

IMPORTANCE AND BENEFITS OF PRANAYAMA- A LITERARY REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Introduction- *Pranayama* word is composed of two *Sanskrit* words *Prana* (extension of life force or vital energy) and *Ayama* (to extend or draw out). It is originated as a *Yogic* practice in ancient India. According to *Patanjali Yoga Sutram*, it is a regulation of breath (stoppage of inhalation and exhalation), which follows after securing the steady posture or *Asana*. According to *Shri Shankaracharya*, it is the control of all life forces by realizing naught but *Brahman* in all things as the mind. The *Gita* says “others offer *Prana*(outgoing breath) in *Apana* and *Apana* in *Prana*, restraining the passage *Prana* and *Apana*, absorbed in *Pranayama*. *Pranayama* is the method of breathe control. **Literary review-** The process of *Pranayama* is concerned with breathing. Breathing is indicator of life. The breathing process chiefly

involves two things, first one is inhaling and other one is exhaling. The inhaling procedure is called as ‘*Puraka*’. Whereas exhaling procedure is called as ‘*Rechaka*’. The state when these two activities are made to halt is called as ‘*Kumbhaka*.’ The halt after inhaling is called as ‘*Abhyantara Kumbhaka*.’ and the halt after exhaling is called as ‘*Bahya Kumbhaka*.’ Many yoga teachers advise that *Pranayama* should be part of an overall practice that includes the other limbs of *Patanjali's Raja Yoga* teachings, especially *Yama*, *Niyama* and *Asana*. **Importance and benefits of Pranayama-** *Pranayama* has the capacity of freeing the mind from untruthfulness, ignorance and all other painful and unpleasant experiences of the body

and mind. When the mind becomes clean it becomes easy for the Sadhaka to concentrate on the desired object. By concentrating on desired object he progresses further in the direction of Dhyana and Samadhi. Physically, Pranayama appears to be a systematic exercise of respiration, which makes the lungs stronger, improves blood circulation, makes the man healthier and bestows upon him the boon of a long life. Physiology teaches us that the air (Prana) we breathe in fills our lungs, spreads in the entire body, providing it with essential form the body, take them to the heart and then to the lungs, which throws the useless material like carbon dioxide out of the body through the act of exhalation. Several diseases can be averted by regular practice of Pranayama. Hence it is obvious that the knowledge of the science of Pranayama and its regular practice enables a man to lead a healthy and long life.

KEYWORDS: Pranayama, Anuloma- Viloma, Ujjayi, Bhastrika, Kumbhak, Kapalbhati and Importace of Pranayama.

INTRODUCTION

Pranayama word is composed of two *Sanskrit* words *Prana* (extension of life force or vital energy) and *Ayama* (to extend or draw out). It is originated as a *Yogic* practice in ancient India. According to *Patanjali Yoga Sutram*, it is a regulation of breath (stoppage of inhalation and exhalation), which follows after securing the steady posture or *Asana*. According to *Shri Shankaracharya*, it is the control of all life forces by realizing naught but *Brahman* in all things as the mind. The *Gita* says “others offer *Prana*(outgoing breath) in *Apana* and *Apana* in *Prana*, restraining the passage *Prana* and *Apana*, absorbed in *Pranayama*. *Pranayama* is the method of breathe control. Yoga Breathing helps to re- charge the cells in the body and re- energizes the brain cells; thus, the body is rejuvenated. Breathing directly affects the mental states. Breathing exercises help to control bodily functions. A regular, deep breathe enables one to feel calm and an irregular breathe can make you feel anxious. Yoga Breathing helps to re- charge the cells in the body and re- energizes the brain cells; thus, the body is rejuvenated. *Pranayama* is the fourth 'limb' of the eight limbs of *Ashtanga Yoga* mentioned in the *Yoga Sutras* of *Patanjali*. *Patanjali*, a Hindu Rishi, discusses his specific approach to *Pranayama* in explaining the benefits of the practice. *Patanjali* does not fully elucidate the nature of *Prana*, and the theory and practice of *Pranayama* seem to have undergone significant development after him. He presents *Pranayama* as essentially an exercise that is preliminary to concentration, as do the earlier Buddhist texts.

Literary review

The process of Pranayama is concerned with breathing. Breathing is indicator of life. It means if Pranayama will be done improperly, it will be harmful. So we should practice Pranayama under the supervision of a trained expert. If we think about Patanjali's 'Ashtanga Yogas' we find it chronologically at number four. Ashtanga Yogas contains following things- Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. Here also a question arises in mind "can we go directly for Pranayama?" or first we should practice Yama, Niyama, Asana and then go for Pranayama. Some expert says ideally we should practice Yama, Niyama, Asana and Pranayama chronologically. But also if we go directly for Asana and Pranayama then we can feel other changes like Yama and Niyama. Asanas are different positions for Pranayama. The breathing process chiefly involves two things, first one is inhaling and other one is exhaling. The inhaling procedure is called as 'Puraka'. Whereas exhaling procedure is called as 'Rechaka'. The state when these two activities are made to halt is called as 'Kumbhaka.' The halt after inhaling is called as 'Abhyantara Kumbhaka.' and the halt after exhaling is called as 'Bahya Kumbhaka.' Many yoga teachers advise that Pranayama should be part of an overall practice that includes the other limbs of Patanjali's Raja Yoga teachings, especially Yama, Niyama, and Asana. There are many Pranayama techniques and forms, these include -

1. Anuloma Pranayama- A form of alternate nostril breathe (distinct from nadi shodhana)
2. Ujjayi Pranayama - "Victorious or Conquering Breathe" is Breathing with the glottis slightly engaged, some versions require digital Pranayama (the fingers controlling the nostrils)
3. Bhastrika Pranayama - "Bellows Breathe" - Fast and forceful inhales and exhales driven by diaphragmatic breathing. Technically not a Pranayama but a 'kriya' (cleansing technique) to clear the nostrils and sinuses for Pranayama.
4. Kumbhaka Pranayama - "Breathe retention" antara (holding in) and bahya (holding out)
5. Viloma Pranayama - "the air is inhaled with pauses and exhaled as one breathe or vice-versa, usually with added kumbhaka"
6. Udgeeth Pranayama - "Chanting Pranayam" - often done with the chanting of the Om mantra.
7. Kapalabhati Pranayam - "Skull shining breathe"
8. Shitali Pranayama - "Cooling breathe" - Inhale is drawn over the curled and extended tongue.
9. Shitkari Pranayama - Similar to Shitali but the tongue is held between the teeth

10. Surya Bhedana Pranayama & Chandra Bhedana Pranayama - Channeling breathe in one side and out the other without alternating, meant to energize Ida or Pingala nadi. The right nostril is associated with the Sun (Surya) or pingala and left nostril with the moon or ida.
11. Sama Vritti Pranayama - "Equal Breathing" the inhale and exhale are of equal size and duration
12. Agnisar Pranayama - focuses on the Navel region/Stomach
13. Bhramari Pranayama - "Bee Breathe" - The yogin makes a humming sound while Breathing
14. Agni-Prasana - "Breathe of Fire" apparently another name for kapalabhati

Some types of Pranayama and their procedures

Anuloma- Viloma (Nadi Sodhana or Alternate nostril breathing)- According to Yogic treatises there are three fundamental Nadis or energy pathways in the system, Ida, Pingala and Sushumna. The Ida and Pingala are left and right Nadis. Ida lies left of spine whereas Pingala lies to the right side of spine. Sushumna runs along the spinal cord in the centre through the seven Chakras. The Ida and Pingala Nadis are often seen as referring to the two hemispheres of the brain. Pingala is the extroverted (active, solar) Nadi and corresponds to the right hand side of the brain (there is contra lateralization). The two Nadis are believed to be stimulated through different Pranayama practices including Nadi sodhana, which involves alternately breathing through left and right nostrils. *Anuloma* involves inhaling through both nostrils together and exhaling each breath alternately between the left and right nostrils. The thumb of the right hand is used to manipulate the right nostril, while the pinky and ring finger are used to control the left nostril. Inverted Anuloma breath is called *Pratiloma* and involves inhaling through alternating nostrils and exhaling through both together. The practice of a *kumbhaka* or retention is encouraged as students advance at the practice; first at the end of the inhale and eventually the end of the exhale.

When practiced as *Sama Vritti* the inhalation, retention and exhalation are all of equal duration. More advanced students may employ *Viśama Vritti* or uneven breath, using ratios such as 1:4:2 (one beat inhale, four beat retention, and a two beat exhale). According to many traditions this is not recommended for beginners or anyone practicing without the guidance of an experienced teacher.

Ujjayi- It is a type of breathing technique employed in variety of Yoga practices. It is usually done in association with Asanas. Ujjayi is a kind of diaphragmatic breath in which air first

fills the lower belly (activating the first and second Chakras), rises to the lower rib (the third and fourth Chakras) and finally moves into upper chest and throat. In Ujjayi the inhalation and exhalation are both done through the nose. The 'ocean sound' is created by moving the glottis as air passes in and out. As the throat passage is narrowed, air way passage also gets narrowed and when air passage through the passage it creates a 'rushing' sound. The length and speed of the breath is controlled by diaphragm. The inhalation and exhalation are equal in duration and are controlled in a manner that causes no distress to the practitioners.

Bhastrika- It is an important breathing exercise in Yoga. It is sometimes known as cleansing action to clear the airways. Bhastrika involves a rapid and forceful inhalation and exhalation by the movement of diaphragm. The movement of air is accompanied by an audible hissing sound. One inhale and exhale equals one round of Bhastrika and it may be repeated for many consecutive rounds.

Kumbhak- It is the pause between an inhale and exhale. It is retention or holding the breath, a state where there is no inhalation or exhalation. Along with inhale and exhale, the Kumbhak is essential to any practice of Pranayama. There are four types of Kumbhaka- Antara Kumbhaka, Bahya Kumbhaka, Sahita Kumbhaka and Kevali Kumbhaka. Ceasing of breath after complete inhalation is called as Antara Kumbhaka. Ceasing of breath after complete exhalation is called as Bahya Kumbhaka. Kumbhaka performed with inhalation or exhalation is called as Sahita Kumbhaka. When inhalation or exhalation is not required for Kumbhaka is called as Kevali Kumbhaka. It can be attained by long term practice of Pranayama.

Viloma- In Viloma Pranayama inhalation or exhalation is not a continuous process, but one that is interrupted by several pauses. For instance, if one complete inhalation were to take fifteen seconds, then in Viloma it would be interrupted every two or three seconds, thus bringing the length of the in breath to twenty five or thirty seconds. Similarly with interrupted exhalation out breath is lengthened from twenty five to thirty seconds.

Udgetha- It is most easy and common Pranayama. It is the art of conscious breathing. It entails primal sound reverberations to resonate and awaken mind to its inherent, immense potential mind. It's imperative to focus solely on specified consequence throughout Pranayama follow. It involves chanting of AUM with every exhalation, lasting up to twenty seconds.

Kapalbhati- It is the most important in the process of Kshatkarma. There are three types of Kapalbhati- Vatakrma Kapalbhati, Vyutkrma Kapalbhati and Sheetkrma Kapalbhati. In Vatakrma Kapalbhati exhalation is active where as inhalation is passive and it is opposite of normal breathing. Vyutkrma Kapalbhati involves sniffing water through the nostrils and letting it flow down into the mouth and spitting it out. Sheetkrma Kapalbhati is reverse of Vyutkrma Kapalbhati in which water is taken through mouth and expelled through the nose.

Sheetali and Sheetkari- It is a cooling down process, which cool down our body and gives feeling of coldness. Daily practice of Sheetali Pranayama provides calm mind and healthy body. The basic purpose of Sheetali Pranayama is to decrease or cool down body temperature. In Sheetali and Sheetkari type of Pranayama we breathe through mouth. These are similar to breathing of Python. Sheetali and Sheetkari types of Pranayama are similar except one difference that is way of breathing. In Sheetali type of Pranayama we breathe through folding our tongue, where as in Sheetkari type of breathing we inhale through teeth.

Surya Bhedi and Chandra Bhedi Pranayama- We have two nostrils for breathing. In Yogic term these two nostrils are called as Nadis. The right nostril is related to Surya Nadi (Pingla) and left nostril is related to Chandra Nadi (Ida). Surya and Chandra Bhedana Pranayama are the simple and effective breathing technique. By such type of Pranayama energy passes through Ida and Pingla Nadis. These are larger Nadis that hold the balance of magnetism and energy created Sun and Moon. They travel from the bottom of spine to the purpose between the eye brows.

Sama Vritti Pranayama- It is an equal ratio breathing technique to ensure that inhalation and exhalation have the same length. Here Vritti refers to fluctuations of mind and Sama Vritti refers to generally thought of as a soothing, calming, and centering practice, which helps to calm the mind.

Agnisara Kriya- The meaning of this Kriya is essence of fire. It is the Kriya that creates fire inside. Agnisara Kriya is an advance practice of Pranayama.

Bhramari- It's literally means bumble bee. It is an effective technique for meditation. It is useful in reducing high vital sign, fatigue and mental stress. It creates positive impact on ear, nose, mouth and eye. It is one of the great breathing exercise to release the mind of disquiet, anxiety or frustration and get rid of anger.

Importance and benefits of Pranayama

Pranayama has the capacity of freeing the mind from untruthfulness, ignorance and all other painful and unpleasant experiences of the body and mind. When the mind becomes clean it becomes easy for the Sadhaka to concentrate on the desired object. By concentrating on desired object he progresses further in the direction of Dhyana and Samadhi. Physically, Pranayama appears to be a systematic exercise of respiration, which makes the lungs stronger, improves blood circulation, makes the man healthier and bestows upon him the boon of a long life. Physiology teaches us that the air (Prana) we breathe in fills our lungs, spreads in the entire body, providing it with essential form the body, take them to the heart and then to the lungs, which throws the useless material like carbon dioxide out of the body through the act of exhalation. If this action of the respiratory system is done regularly and efficiently, lungs become stronger and blood becomes pure. However, most of the people do not have the habit of breathing deeply with the result that only one-fourth part of the lungs is brought into action and 75 percent remains idle. Like the honeycomb, lungs are made of about 73 million cells, comparable to a sponge in their making. On normal Breathing, to which we all are accustomed, only about 20 million pores in the lungs get oxygen, whereas remaining 53 million pores remain deprived of the benefit, with the result that they get contaminated by several diseases like tuberculosis, respiratory diseases and several ailments like coughing, bronchitis etc. In this way, the inefficient functioning of the lungs affects the process of blood purification. Heart weakens because of this with a constant possibility of untimely death. It is for this reason that the importance of Pranayama has come to be recognized, for a healthy long life. Several diseases can be averted by regular practice of Pranayama. Hence it is obvious that the knowledge of the science of Pranayama and its regular practice enables a man to lead a healthy and long life. It is for this reason that in several Hindu religious rites, Pranayama is found to have been introduced as an essential element. Mental disturbances like excitement, anxiety, fear, anger, disappointment, lust for sex (lasciviousness) and other mental perversions can be calmed down by regular practice of Pranayama. Besides, Pranayama practice improves the functions of the brain cells with the result that memory and the faculty of discrimination and observation improves, making it easy for the Sadhaka to perform concentration and meditation. Our karmas (deeds) result in the formation of certain tendencies, which determine the nature of our next birth either as humans or as animals of various categories. A man, who regularly performs Pranayama, is required to take lesser number of breathes and therefore lives longer. Like Yoga, Pranayama should also be performed four or five hours after taking food. In the morning Pranayama

should be done after finishing daily routine acts like cleansing mouth, emptying of bowels etc., it should also be done before Yogsana. In the beginning Pranayama should be done for five or ten minutes gradually the time may be increased up to about 1/2 or 1 hour. Maintain a specific number of repetitions and do not variate. Maintain a specific rhythm. If it is not possible to clean the bowels by morning, at night take some mild laxative like Haritaki (*Terminalia chebula* Retz) or any other mild laxative (a non habit forming medicinal herb having a laxative effect). Kapalabhati Pranayama, if done regularly for a few days will help in curing constipation.

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