in Atharvashira, Atharvashika Upanishads

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ABSTRACT

The socio-religious heritage of Indian people is based on the Vedas, the oldest and sacred scripture of the entire world, which reflect the way of life, culture and Philosophy of ancient India. The Upanishads mark the concluding parts of the Vedic literature Om is sacred sound and spiritual symbol in dharmic religions Om mantra chanting, a simple and easy to practice, also comes under the aspect of meditation. The Shaiva Upanishads extol Shiva as the metaphysical Brahman and the Atman (soul, self) Rudra is the principle found in all things, their highest goal, the innermost essence of all reality that is visible or invisible.

Keywords: Om, Shiva, knowledge, Brahman, kaivalya

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Introduction

The Vedas ("knowledge") are a large body of knowledge texts originating in the ancient Indian subcontinent. Composed in Vedic Sanskrit, the texts constitute the oldest layer of Sanskrit literature and the oldest scriptures of Hinduism. Hindus consider the Vedas to be *apauruṣeya*, which means "not of a man, superhuman" and "impersonal, authorless".

Vedas are also called *śruti* ("what is heard") literature, distinguishing them from other religious texts, which are called *smṛti* ("what is remembered"). The Veda, for orthodox Indian theologians, are considered revelations seen by ancient sages after intense meditation, and texts that have been more carefully preserved since ancient times. In the Hindu Epic the Mahabharata, the creation of Vedas is credited to Brahma. The Vedic hymns themselves assert that they were skillfully created by Rishis (sages), after inspired creativity, just as a carpenter builds a chariot.

The Upanisads are the prime source of many philosophical conclusions. The word Upanisad can be split as *upa+ni+sat*; to mean 'upa' – approaching a teacher; 'ni' – for knowledge; 'sat' – to attain liberation. The Upanisads present Brahman as the absolute reality and the substratum of the universe. Brahman is revealed as both the material and intelligent cause of the universe. Upanisads employ two ways of defining Brahman, one in its own nature (*svarupa lakshana*), that is, Brahman as the Consciousness, Existent and Bliss principle. The second definition is from its accidental attributes (*tatastha lakshana*) wherein Brahman is shown as the substratum of origination, sustenance and resolution of the universe. Various methodologies are used by the Upanisads to arrive at the absolute reality and one such method we find in the Aitareya Upanisad is known as superimposition and negation (*adhyaropa and apavada*). The world and its objects are superimposed initially and after the revelation of the non-difference between the effect and its material cause, the world is negated as non-existent in the substratum. Further, there is the description of the world, the individual self and the creator of the universe in the Upanisads.

Vedas or the source of knowledge, is also referred to as the *Śruti*. The content of the Vedas that has come down to us for centuries is said to have been heard by the sages in deep meditation and these sages are therefore known as 'mantradastās' or the 'seer of the mantras'.

The word 'Veda' generally refers to 'Mantras' and 'Brahmanas'. Mantras are hymns in praise of gods who are invoked in a ritual and Brahmanas are those portions which give various instructions on the performance of rituals. The Aranyakas deals with meditation which is generally taken up while living in forest (*aranya*). The Upanisads reveal the Absolute Truth, which provides the means to liberation and is popularly known as the 'Vedanta.' The Vedic Literature is vast with several branches and sections. The Vedic concepts and doctrines have highly influenced the religious and philosophical thinking of India. Some of the concepts are the definition of Sat and Asat. The most influential concepts are the law of karma and the concept of dharma that reflect the social condition of Vedic period.

In Muktika Upanishad is a tutelage of Lord Rama to Lord Hanuman. It gives an index of 108 Upanishads. The composing period of Upanishads ranges from the 10th Century BCE to the 14th century CE. In the 18th Century CE, Sri Ramachandrendra Sarasvati by his cognomen name Brahma Yogi wrote commentaries for all 108 Upanishads.

- Mukhya Upanishads-13
- Saiva Upanishads-14
- Vaisnava Upanishad-14
- Sakta Upanishads-8
- Samanya Upanishads-21
- Sanyasa Upanishads-18
- Yoga Upanishads-20

Shaiva Upanishads

The Shaiva Upanishads are minor Upanishads of Hinduism, specific to Shiva theology (Shaivism). There are 14 Shaiva Upanishads in the Muktika anthology of 108 Upanishads. They, along with other minor Upanishads, are generally classified separate from the thirteen ancient Principal Upanishads rooted in the Vedic tradition.

The Shaiva Upanishads also contrast from other groups of minor Upanishads, such as the Samanya Upanishads which are of a generic nature, the Sannyasa Upanishads which focus on the Hindu renunciation and monastic practice, the Yoga Upanishads related to Yoga, the Vaishnava Upanishads which highlight aspects of Vishnu, and the Shakta Upanishads which highlight Shaktism.

The Shaiva Upanishads praises Shiva as the metaphysical Brahman and the Atman (soul, self). A few texts such as Atharvashiras Upanishad include alternate terms such as Rudra, and assert all gods are Rudra, everyone and everything is Rudra, and Rudra is the principle found in all things, their highest goal, the innermost essence of all reality that is visible or invisible.

Some Shaiva Upanishads include sections with symbolism about costumes, rites and objects of worship in Shaivism. The Shaiva Upanishads and other minor Upanishads are a separate subgroup from the thirteen major Principal Upanishads considered to be more ancient dated to be between eighth and first century BCE; however, the estimates for the minor Upanishads vary. According to Mahony, the minor Upanishads

are approximately dated to be from about 100 BC to 1100 AD. Patrick Olivelle states that sectarian Upanishads attached to Atharvaveda were likely composed in the second millennium, until about the 16th century.

Saiva Upanishads 14

S NO	Upanishad Names	Mukthika Serial	Veda Names
1	Kaivalya Upanishad	12	KrishnaYajurveda also AtharvaVeda
2	Atharvashiras Upanishad	22	Atharvaveda
3	Atharvashikha Upanishad	23	Atharvaveda
4	Brihajjabala Upanishad	26	Atharvaveda
5	Kalagni Rudra Upanishad	28	Krishna Yajurveda
6	Dakshinamurti Upanishad	49	Krishna Yajurveda
7	Sharabha Upanishad	50	Atharvaveda
8	Akshamalika Upanishad	67	Rigveda
9	Rudrahridaya Upanishad	85	Krishna Yajurveda
10	Bhasmajabala Upanishad	87	Atharvaveda
11	Rudrakshajabala Upanishad	88	Atharvaveda
12	Pancabrahma Upanishad	93	Krishna Yajurveda
13	Jabali Upanishad	104	Samave
14	Ganapathi	89	Atharvaveda

One of the thirteen Principal Upanishads, namely the Shvetashvatara Upanishad mentions Shiva, Rudra, Hara and other Vedic deities, as well as Samkhya-Yoga and Vedanta philosophy. Shvetashvatara is neither considered a Shaiva nor a minor Upanishad. The Nilarudra Upanishad is an important Shiva-focussed Upanishad, remarks Deussen, from the group of five minor Upanishads which assert god Shiva as a symbolism for Atman (soul). These are ancient Hindu texts, with Nilarudra likely the oldest (composed closer to Shvetashvatara Upanishad), but Nilarudra is not included in the anthology of 108 Upanishads by Muktika like the other four of the five.

Concept of om

The vibration produced by chanting OM in the physical universe corresponds to the original vibration that first arose from the mouth of Hiranyagarbha the Karya-brahman. Hence Om is very important. This is Om or the word of power. Even Adishesha or Sarasvati will not be able to exhaust the subject on this sacred, Mantra Om even if they have the water of the oceans as ink and all the trees of the world as pens. Volumes have been written in the Sanskrit language on the significance of Om, the sacred and the mysterious monosyllable. All Mantras begin with Om. The Panchakshara and Ashtakshara Mantras are contained in Om. All Vedas, all Vedanta, all the sacred scriptures of the Hindus are contained in Om. Om is the womb for everything. This world has come out of Om, exists in Om and dissolves in Om during the cosmic pralaya. The creation itself is set in motion by the vibration of Om.

'A,' 'U,' 'M' are the life of all articulate words. 'A and 'U' when connected together coalesce into 'O'. Therefore the right way to write Om, is 'AUM.' 'A' of the sacred monosyllable AUM is a symbol of the Virat aspect (gross manifestation), 'U' of Hiranyagarbha, Karya-brahman (subtle manifestation) and 'M' of the Isvara aspect, Karana-brahman, (unmanifested state of Brahman).

Om is called Pranava, because it runs through prana or the vital force and pervades life.

As already stated Om is split into 'A,' 'U' and 'M.' 'A' signifies the waking state (Jagrat Avastha), 'U' the dreaming state (Svapna Avastha) and 'M' the deep sleep state (Sushupti Avastha), While the Om taken as a single unit, stands for the fourth state, Turiya which transcends the above three states. The hypnotic rhythm of repetition of Om causes stillness in the mind. Chanting of Om, silent T'apa of Om and meditation on Om set up harmonious vibrations in the mind or subtle body, elevate the mind to magnanimous heights of divine splendour and eventually raise

the consciousness to the state of Turiya wherein the meditator loses his individual consciousness and merges himself into the Supreme Soul, the all-pervading Brahmic Consciousness.

That which is Om is the imperishable, immutable noumenon, the Supreme Brahman. Om includes the experiences of man in the three states, viz., waking state, dreaming state and deep sleep state. Om stands for all the manifested and unmanifested planes. 'A' represents the physical plane and the waking state, 'U' represents the astral or mental plane and the dreaming state, 'M' indicates all that is beyond the reach of intellect, all that are unknown and the deep sleep state. Corresponding to the four states, waking state, dreaming state, deep sleep state and Turiya, the mystic expression of Om is supposed to have four syllables, each representing a corresponding position of both in the macrocosm and microcosm.

The four sounds are 'A,' 'U,' 'M' and the indescribable vibration which is the essence of the whole (Ardhamatra). Now the purport of the Mandukya Upanishad which deals with this subject is to make the aspirant for Moksha, contemplate on the identity of 'A,' Visva and Virat; 'U,' Taijasa and Hiranyagarbha; 'M' Prajna and Isvara; and the Ardhamatra, the essential vibration of Om, Turiya and the Pure Brahman. All these measures are devised in order that aspirant might grasp the highest Principle which transcends all mundane character. The universal aspects of Brahman which possess divine powers are, therefore, represented as one with the corresponding aspects in the individual. The Anandamaya state of the individual soul is looked upon as one with the Isvara state or universal soul.

Om in Atharvashira Upanishad

The Atharvashiras Upanishad is a Sanskrit text that is one of the minor Upanishads of Hinduism. It is the 22nd Upanishad in the list of Upanishads found in Muktika Upanishad. It is among the 31 Upanishads associated with the Atharvaveda. It is classified as a Shaiva Upanishad focussed on god Rudra.

The Upanishad is notable for asserting that all gods are Rudra, everyone and everything is Rudra, and Rudra is the principle found in all things, their highest goal, the innermost essence of all reality that is visible or invisible. Rudra is Atman and Brahman, and in the heart. Rudra's symbol is Om, states the text, he can be realized by abandoning anger and lust, and through silence alone. The text is known for its monism (Advaita), and was quoted extensively by the German philosopher Hegel.

It is also known as Atharvasirasopanishad, Atharvashira, Atharvasira in some texts referencing it, and as Sira Upanishad in Muktikā canon of 108 Upanishads.

The Atharvasiras Upanishad is an ancient text likely written in BCE, but its exact dating is uncertain. It is mentioned in Gautama Dharmasutras verse 19.12, Baudhayana Dharmasutra verse 3.10.10, Vasistha Dharmasutras verse 22.9 and elsewhere. The Upanishad, states Parmeshwaranand, belongs to the category of "later Upanishads", and he dates it to approximately 5th century BCE. Deussen remarks that it is from the group of five Upanishads which assert god Shiva as a symbolism for Atman in Hinduism. These five Upanishads – Atharvashiras, Atharvashikha, Nilarudra, Kalagnirudra and Kaivalya – are ancient, with Nilarudra likely the oldest and Kaivalya the relatively later era Upanishad (still BCE) composed closer to the time of Shvetashvatara Upanishad, Mundaka Upanishad, and Mahanarayana Upanishad. The text consists of 7 chapters, mostly prose with some verses. Several versions of the text are known, and the surviving manuscripts show evidence of being corrupted.

The importance of Self-knowledge
The wise who sees him (Rudra) as dwelling in himself,
He alone attains peace, and none else.
—Atharvashiras Upanishad, Chapter 5

Who is Rudra?

The Chapter 1 of the text begins with the answer to the question, "Who is Rudra?" He is introduced as that one "which existed at first, exists now and shall exist in future", the eternal and the non-eternal, the visible and the invisible, the Brahman and the non-Brahman, the east and west and north and south and above and below, the masculine and feminine and neuter, the Savitri and Gayatri, the appearance and the reality, the water and the fire, the cow and the buffalo, the lotus flower and the soma filter, the within and the without, the inner essence of everything. This chapter references and includes fragments of hymns from Atharvaveda sections 4.1 and 10.8, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad section 6.1 and Chandogya Upanishad section 7.25, however it expresses those ideas through Rudra. Rudra is the exalted one, is all gods, is universe Rudra is described as the essence of all gods, all living beings, one with the universe and as Maheshvara in the text.

Chapter 2 is set in repeating verse style, of the form:
Rudra is the exalted one, he is Brahma, to him the salutation, the salutation!
—Atharvashiras Upanishad, 2.1

The same verse is repeated with Brahma replaced with the names of numerous gods (Vishnu, Skanda, Indra, Agni, Vayu, Surya and others), thereafter replaced by objects of nature, substances, direction, colors, mantras, concepts (Truth), with the last verse stating "Rudra is the exalted one, he is the Universe, to him salutation, the salutation".
Chapter 3 is set in prose, and continues to assert the oneness of everything and everyone as Rudra. He is asserted as growth, as prosperity, as peace, as all, as non-all, as whole, as non- whole, as done, as non-done, the principle behind everything and the highest goal of every living form and everything that changes. The Upanishad then references and includes a fragment of hymn 8.48.3 of the Rigveda, stating that the one who has seen this light can have no fear of anyone's hostility or malice:

We have drunk Soma, have become immortal,
Have entered into the light, found out the gods!
What could the hostility harm us now,
What, O immortal, the malice of man!
—Atharvashiras Upanishad, Chapter 3

The soul, asserts the text, existed before the Soma and Surya. The whole world is Om symbol, and all deities, all vital breaths and He (Rudra) too is in the heart of each living being. Om is the holy call, Om is Rudra, he is infinite, he is protecting, he is the pure, he is the subtle, he is the lightning like, he is the highest Brahman, he is the One, he is the Rudra, he is the exalted Maheshvara, adds the text.

Rudra is Om, both symbolism for Atman, Brahman and the world. The Upanishad states that Rudra is resident in the soul in the heart. In chapter 4, the text offers mystical explanations to why Rudra is described the way he is. He is called Om, states the text, because when uttered he makes Prana go upwards. He is called the holy call because he is the essence of all the Vedas. He is called all pervading because he permeates the silence of the universe. He is called infinite because when uttered there is no end of it in any dimension, states the text.

He is called protecting, because he removes the fear of rebirth and suffering. He is called subtle, asserts the text, because uttering him makes the limbs tingle. He is called the highest Brahman because he is the highest of the highest, the highest goal, the strength that strengthens the strong. He is called the one because everything ends in him and he unites all creatures. He, asserts the text is called the exalted Maheshwara because from him all the Vedas flow and in him is raised through the perception of the Atman (soul, self) and the mastery of Yoga.

Rudra is in all men, omnipresent, he was born, and he will be born, he is in all the world spaces, begins chapter 5. One Rudra there is, states the Upanishad, and he has no second. He dwells in all living beings, and they return in him when they end. [23] Through him, the whole universe spreads out. Whoever knows him, enters peace. He is unity, he is eternal, he is energy, he is Om, he is silence that follows Om. Rudra is one without a second, the Pashupata.

Chapter 5 of the text asserts that one should revere Rudra as one, he has no second. He dwells within, those who abandon anger, greed and worldly desires realize him and attain peace. Fire, states the text, is ultimately ashes, wind is ashes, water is ashes, earth is ashes, universe is ashes, the body and mind are ashes, and thus the Pashupata covers himself with ashes as a form of prayer.

Rudra is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. One who seeks him gets immense bliss. Rudra is everywhere, he is all matter, he is in fire, he is in water, he has become plants and trees, he has become all living beings, states chapter 6 of the Upanishad. Nothing exists apart from Rudra. He is eternal, from which time is born. Nothing is earlier, and nothing later, he pervades all the world.

The Atharvashiras Upanishad was one of the minor Upanishads that Georg Hegel, the German philosopher of the late Enlightenment, referred to as he presented Brahman in Indian philosophy in his scholarship. He wrote, Atharvashiras Upanishad. which is dedicated to Shiva, who likewise speaks of himself, to an extent in most daring expressions of abstraction, which along this manner brings about a movement leading to unity: what has been, is Rudra; and what is, is He; and what will be, is He; Always was I, always am I, and always will I be. (...) What is, am I; and what is not, am I. I am Brahma and I am Brahman, etc. And further in one passage: I am the truth, I am the ox, etc, I am the supreme Being. Further therefore, where the intuition or representation of other individual objects, elements etc. begins, is said of them likewise as of the Ultimate, that they are Brahman.

—Hegel, Taschenbuch Wissenschaft Werke 11
The Atharvasiras Upanishad has been an important text in the Pashupata Shaivism tradition and the Nath Yogi movement founded by Gorakhnath. It contains the vow of those who enter monastic life in these traditions.

Om in Atharvashika Upanishad

The Atharvashikha Upanishad is a Sanskrit text that is one of the minor Upanishads. It is among the 31 Upanishads associated with the Atharvaveda. It is the 23rd Upanishad in the list of panishads found in Muktikha Upanishad. It is classified as Shaiva Upanishad focussed on god Shiva.

The text is composed through the voice of the Sage Atharvan, to whom he Atharvaveda is eponymously attributed. The text discusses and equates Om symbol to Shiva as the Supreme Being and Brahman, explaining the spirituality behind its chanting and meditation. It declares Shiva to be higher than Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra and Ishana. The text is also called Atharvashikhopanishad, and is listed at 23 in the Telugu language anthology of 108 Upanishads in Muktika Upanishad.

The word "Atharvashikha", states Deussen, means the "Tip of the Atharvan". Shikha also means "particular verse or formula" and "a tuft or lock of hair on the crown of the head". Atharvashikha along with the other four Upanishads – Atharvashiras, Nilarudra, Kalagnirudra and Kaivalya – are ancient, with Nilarudra likely the oldest and Kaivalya the relatively later era Upanishad (still BCE) composed closer to the time of Shvetashvatara Upanishad, Mundaka Upanishad, and Mahanarayana Upanishad.

Atharvashikha is probably among the later Upanishad in this group, and may be the stage of Hinduism where a transition occurred from Rudra, Ishana and related Vedic deities to one Shiva. The Atharvashikha Upanishad is, states Parmeshwaranand, a relatively later era composition (still 1st millennium BCE), influenced by the Pashupata Shaivism. The Atharvashikha Upanishad is presented in two sections, with Section 1 dealing with what is meant by Om and the significance of its syllables, and Section 2 dealing with the benefits one derives by meditating coupled with reciting the word Om representing the four Vedas. The text focuses on OM mantra and its benefits.

The Atharvashikha Upanishad imitates and repeats some text from other Shaiva Upanishads such as the Atharvashiras Upanishad, while expanding on a few aspects covered by it. However, a difference between the two texts is that Atharvashiras never uses the word "Shiva" (instead uses Maheshvara), while Atharvashikha repeatedly uses the word Shiva. What is the object of meditation?

The Upanishad opens with Rishis Pippalada, Angiras and Sanatkumara meeting sage Atharvan and ask, "which Dhyana (meditation) is highest?", "what does meditation comprise of and who should meditate", "what is the object of meditation?" Om is the highest, replies Atharvan. The text explains the basic meaning of the divine Om mantra, representing the Para Brahman, the highest Brahman, the "Ultimate Reality". Om's has four legs, syllables, which symbolize the four gods and the four Vedic scriptures. It has also four heads, which stand for holy fires – Garhapatya, Dakshina, Ahavaniya and destructive fire.

The four syllables of Om – A, U, M and the half part are equated with empirical realities, abstract concepts, rituals and gods by the Atharvashikha Upanishad.

Atharvan explains that the first syllable of Om, "A", represents the Prithvi (Earth), the Rig Veda, the god Brahma – the Creator of the Trimurti, the color red, the eight Vasus, the gayatri meter, and Garhapatya, the sacred fire in a household. The second syllable "U" denotes, states the text, the Akasha (sky), the Yajur Veda, the color black, the eleven Rudras, the Tristubh meter, and the Dakshinagni ritual fire. The third syllable "M" represents Heavens, the Sama Veda, the color white, Vishnu, the twelve Adityas, the Jagati meter and the Ahavaniya ritual fire.

The half fourth syllable, which is the hidden part that follows M, represents the Atharva Veda, Purusha (the Supreme Being), the spectrum of all colours, the Maruts deities, the Viraj meter and the Samvartaka fire which destroys creation. It reverberates as the sound of Brahman.

Om, Atman, Brahman and Shiva

The fourth half mora (syllable) of Om has three specific pronunciation modes – the short, long and the extra-long, states the text. These are related specifically to the degrees of utterance – one, two, and three matras, units of vocal pronunciation. This fourth is sant-atman, or "calm- self".

The half syllable is absent in the long pronunciation, the sound which is identified as the illumination of the soul. When uttered as a long reverberation, asserts the text, it rises upwards, resonating with Om-kara, the universal sound.

Chapter 2 begins stating that Om is also called Pranava, because it makes all Pranas (vital breath, life force) to give Pranama (bow down). Om, states the text, should be meditated upon as the origin of the Vedas and origin of all the gods.

A meditation on Om relieves (Santarayati) the meditator from fears and sorrows. As Vishnu in Om, it conquers all and fixes the mind in the highest Atman. As Brahma, it withdraws all senses. As Ishana, it sets the whole world into activity. It is through Om that Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra and Ishana came into being, as did all creatures and the deities of sensory organs in them.

Brahman, Vishnu and Rudra too, The Lord and also the Blissful (Shiva) Fivefold as these five gods, The holy sound is proclaimed.

— Atharvashika Upanishad, Chapter 2, Translated by Paul Deussen
Even utterance of the word Om for a second is stated to be superior to performance of one hundred yajna sacrifices. Further, Shiva is equated to Om. All knowledge, all Yoga practice, all meditation is about Shiva Mahadeva, states the text.

The Hindu philosopher Adi Shankara (c. early 8th century CE), apart from providing commentary on major Upanishads, which are well recorded, is also credited with bhasya (commentary) on a few minor Upanishads which include the Atharvashikha Upanishad. This is considered highly doubtful by scholars such as Paul Hacker and Natalia Isaeva, and it is likely the minor Upanishads were commented on by different persons who were also named Shankaracharya. The Om-sound, asserts the Upanishad, is Shiva.

Conclusion

The Vedas, especially the Upanishads, would eventually form the foundational understanding of Sanatan Dharma and provide direction and purpose in the lives of adherents. It came to be understood that there was a single entity, Brahman, who not only created existence but was existence itself. Om is God. It is the Self. It is the universe. It is Consciousness. To attain liberation, one should resort to Pranava. It is the dispeller of all obstacles. Shaiva Upanishads extol Shiva as the metaphysical unchanging reality Brahman and the Atman (Self) and include sections about rites and symbolisms related to Shiva. Shiva is the primal Self, the pure consciousness and Absolute Reality

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