

CHAPTER 1.0

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Every society in the world has a religious tradition governed by a set of religious beliefs. It has various well-established methods to remain in the path of spirituality and attain the ultimate goal of life. Out of the various established methods, recitation of *Mantra* (*japa*) every day or during meditation is believed to improve physical and mental health. The term *Mantra* comes from Sanskrit root words ‘*man*’ that means mind and ‘*tra*’ means a vehicle, meaning an instrument that takes the mind from the state of activity to silence. Recitation of *Mantra* (repetition of sacred words or phrase) has been a universal practice and considered as a method to slow down the thoughts and attain one-pointed concentration (Bormann, Hurst, & Kelly, 2013).

Like an image or any object, *Mantras* are used as effective tools for meditation. The use of *mantra* during meditation is found in many contemporary yoga traditions and these practices have been found to be widely used in research. The significance of recitation of ‘Om’ is well described in Yoga texts and its chanting during meditation decreased the heart rate (Telles, Nagarathna, & Nagarathna, 1995) and skin resistance (Telles, Nagarathna, & Nagendra, 1998) suggestive of mental alertness and physiological relaxation. Similarly, the practice Transcendental Meditation has many unique characteristics and one of them is the *Mantra*. This particular practice demonstrated a decrease in oxygen consumption, breath rate and heart rate. In addition to the mentioned physiological changes, a reduction in blood lactate levels, and an increase in slow alpha and occasional theta in the EEG after 20 minutes of practice, suggestive of a quietening effect of the mind (Wallace, Benson, & Wilson, 1971). Also, most of the studies on TM reported changes attributed to increased autonomic stability and sympathetic withdrawal (Orme-Johnson & David, 1984).

Besides all the above-mentioned findings, it has been substantiated scientifically that yoga *Mantra* (*sutra* of scriptures) had a positive impact on physiological functions of the body. For example, during the recitation of Yoga *Mantras*, there was an increase in the

synchronicity of cardiovascular rhythms when they were recited. In a very eye-opening scientific study (Bernardi et al., 2001), it was demonstrated that when rosary prayer was chanted six breaths per minute induced favourable physiological and psychological effects. More directly chanting of *gayatri mantras* was reported to be increasing the performance of attention compared to poem line chanting (Pradhan & Derle, 2012).

Mantra meditation (MM) improves attention, awareness, emotional regulation, relaxation, sleep quality and builds the capacity to cope with stress (Quilty et al., 2013). In addition, MM also improved self-reported spiritual well-being, mindfulness traits, quality of life and reduction of stress, anxiety and anger (Khoury et al., 2017; Hilton et al., 2017; Jayatunge&Pokorski, 2018 and Pandya, 2019). Not only chanting of *Mantra* but listening of *Mantra* also has the impact on general psychological well being such as cheerfulness and clarity of mind (Burger and Lockhart, 2017). Transcendental meditation (TM) is also a type of *Mantra* meditation that helped to reduce depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and improved many psychological variables such as mindfulness, self-efficacy, mental and physical quality of life and reduced stress (Basso et al., 2019).

More recently the recitation of *Mantra* improved performance related to focused attention in school children undergoing yoga training in a residential set up (Spadaro and Hunker, 2016). With this evidence, it can be suggested that the recitation of certain yoga *mantras* and prayer, at specific frequencies, resulting in yielding psychological and physiological effects.