

THE CONCEPT OF PRANA IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

The word Prana literally means life but in Vedic and Ayurvedic texts it has a vast meaning. The term is used for variety of elements as the phenomenon of life depends on many of them. *Prana* is Breath in, inhale, the breath of life, breath, respiration, spirit, vitality, life. Ayurvedic literature contains numerous references underlining importance of *prana*. Thus, term *prana* is mainly used as synonymous to 'vayu', as a type of *vayu* and as a subtle vitality element i.e. 'subtle *prana*'. According to *Rishi Parashar*, *nabhi* is first organ to be developed in fetus. Simply because *nabhi* is the place for '*prana*' along with bodily *ushma*. The association of *agni* and *prana*, also it highlights *prana* as a precursor. In *Charak Samhita*, '*Dasa*

Pranayatana' is a unique concept in Ayurveda, as they are the seats of life or vitality. Acharya Sushruta has mentioned the unique concept of the twelve *prana* in *Sushruta Samhita*. The elements *agni*, *soma*, *vayu*, *satwa*, *raja*, *tama*, five *indriya* & *bhutatma* are considered as *prana*. These twelve live attributes constitute human body. It is the vital essence of all *dhatu* i.e., *ojas* is also considered the site for *prana*.

INTRODUCTION

The word Prana has a vast meaning. Prana is the life force that enters the body at birth, travels through all the parts of the body and leaves at moment of death. Prana is the key concept of Ayurveda. Ancient literature like *Veda*, *Upanishads*, *tantra*, *purana*, *samhitas* are rich source of information about *prana*. The word *prana* is derived from the word "*An*" with *presuffix* "*pra*" and "*ac*" and "*Ghan*". At other places, some gives it derivation as the root *pr-pranati* and *pi-parti* meaning to fill, to nourish, to satiate and is thus related to *purna* (fullness).

Prana has remained fundamental in Ayurvedic theories. The term is used for variety of elements as the phenomenon of life depends on many of them. Gramatically it means forward, in front of, forth, filling, fulfilling. When used as an adjective it means excessively. Dictionary meaning of *Prana* is Breath in, inhale, the breath of life, breath, respiration, spirit, vitality, life. Ayurvedic literature contains numerous references underlining importance of *prana*.

According to Acharya Charaka, while treating '*aavritta vata*', vaidya shall particularly take care of '*prana*' and '*udana*' as 'life' depends on *prana* and '*bala*' depends on *udana*.^[1] In the *Vatakalakaliya Adhyaya* of *Charak Samhita*, *Vayu* when unvitiated, holds up the systems and organs, has five forms – *Prana*, *Udana*, *Vyan*, *Saman* and *Apana*, initiates upward and descending movements leads and organize minds, employs all sense organs in their function, carries all sense objects, produces structural configuration of all bodily *Dhatus*, encourages union in body, punctual speech, instigates touch and sound, is the origin of auditory and tactile sense organs, is source of exhilaration and courage, stimulates *Agni* (digestion), absorbs *Doshas*, throws out excreta, makes the gross and subtle channels, shapes the fetus and life span.^[2]

Acharya Charak has described five types of *Vayu* named as *Prana*, *Apan*, *Udan*, *Saman* and *Vyan*. It co-ordinates the body well while moving unimpeded in different places. *Vayu* is life, strength and sustainer of creatures. *Vayu* is the entire world; it is the master of all.^[3]

The places of *Prana Vayu* are *Murdha* (head), *Uras* (chest), *Kantha* (neck), *Jihva* (tongue), *Asya* (mouth), *Nasika* (nose) and its functions are *Shathiwan* (spitting), *Kshwathu* (sneezing), *Udgar* (eructation), *Shvasa* (respiration), *Ahara* (eating), etc.^[4]

Pranayatan are specific seat of *Prana*. They are ten in number namely two *Sankhas*, *Marma Traya*, *Kantha*, *Rakta*, *Sukra*, *Ojas* and *Guda*.^[5] The vital breath (*Prana vayu*) of men resides in heart, head and urinary bladder. Hence, one should make every effort to protect them.

The body keeps a normal heat. The main cause of this heat is the vital energy or *Prana*.^[6] That where vital breath of living beings is located and also all the sense organs and which is the best of all organ is known as head.

Acharaya Sushruta stated that *Agni*, *Soma*, *Vayu*, *Satwa*, *Raja*, *Tama*, *Panchendriya* and *Atma* are the *Prana*.^[7] Main place of *Prana* is *Nabhi* which is a network of *Shira*.^[8] The

bodily *Vayu* is classified as *Prana*, *Udana*, *Samana*, *Vyana* and *Apana*. These five classes of *Vayu*, located in their specific region contribute towards the integration and maintenance of the body.

Acharya Sushruta has described that *Prana Vayu* is *Vaktra Sanchari* (circulate in oral cavity). Its vitiation causes hiccup and *Swasa* rog.^[9] In commentary of *Acharya Dalhan*, he said that the field and action of *Prana Vayu* includes the reason of the *heart, throat, head and nose*.^[10] *Gayadasacarya* commentating on the above *Acharya Sushruta* opinion that however, by holding of *Pranas-Agni*, soma etc in the fact holding up of heart is meant in their supporting base thus by holding of heart the base of *Pranas*, it meant the holding of *Pranas* themselves. In fact, it is also known as the basic cause of death.^[11]

In *Astanga Sangraha* while describing about the *Vaikalyakar Marma* it is *Saumya* (predominance of *Bhutaj*) nature, soma (water) supports life by its stability and cold properties.^[12] Blood is the life of all living beings; its loss causes decreases of the body temperature (*Agni*) and increase of *Vata*.^[13] So, the patient should be given strengthening food for saving *Prana*(life). *Prana* is situated in the head and moves in the chest, throat, helps (attends to) the mind, heart, sense organs and intellect attend to expectoration, sneezing, belching, inspiration and swallowing of food.^[14]

In *Astanga Hridaya*, *Acharya Vagbhat* has described that main place of *Prana* is *Murdha* and it travels in *Uras*, *Kantha*, *Hridaya* and it governs memory, heart, senses and mind.^[15]

In *Sharangdhar Samhita* the physiology of respiration in *Ayurveda* is described very beautifully by *Acharya Sharangdhar*. He stated that *Prana Vayu* is located near *Nabhi* moves upward to *Hridaya* and comes out to the throat to drink the *Vishnupadamrtam*. After imbibing the same returns back fast to nourish the whole body and to stimulate the *Jatharagni*.^[16] Combination of *Sharir* and *Prana* is said as *Ayu*. By the separation of these combination is called as *Pancatva*.^[17]

Acharya Bhav Misra supports the view of *Acharya Sushruta* on *Pranavayu* by stating that it is mentioned by *Sushruta*, *Pranavayu* circulates in oral cavity and makes food enter inside and supporting *Agni*, *Vayu*, *Satva*, *Raj Tama*, *Panchendriya*, *Bhutatma*.^[18] *Prana* resides in the *Nabhi* (umbilicus) of living beings and the umbilicus also is supported by *Prana*. The umbilicus is encircled by *Siras* just like the axle hole of the wheel by the spokes.^[19] *Parasara*

said that *Nabhi* (umbilicus) gets originated first and *Prana* (life) located there which helps in the growth of the body with the combination of *Usma*(heat).^[20]

Discussion: In Charak Samhita, '*Dasa Pranayatana*' is a unique concept in Ayurveda. It have been mentioned in two different chapters-once in *Sutra sthan* and second in *Sharir Sthana*. In *Sutra sthan* we find that the whole chapter is dedicated to the study of *Dasa Prayatana* and tells that one who knows these concepts will be known as '*Pranabhisara Vaidya*', i.e., One who is confident and having absolute knowledge of the patient and the disease. It says that every physician should be aware of these 10 *pranayatana* as they are the seats of life or vitality. These include *Shankha*(two temples), three vital organs (*hridaya, basti, shira*), *kantha, rakta, shukra, ojas and guda*, The desire for life is said to be the first of all. Thus, following prescribed course, one is able to preserve his life & can live long. Chakrapani & Yogindranath Sen described '*prana*' is nothing but life. Chakrapani recommend '*prananupalana*' for same. Yogindranath Sen enlist them as *swasthavrutta palana*, avoiding *vegadharana, sahasavarjana* etc. '*Jivita*' is synonymous to *prana* is a singular term but resides in many places, says Chakrapani. The term *prana* is many times used as synonymous with '*vayu*' but not merely for a single kind of *vayu*. Acharya Charaka have mentioned that, '*Dehagni*' is responsible for life, *varna* (colour) strength, health, enthusiasm, complexion, *ojas, tejas, agni* and *prana*. Chakrapani while commenting on same clarifies that term '*prana*' is inclusive of all of its five kinds.

Thus, term *prana* is mainly used as synonymous to '*vayu*', as a type of *vayu* and as a subtle vitality element i.e. '*subtle prana*'.

Subtle Prana: Along with *prana vayu* (a kind of *vayu*), term *prana* is also referred as a subtle vitality element too. This subtle *prana* is said to be located at *pranayatana* (10 special sites of *prana*). It is also reside at *marmas* (vital points), along with *rakta*, particularly in *tri marma* (three vital organs) and at *nabhi*. There is also a unique conceptualization of the twelve *prana* in Sushruta Samhita.

Marma & Prana: Acharya Charaka has quoted that *marma* gives aashraya to subtle *prana* as the vitality element *prana* itself resides in *marma* only. *Marmas* are sites for *prana* in particular. Sushruta elaborates them as sites of *sannipata* (adjoining area) of principle *mamsa, sira, snayu, asthi, sandhi*. He further states that *marma* are the points where *prana* resides "Svabhavata" (naturally). According to Acharya Sushruta, '*Sadyapranahara marma*' are *agni*

dominant. Vitiating of such *marma* leads to death instantaneously as *ksheena agni* speedily diminishes *prana*. *Kalantara pranahara marma* are *agni-soma* dominant. As here *agni* is associated with *soma* principle, process of *pranahara* occurs slowly. *Vaikalyakara marma* are *soma* dominant. *Soma guna* is capable of taking care of subtle *prana* owing to its *sthira* & *sheeta* attributes. Thus, it is important to note that *ksheena agni* rapidly diminishes subtle *prana* whereas *sthira* & *soma* attribute preserves/ nurtures subtle *prana* i.e., *avalambana* of *prana*. In *siddhi sthana* Charaka has mentioned that, in protection of *marmas* *vayu* needs to be carefully kept in equilibrium. because *vayu* is responsible for excitation of *kapha* & *pitta* and subtle *prana* also depends on *vayu*. This *vayu* is best treated by *basti*, therefore there is no other than *basti* therapy which can safeguard the *marmas/pranayatana*.

Concept of twelve prana: It is a unique concept, Acharya Sushruta has enlisted elements *agni*, *soma*, *vayu*, *satwa*, *raja*, *tama*, *five indriya* & *bhutatma* to be considered as *prana*. These twelve live attributes constitute human body. Acharya Sushruta has mentioned the functional entity of the concept of *Prana* but Acharya Charak has anatomically positioned them as *Dashapranayatana* in *Sutra Sthan* chapter twenty-nine. Acharya Dalhana has explained that, *Prana* the life element, is *hetu* for sustenance of *deha*. *Upadan* of *prana* i.e., factors for life principle are *agni* and other eleven elements. *Agni* is the *shakti* (energy) present in the body in the form of five kinds of *pitta* and firey element present in the *dhatus* (tissues). It is also *adhidevata* of *vaak* i.e., speech and support life by performing functions such as digestion of food, etc. *Soma* (Ap-water) is present in the form of five kinds of *Kapha*. It is a *shakti* (energy) residing in *rasanendriya* (tongue) and supports life by nourishing all liquid body elements like *shleshma*, *rasa*, *shukra* etc. *Vayu* is present in body in five kinds (*Prana*, *udana*, etc) and supports life by respiration, movements and regulations of *Dosha*, *dhatu* and *mala*. *Satwa*, *raja*, *tama* are nothing but components of *prakriti*. *Indriyas* are five *indriya* support life by perceiving objects such as light, sound, etc. *Bhutatma* (soul) also known as *Karmapurusha* is the cause of consciousness (activity) of all the factors and is the performer of all the actions both good or bad.

In the above explanation of *prana* it is seen that *Agni*, *soma*, *vayu* together represents *tridosha* or they can be related to *sharira* or the physical body, *satva*, *raja*, *tama* denotes the psyche or the mind, the *indriyas* represent the senses or *gyanendriya* and lastly *bhutatma* represents the soul. Thus, according to Ayurveda *Ayu* or life is a four dimensional entity comprised of: 1) physical body 2) psyche, 3) senses 4) soul. Thus Ayurveda addresses **Life as**

the body-mind-spirit continuum. In other words life is comprised of physical, mental and spiritual phenomenon in a quantized continuum.

Ojas and Prana: It is the vital essence of all dhatu and thus is site for *prana*. Charaka in Sutra Sthan chapter 30 described the role of *ojus* in maintenance of health. There can be no life without ojus. *Ojus* develops in the beginning of the formation of embryo. It is the nourishing fluid from the embryo. It enters the heart right at the stage of formation of the later. Loss of *ojus* amounts to the loss of life itself. *Ojus* sustains the life & is located in the heart. It constitutes essence of all tissue elements, says Charaka.

CONCLUSION

Prana is considered as notion of vitality in oriental sciences. Vitality and vigor are considered synonymous; both refer to the presence of energy, enthusiasm Life and Health are not mere words but are the concepts defined & criticized over hundreds of years by scholars of different doctrines. There is need to write criticism on 'life' vis a vis '*prana*', because desire for life is mentioned as "*Praneshana*" in Charaka Samhita and thus prana is considered equivalent with life.

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