



A comparative study between Buddhist mantra Om Maṇi Padme Hūṃ and śaivite mantra Om Namaḥ Śivāya

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Abstract

Chanting of a mantra is the perfect way of awakening the consciousness within and can demonstrate a therapeutic effect on the body. The most important mantra for the Tibetan Buddhists associated with the bodhisattva – Avalokiteśvara is the six - syllable mantra Om Maṇi Padme Hūṃ. In Tibetan Buddhism, in particular, the Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra is one of the most significant texts, because it is the source from which the syllable “Om Maṇipadme Hūṃ” is derived. This mantra originated in India and it is in Sanskrit. Om Maṇi Padme Hūṃ is the most widely used of all Buddhist mantras. It is open to anyone who feels inspired to practice it to develop great love and compassion. On the other hand, the Om Namaḥ Śivāya mantra is a five syllable mantra that is associated with the qualities of grace, truthfulness and love. Om Namaḥ Śivāya mantra is perhaps among the most powerful and the most popular mantras on the earth. Also called as the Pañcākṣara or Pañcākṣarī mantra, we find the five syllabled mantras Namaśivāya (Na + Ma + Śi + Vā + Ya) attributed to Lord Śiva and affixed with ‘Om’, the primordial sound. Om Namaḥ Śivāya is a most potent and popular mantra, which is at the heart of the Vedas, Purāṇas and Tantra. In Hindu tradition, Lord Śiva was considered as lord of meditation, who enlightens the universe. This study is a comparison of two well-known mantras – Om Maṇi Padme Hūṃ; a Tibetan Buddhist mantra and Om Namaḥ Śivāya; a Hindu mantra.

Keywords: mantra, chanting, Om, Kāraṇḍavyūha, syllable, Mahāyāna

Introduction

The Kāraṇḍavyūha’s principal content is the introduction of the Om Maṇi Padme Hūṃ mantra ^[1] and the descriptions of its inconceivable benefits. These are also the most quoted sections of the sūtra. The merits of reciting this Mantra are limitless and cannot be fully described even by the Buddha. It is said that the sand of the Ganges and the drops of water in the ocean can be counted but not the merits from the recitation of this Mantra. This Mantra is the great love and compassion manifestation of all the Buddhas. It helps us to develop the love and compassion to make our life full of meaning. Also this mantra can bring healing and can be used as a prayer for other sentient being. Om, na, mah, shiv, vaa, ya are the six syllables present in Om Namaḥ Śivāya Mantra, which is one of the oldest mantras in Hinduism. It is a part of Shri Rudram Chamakam and it means “I bow to Śiva” ^[2]. Chanting Om Namaḥ Śivāya should be practiced in a calm, relaxed, and gently focused state, in mindfulness that the mantra is a salutation to the divine forces of life. Paramahansa Muktananda explained that “everyone can chant Om Namaḥ Śivāya Mantra because: “This mantra is free of all restrictions. It can be repeated by anyone, young or old, rich or poor, and no matter what state a person is in, it will purify him” ^[3]. It was reported that by chanting Om Namaḥ Śivāya mantra, it nullifies almost 99% of the negative impact of the planets. However, scientific evidence is lacking on this aspect. The reason for comparing these two mantras is based on the history behind the origination of the Om Maṇi Padme Hūṃ Tibetan mantra, which is said to have originated from the Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra that has close affinities to non-Buddhist literature and therefore the six syllable mantra is said to have

been conceptualized from the five syllable mantra “Om Namaḥ Śivāya”. A strong similarity has been observed in the frequency patterns of the two mantras which provide substantial evidence of the Om Maṇi Padme Hūṃ mantra being a derivative of the Om Namaḥ Śivāya mantra. This evidence can be upheld by the ability of both these mantras to generate positive energies within the body when chanted repeatedly.

The six-syllable mantra Om Maṇi Padme Hūṃ is the core essence of an entire range of Bouddhadharma, and it’s a practice very suitable for samsaric beings like ourselves. This practice can purify all karma and we can achieve the results at the moment of our death. If practised well, one can see the benefits even before death. In this regard, Alexander Studholme says "Om Maṇi Padme Hūṃ is, to begin with, a prominent visual feature of the landscape, carved and painted onto the rocks that line a road or a path, written in huge letters high up on a hillside, or present in monumental form in the so-called maṇi-walls (in Tibetan, maṇi gdong) the glorified dry-stone walls that are constructed entirely out of rocks each inscribed with a sacred formula, which, as the name of these edifices would suggest, is most often Om Maṇi Padme Hūṃ. Om Maṇi Padme Hūṃ is also (with few exceptions) the formula that, in printed form, fills the “prayer wheels” (maṇi chos ’khor) of the Tibetan religious world. These are the cylinders or drums-sometimes large and sometimes small-which line the outside walls of monasteries and temples, waiting to be spun around by visitors, as well as the personal, hand-held contraptions, kept revolving by a gentle flicking of the wrist. Prayer wheels are also found, in different shapes and sizes, harnessed to the power of mountain streams, to the

currents of hot air rising from butter lamps, and even, in modern times, to the flow of electric currents" [4]. The 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet says, the six syllable chant *Om Maṇi Padme Hūṃ* is great but you need to think of each syllable when you chant it. The *OM* is an indivisible union of method and wisdom that can transform your impure body, speech, and mind into the pure exalted body, speech, and mind of a Buddha. *MAṆI*, the jewel, symbolizes factors of method, compassion and love, the altruistic intention to become enlightened. *PADME* means lotus and symbolizes wisdom. Growing out of mud, but not being stained by mud, lotus indicates the quality of wisdom, which keeps you out of contradiction. The last syllable, *HŪM*, means inseparability; symbolizing purity and can be achieved by the unity of method and wisdom [5].

In a study conducted by Dr Alexander Studholme, this sutra marks the beginning of theism in Buddhism. Avalokiteśvara is regarded as a 'creator lord' with worlds found in the pores of his skin. The *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* is a text that is filled with techniques for folding theistic concepts. The Buddhist Mahāyāna definitely took on influences from the Śiva devotees at the time where there was a lot of interaction between the Buddhist and Hindus during the writing of these sūtras and therefore there is a lot of similarity in the texts. The sūtras of the Pāli era were more dedicated to the representation and working of the mind which is when devotion and mysticism was more popular. The Mahāyāna sūtras were more directed to attain a transcendental experience and therefore very powerful. Studholme claims that the *Om Maṇi Padme Hūṃ* mantra is said to have originated from one of the Mahāyāna sūtra i.e. *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* which apparently contains the manifestations and works of Avalokiteśvara. Since this sūtra has close affinities to non-Buddhist literature, the six syllable mantra is said to have been conceptualized or evolved from 'Śiva's' or 'Śiva's' five syllable mantra "*Om Namaḥ Śivāya*" [6].

The syllable *OM* is common for both these chants but based on its pronunciation while chanting, the frequencies that emerge are different for each of them. Chanting the *OM* in these mantras has a direct impact with the gamma wave patterns of the brain which have showed 95% increased mental activity/cognitive enhancement, freedom from distractibility, high levels of info-processing, learning and focus, high short-term memory ability and migraine prevention. Buddhist teachings claim that by chanting the *OM* syllable, an impure body, speech and mind can be transformed into pure ones of a Buddha, who was once impure and later by removing negative attributes, achieved enlightenment on his path. Based on the comparison of frequencies for both the chants and their syllables, there is a resilient similarity in the frequency patterns for each of the syllables and therefore there seems to be some commonality in the experience and healing capability of these chants.

The Mahāyāna sūtras mark the beginning of theism in Buddhism and are known to provide teachings related to attaining transcendental experience which is why the chants provided in these sūtras can bring about a transformation when regularly chanted. The frequencies associated with these chants and their syllables are the most important as there is a direct effect of these frequencies on the brain. The final

grouping and comparison of the frequencies for the syllables of the two mantras have shown some common frequencies which have apparently been used by healers and meditators to bring a significant change in the lives of individuals.

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The presentation of *Nama Śivāya* in the Śaivite Skanda Purāṇa, the work which, as we saw, may be linked in some way to the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*. In addition to many occasional references to this five-syllable formula, the purāṇa contains one chapter wholly devoted to its description. The Śiva Purāṇa includes one chapter on the five-syllable formula and the single syllable *Om* together, and a group of three chapters that discuss the qualities and the correct use of *Nama Śivāya* alone. In addition, passages from the *Linga Purāṇa*, which also contains a chapter on the glory of the five-syllable mantra, will be taken into account.

The relevant chapter in the Skanda Purāṇa begins with an introductory passage paying homage to Śiva. *Nama Śivāya* is first introduced, not in its normal five-syllable form, but in the common, variant six-syllable form *Om Nama Śivāya*. The chapter immediately reverts to descriptions of the formula in its more familiar form *Nama Śivāya*. It is "the supreme king of the kings of all the mantras," "the crest-jewel of all the Vedāntas," "the storehouse of all spiritual knowledge," "the illuminating lamp on the path of salvation," "the submarine fire unto the ocean of ignorance," and "the forest fire of great woods of heinous sins." Its use is openly available to women, śūdras and men of mixed social class and birth, and involves neither special initiation, nor homa, consecration, water-libation, special occasion, nor special process of instruction. It is "ever pure." It can destroy great sins and grant salvation. It should be acquired, the purāṇa then says, from an excellent preceptor, who is described as free from impurities, quiescent, well-behaved, of few words, free from lust and anger, with control over the sense organs and possessed of good conduct. If then repeated in a sacred place, the formula immediately brings inordinate or supernatural power. Six holy places are then listed which are conducive to the attainment of such powers: Prayāga, Puṣkara, the "charming" Kedāra,

Setubandha, Gokarṇa and Naimiṣṭrāṇya ^[7].

In many obvious respects, this presentation is clearly very different from the way in which Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ is written about in the Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra. Both the purāṇas and the sūtra are promoting a similar type of religious phenomenon. The Śaivite formula is pañcākṣara, “five syllables,” while the Buddhist formula is ṣaḍakṣara, “six syllables.” Although Nama Śivāya seems, in general, to be referred to as a mantra, it is also, like the Buddhist six syllables, described as a vidyā ^[8]. Both formulae are, furthermore, said to be the hṛdaya, or “heart” of the Īśvara: Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ, in the Kāraṇḍavyūha, is repeatedly referred to as the paramahṛdaya, or “innermost heart”; Nama Śivāya, in the Liṅga Purāṇa, as hṛdaya ^[9] and in the Śiva Purāṇa as mahāhṛdaya, or “great heart” ^[10]. Both the Śaivite and the Buddhist formulae are also promoted as sui generis means of attaining liberation. In the Skanda Purāṇa, for instance, Nama Śivāya is “the bestower of salvation on those who repeatedly mutter it.” It is the bestower of everything, the means by which “the ultimate principle” is reached and the Supreme Brahman is attained. Similarly, in the Śiva Purāṇa, we read: “(But) he who worships me even once with devotion repeating the five-syllabled mantra, attains my region through the weightiness of the mantra alone” ^[11]. And in the Liṅga Purāṇa: “It is the excellent knowledge leading to salvation” ^[12].

Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ, meanwhile, is said early on in the sūtra’s presentation, to bring about liberation. Whoever knows this paramahṛdaya, we read, knows liberation. A little later, it is said that whoever is given solace by Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ is said to become an irreversible bodhisattva and, before long, a fully enlightened buddha. The formula is the incomparable teaching on supreme enlightenment and nirvāṇa. Bringing it to mind leads to the destruction of all evil and the attainment of enlightenment. Reciting it brings sublime liberation. Without Nama Śivāya, the Skanda Purāṇa says, beings will “move round and round in the terrible mundane world infested with miseries.” Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ, likewise, is said to be the cause of the destruction of rebirth in the five realms of saṃsāra, leading to the drying up of the hellish kleśas and also to the end of the animal realms. Both Nama Śivāya and Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ are presented, in the same somewhat paradoxical manner, as formulae whose use may be enjoyed by almost everyone, regardless of any distinctions of class or gender, but which are yet, at the same time, extraordinarily difficult to come by. Similarly, though at one moment various complicated ritual processes appear to be absolutely necessary for effecting initiation into the use of these formulae, at another such procedures appear to be entirely dispensable. In the Skanda Purāṇa, for instance, Nama Śivāya is said, on the one hand, to be recited by women, śūdras and men of mixed caste and birth: categories that would have been excluded from participation in many other Indian religious practices. In the Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra, the use of Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ is also shown to cut across social and religious class barriers. When Sarvanīvaraṇaviṣkambhin sets out for Vārāṇasī in order to find his preceptor, he is said to gather around him a retinue of many different types: bodhisattvas, householders, renunciants, boys and girls.

The text reads:

athavā śraddhādhimuktakasya dātavyā / athavā
mahāyānaśraddhādhimuktakasya dātavyā /
na ca tīrthikasya dātavyā/ ^[13]

The formula, in other words, is to be given either to one who has exhibited faith, or (athavā) to one who has exhibited faith in the Mahāyāna. The Kāraṇḍavyūha indicates, at this Both sūtra and purāṇa, then, suggest that Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ and Nama Śivāya were promoted as popular practices, available to one and all.

Nonetheless, by virtue of the fact that their use was deemed to be dependent upon the good will or grace of the Buddhist or the Śaivite Īśvara, these formulae are presented as rare and wondrous treasures, a conceit occasionally reinforced by the performance of elaborate initiation rituals. The necessity of a qualified preceptor is consistently stressed. The bodhisattva Sarvanīvaraṇaviṣkambhin has to seek out the dharmabhāṅaka of Vārāṇasī. Similarly, in the Śiva Purāṇa, we read: “A japa without the behest of the preceptor, holy rites, faith and the prescribed fees is fruitless though the behest might have been secured” ^[14].

But perhaps the most arresting of all the similarities between Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ and Nama Śivāya is the way in which both sūtra and purāṇa appear to reflect a common understanding of the two formulae as forms of the praṇava. The subtle praṇava and the gross praṇava are, then, Oṃ and Nama Śivāya. This conception of Nama Śivāya as a form of the praṇava illuminates many aspects of its presentation. Oṃ is also regarded as both the essence and source of all religious teachings and practices. The Śiva Purāṇa states of Nama Śivāya: “Then all the Vedas, scriptures etc. are stationed in the five-syllabled mantra.” ^[15] And again: “This five-syllabled lore is present in all Upaniṣads.” And in the Liṅga Purāṇa: “At that time the Vedas and scriptures are stationed in the five-syllabled mantra.

Like Nama Śivāya, Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ is also said to have the qualities characteristic of a praṇava. We have already seen how the six syllables are repeatedly said, in the Kāraṇḍavyūha, to be self-sufficient means of achieving many different kinds of religious goals. The Buddhist formula is also presented, in the sūtra, as the condensed expression of all religious teachings. The idea of Nama Śivāya as both the essence and source of all things is conveyed in terms of a simple, though nonetheless evocative image. The formula is repeatedly described as the seed of a banyan tree. In the Śiva Purāṇa, for instance, in the course of a discussion of the six-syllable Oṃ Nama Śivāya, we read: “The first mantra consisting of six syllables is the seed of all lores. It is very subtle but serves a great purpose. It shall be known like the seed of the banyan tree” ^[17]. A similar sort of image-also derived from nature-is used to describe Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ. The Buddhist formula, in the Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra, is said to be like a grain of rice. As such, the formula is both the regenerative seed and also the essential, nourishing part of the plant. This conception of Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ is not just mentioned in passing, but is developed over the course of several lines of the text. The six-syllable formula, we read, is

“the grain of rice of the Mahāyāna”. It is, once more, the condensed expression of Buddhist teaching; its recitation is the equivalent of the singing of many Mahāyāna sūtras and the teaching of a great variety of texts. It is a sui generis means of achieving the great religious goals: its simple recitation brings sublime liberation. To obtain the formula, the sūtra explains, is to possess the pith, just as one obtains the pith of rice grains, by taking them home, filling jars with them, drying them in the sun, threshing them, and leaving them for four years. All other yogas are like chaff. The six-syllable formula is like the rice grain. Om Maṇipadme Hūṃ, here again, appears deliberately to be presented as a kind of Buddhist praṇava. The use of this type of imagery, in parenthesis, represents another link between the Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra and the buddha nature sūtras of the Mahāyāna. The kernel of grain inside the husk and the seed within a fruit, for instance, are, respectively, the third and sixth of nine similes used to describe the tathāgatarbha in the Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra. The six-syllable Buddhist formula is also, like the Śaivite formula, personified as a female deity. In the Īva Purāṇa, for instance, Nama Śivāya is described as follows:

It is the goddess, my own expression coming out of my mouth at first. The goddess having the splendour of molten gold, plump, lifted-up breasts, four arms, three arees, and the crescent moon as the crest-jewel. Her hands are as tender as lotuses. She is gentle with the gesture of boon and protection; she is possessed of all characteristics. She is bedecked in ornaments. She is seated on a white lotus. Her tresses are blue and curly. She has five colours with beaming discs, viz., yellow, black, smoky, golden and red ^[18].

Conclusion

Om Maṇipadme Hūṃ, or ṣaḍakṣarī mahāvīdyā as the formula is dubbed, also appears as a goddess in the maṇḍala presented in the Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra. She has four arms, is “autumn yellow” in color, is decorated with many ornaments, holds a lotus in her outer left hand and a string of prayer beads in her outer right, with her two inner hands joined in the mudrā of sarvarājendrā. The six-syllable Buddhist formula Om Maṇipadme Hūṃ represents an adaptation of the five-syllable Śaivite formula Nama Śivāya. Both are concise vidyās, the hṛdayas of their respective Īśvaras, sui generis means of attaining liberation, universally available, though of rare value and somewhat secret. Both are also, it has been argued, conceived of as forms of praṇava. Their close similarity, it seems, even led non-Buddhists to seek initiation into use of the Buddhist formula.

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10. Liṅga Purāṇa, 1, 85-39.
11. Śiva Purāṇa, Vāyavīyasamhitā, 14-51.
12. Śiva Purāṇa, Vāyavīyasamhitā, 13-12.
13. Liṅga Purāṇa, 1, 85-39f. It should be noted that the comparable Vaiṣṇavite formulae, the eight-syllable Om Namō Nārāyaṇāya and the twelve-syllable Om Namō Bhagavate Vāsudevāya, are described in the same all-encompassing terms. In the Liṅga Purāṇa, for instance, we read: The mantra Om Namō Nārāyaṇāya is the means for achieving all objects. Hence, one should repeat the mantra Om Namō Nārāyaṇāya on all occasions. Liṅga Purāṇa, ch. 7, ll. 9–14. The twelve-syllable formula, meanwhile, destroys the great sins of those who read and listen to it. The man who repeats this unchanging twelve-syllabled mantra continuously attains the divine, incomparable great region of Viṣṇu even if he follows a sinful conduct. Liṅga Purāṇa, ch. 7, ll. 28-33.
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