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Sound and Silence: Understanding Pranava in Yoga Darshana through the Bhashya Tradition

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Abstract

The celestial syllable *Pranava* (ॐ) delegates foundational role in *Yoga Darsana*, serving as both a transcendental principle and a practical tool for spiritual realization. While *Yoga Sutra of Patanjali* I.27–29 offers a precise reference “तस्य वाचकः प्रणवः¹” and “तज्जपस्तदर्थभावनम्²”. Its philosophical and meditative significance are fully revealed through the *Bhashya* tradition as like in Vyasa in his *bhashya*, presents *Pranava* as inclusive of the pure, eternal, and omniscient nature of *Isvara*, *Adi Sankaracharya* approaches *Pranava* not only a sound that is inherently charged with the presence and power of the Absolute but also in formless *nirguna Brahma*. *Bhoja* in his exposition focuses on *japa* and *dhyana* as progressive interiorizations, bridging verbal utterance with contemplative stillness. The alignment of the *Nada* with *Brahma*, *Vishnu* etc can be seen in *Nagogi* commentary. This paper applies a hermeneutical method to get profound understanding of *Pranava* with help of classical commentators—including *Vyasa*, *Sankara*, *Bhoja*, the *Yoga Pradipika*, and the *Chandrika*, etc..

Keywords: Yoga Darsana, Pranava, Bhashya, Vyasa, Nada, Sankara.

Introduction

Pranava is a sound of cosmos, rhythm of universal vibration delegated sacredly in *Pantajali Yoga Darshna*. Through it appears briefly in the *yoga sutras* (I.27-29) the distinct interpretation of great personalities elevates it to a status of profound metaphysical, meditative and spiritual significance. As a transcendental principle of *Pranava*, signifies *Iswara* who is untouched by afflictions (*kleshas*) and karmic imprints (*karmas*). As a practical tool, it becomes a medium for meditative absorption, internal transformation gradually liberation.

तस्य वाचकः प्रणवः।³

तज्जपस्तदर्थभावनम्।⁴

ततः प्रत्यक्चेतनाधिगमोऽप्यन्तरायाभावश्च।⁵

However, the real essence of *yoga sutras* can only be understandable to those who have wholeheartedly aspired for grace of *Patanjali/Guru* and engaged in dedicated practice have obtained the deep insights and offered as in the form of commentaries. This idea is supported by scriptures like the *Mundaka Upanishad* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, which both say that higher knowledge is revealed only when a seeker approaches a teacher with the right attitude.

तद्विद्यानर्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्मनिष्ठम्।⁶

This outlines that true wisdom is not mere studied, it is received through the guidance of a teacher and the pure determination of the seeker. All these *Bhashyakars* can be seen as

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who had realized the higher self through deep inner discipline. Their commentaries speak direct understanding born from dedicated practice and inner clarity. Hence, understanding the Yoga Sutras through their interpretations becomes a highly authentic and significant way to approach the teachings of the Sutrakara (Patanjali). Their works lead the seeker not just toward theoretical understanding, but toward the realization meant by *Patanjali* himself.

Vyasa's commentary provides an existential grounding, presenting Pranava as an audible expression of *Isvara*. *Bhoja* emphasizes on spiritual absorption by concentrating and associating the sound of Om the *Pradipika* integrates the states of consciousness aligning with A-U-M and the transcendent fourth, *turiya*

Vyasa's interpretation of Pranava and One-pointedness to Self – Realization.

Vyasa Bhashya of Patanjali yoga sutras is very popular; through his commentary we can get to know that the relation of Pranava and *Isvara* is same inherited relation between flame and light.

वाच्यवाचकत्वमथ प्रदीपप्रकाशवदवस्थितमिति।⁷

His (*Isvara*) relation with the sign (*pranava*) is inherent and thus ever present. Just as the relation already existing between father and son, is only expressed by convention this is the father, this the son! The relation between the word and meaning are eternal as one co-existed with the other. The yogi who has come to know this, constantly repeating word (*Pranava*) and the habitual mental manifestation is to be of what signifies: *Isvara*, becomes one pointed. Now with help of one pointedness and self-awareness practice yoga and let self-study be affected through yoga. By *swadhyaya* and yoga together the higher self-revealed.

स्वाध्यायाद्योगमासीत् योगात्स्वाध्यायमासते।

स्वाध्याययोगसंपत्त्या परमात्मा प्रकाशते इति॥ 28॥⁸

Thus, all the obstacles will be ceased, able to understand the individual self and the true nature of himself is also seen and get to know inclusive of the pure, eternal, and omniscient nature of *Isvara*.

स्वरूपदर्शनमप्यस्य भवति।⁹

ईश्वरः पुरुषः शुद्धः प्रसन्नः केवलोऽनुपसर्गस्तथाऽयमपि बुद्धे प्रतिसंवेदी पुरुष इत्येवमधिगच्छति।¹⁰

Bhoja's interpretation of Pranava and a Pathway to Samadhi:

Bhoja, in his *Vritti* underscores the state of *samadhi* is achievable by the concept of *Isvara* and *Pranava* characterized by the relation of what is expressed (*vachya*) and what expresses (*vachaka*). This relation is always existed and indicated by convention and is not created by anyone --just like the inherent relationship between a father

and son already exists, and is merely pointed out by saying 'this is his father' and 'this is his son'.

The repetition of proper articulation of *three and half measurement of Pranava* ¹¹ contemplation of *isvara* in mind again and again is a method for the attainment of *samadhi*, the yoga practitioner the *Pranava* should be repeated *Isvara* to be contemplated in the mind.

समाधिसिद्धये योगिना प्रणवो जप्यस्तदर्थ ईश्वरश्च भावनीय।¹²

The realization of inward consciousness is happened by *Pranava Japa* and from the contemplation of its meaning, one is able to turn towards the one's own *antahkarana* by *drik-shakti* (which sees) due to the aversion of external objects. The realization of inner consciousness becomes knowledge (*jnana*).

Bhava Ganesa's interpretation of Pranava as a Structural Outline of Antaranga Yoga:

Bhava Ganesa said in his *Pradipika*, the Principal name of *Isvara* is *Pranava*. *Isvara* is formless and perceivable by *bhavana* (emotions / feelings) and conceived through *manas*, He is pleased by remembrances of OM as his name.

अदृष्टविग्रहो देवः भावग्राह्यः मनोमयः।¹³

By the recitation of *Pranava* and concentration on *Brahman* as the meaning of *Pranava* results deep devotion in the form of concentration and that concentration leads to *Dharana*, eventually to *Dhyana* and *Samadhi* is the result of *pranidanam*.

धारणाध्यानसमाधिरूपं प्रणिधानम् इति शेषः।¹⁴

He disclosed a meditative technique that "om is eternal nature of *brahma*, *Vishnu*, *maheswara* and equal to ten million suns radiance. One should meditate with in oneself upon the pure radiance, with those pure devotions (*isvara pranidanadam*) happens to realize individual soul and the inner consciousness with in individual being.

The Interpretation of Sankaracharya in Bhashya vivaranam:

AdiSankaracharya, the great philosopher in his commentary on *vyasa bhashyam* of yoga sutras knows as *Patanjali yogasutra bhashya vivaranam* states that 'the mind becomes calm and reach serene state by continuously meditating on *om*.

तेन हि मनसि सततं प्रणिधीयमानः प्रसीदति।¹⁵

It should be done as, Whether *Pranava(om)* consisting of three and half matras (A-U-M and half of sound) or three matras (A-U-M), doing its subvocal or mental repetition and the contemplation of its meaning in the *buddhi*.

तस्येश्वरवाचकस्य प्रणवस्यार्धचतुर्मातरस्य त्रिमात्रस्य वा जपः मनसोपांसु वा आवर्तनं जपः, तदर्थस्य चेश्वरस्य प्रणवेन वाचकेन समपितस्य बुद्धौ समारोपितस्य भावनमभिष्यानं तदर्थभावनम् । कर्तव्यमिति वाक्यशेषः ॥¹⁶

And he also emphasis on not to become inclined towards sense objects try to do mental repetition of Pranava as it is very close to meditation.

मानसोऽभिजपः प्रास्यते ध्यानस्यासन्नतरत्वात्मा विषयप्रवणचित्ता भूदिति¹⁷

Anantadeva's Interpretation on Pranava is a Way to Ekagrata:

In *Chandrika*, Anantadeva highlights the way to pratyahara and attain concentration by employing Iswara in mind and repeating omkara again and again.

तस्य प्रणवस्य जपः प्रणववाच्यस्य ईश्वरस्य भावनं पुनः पुनश्चेतसि निवेशनमेकाग्रताया उपायः।¹⁸

Conclusion:

Together, we can understand the clear representation of *Nada* as a sound of utterance and *Sunya* as 4 states of consciousness either it is A-U-M and ardra matra or Jagrat(walking), swapna(dreaming), Sushupti(dreamless State) and 4th is the matra less state know turiya, known as nirvikalpa, beyond dualities are the dimensions of pranava. These textual interpretations are vital to get the deeper meaning of what Patanjali's sutras says and offer adaptability on application of meditation, mindfulness and integrative wellbeing. By collaborating with the *Bhasya* tradition, this paper bridges scriptural exegesis and modern contemplative needs, demonstrating the enduring potency of *Pranava* as both symbol and sadhana.

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Foot Note

1. Yoga Sutra I.27
2. Yoga Sutra I.28
3. Yoga Sutra, I.27
4. Yoga Sutra, I.28
5. Yoga Sutra, I.29
6. Mundaka Upanishad ,1.2.12
7. Psy I.27 Vyasa Bhashyam
8. Psy I.28 Vyasa Bhashyam
9. Psy I.29 Vyasa Bhashyam
10. Psy I.29 Vyasa Bhashyam
11. Psy I.28 ,Bhoja Vritti (सार्धत्रिमात्रस्य प्रणवस्य जपः)
12. Psy I.28 ,Bhoja Vritti
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