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A Review on *Prana Vayu*: The Life Force

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is the ancient experiential life science. It has own fundamentals and concepts regarding etiopathogenesis of diseases and their management. It considers the human body as an individual whole with a network of interrelated functions, mind and consciousness, wherein a disturbance in one part will have repercussions in other parts as well. *Ayurvedic* treatment aims not only at cure of diseases, but also at the restoration of the equilibrium of bodily functions. The knowledge of body is essential for maintenance of health, as this knowledge gives an insight for the factors essential for the maintenance of body. Human body is composed of *Dosha*, *Dhatu* and *Mala*. *Vata Dosha* among the three *Doshas* plays a major role to maintain health and as well in disease manifestation. It is the initiator and controller of human body and also responsible for all body activities. That's why *Vata* is also called *Prana* for human beings. Depending on variation in site of location and specific functions, *Vata Dosha* is of five types. Among these subtypes, *Prana Vata* is the prime one which is essential to carry out vital functions of the body.

Key Words *Vata*, *Dosha*, *Prana Vayu*

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INTRODUCTION

Dosha, *Dhatu* and *Mala* constitute the basis of the physiological and pathological doctrine of *Ayurveda*. *Tridosha* are basic elements in the human body to form, run and maintain it. All the constituents of the triad of humours (*Tridosha*) are equally important but *Vata Dosha* has got some special place due to its activeness as it provides movements and connectivity to other *Doshas*¹. The existence of *Vata* in an individual is found even before the starting of his life till death. Life starts when *Shukra* and *Shonita* meet. The spermatogenesis and oogenesis are carried

out with the help of *Vata* as it has the property of *Vibhajana*². The ejaculation of sperm and movement of ovum from ovary to uterus is accomplished with the help of *Chala Guna* of *Vayu*. After meeting of the sperm and ovum, single celled embryo forms which grows in full term foetus after various divisions and developments. Due to the stimulation of *Vata* the nutrition from mother reaches to the foetus. It also helps in birth of the foetus³.

After birth the individual comes in contact with environmental *Vayu* and the functioning of lungs starts after the entry of *Prana Vata* for the first time. The *Prana Vata* provides nourishment to all

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the other subtypes of *Vayu* and also promotes proper functioning of the bodily elements. The essential daily activities are carried out with the help of all five types of *Vayu*. By the time, division and differentiation of the cells takes place in the body which leads to aging and finally death. Thus, *Vayu* has prime role in the life cycle of an individual.

The *Vata Dosha* pervades the whole body. It performs various functions in different parts of the body with the help of different *Gunas*. Some of the actions are performed by *Ruksha Guna*, some by *Laghu Guna* etc. Each *Guna* is responsible to perform a particular function in particular body part. On the basis of *Sthana* and *Karma Vata* *Dosha* is divided in five subtypes. When these subtypes get vitiated they causes various diseases according to their respective *Sthanas* and *Karmas*. *Prana*, *Udana*, *Samana*, *Vyan* and *Apana* are the five subtypes of *Vayu* which moves in their respective areas to perform their specific functions^{4,5}. The *Sthana* of *Vayu* only describes the area of predominance otherwise all the *Vayus* are active in whole body performing their respective *Karmas*. Among all these subtypes, *Prana Vayu* is of utmost importance as it regulates all the remaining subtypes. Moreover, it performs vital functions in the body without which life cannot be sustained.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

It is a literary review, though all the available literature including *Brahattrayis*, *Laghutrayis*, and

other available books were studied. All available modern books relevant to the topic, articles, journals etc. were studied.

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Prana Vayu

Prana means life. The function of *Vayu* as to maintain the continuity of life is termed as “*Ayush Anuvriti Pratyabhoota*”⁶. There is no specific *Srotasa* described for *Doshas* in our classical texts at the same time the first *Srotasa* is stated as *Pranavaha Srotasa*. Here the *Prana* word for the *Srotasa* refers to *Prana Vayu* or *Ambarpiyush* which is inspired from atmosphere and by the *Srotasas* in the body it is converted in the similar form which is easy for assimilation.

Description of *Prana*-

In classics, the *Prana* is used at various places with different meanings. The word *Prana* is indicative of life. So, the things essential to maintain the life are termed as *Prana*.

- *Prana* as *Vayu*⁷- *Vata* in its normal state is responsible for all the activities of the body. *Vata* constitute the very life of living beings.
- *Prana* as *Marma*⁸- *Soma*, *Vayu*, *Tejas*, *Sattva*, *Rajas*, *Tamas* and *Jivaatma* all these exists in the *Marmas*. Therefore, a living being cannot survive after injury to *Marmas*.
- *Prana* as *Bala*⁹- In the reference to *Jwara Chikitsa* it is said that fasting should be done up to the extent it does not harm the physical strength. All the therapies have an aim of

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maintaining the strength of body which helps the patient to get rid of the disease.

- *Pranayatana*¹⁰- There are ten important repositories of life, injury to which can cause various diseases and can lead to death. Here the term *Prana* is used in the sense of vital parts and not the vital breath because these are some specific parts of vitality and the *Prana Vayu* pervades whole body.

Functions of *Prana Vayu* inside the body¹¹-

The perception of *Shabda*, *Sparsha*, *Roopa*, *Rasa*, *Gandha* by the sense organs takes place by the stimulation of *Prana Vayu*. *Indriyadhrika* and *Dehadhrika* means to bear *Indriya* and *Deha* or we can say the proper knowledge of *Indriyārtha* and bodily functions. The Main functions of unvitiated *Prana Vayu* inside the body are as follows-

- 1) *Buddhidhrik*- The proper combination of *Indriya*, *Mana* and *Aatma* lead to origin of *Buddhi*. Thus, the *Prana Vayu* which is present in *Mashtishka* leads to *Gyanprapti* by stimulating the *Aatma*, *Indriya*, *Indriyārtha* and *Mana* to be in proper combination. So, it is said that *PranVayu* is responsible for the important function like *Buddhi*.
- 2) *Hridayadhrik*- The donning of *Hridaya* is done by *Prana Vayu*. During the circulation of *Rasa*, *Rakta* and the *Doshas*, *Prana Vayu* flows in the vessel which is attached to *Hridaya* and for proper contactions and relaxation of *Hridaya* *Prana Vayu* is required. According to *Aacharya shushruta*, *Avalambana* is the function of *Prana*

Vayu and the word *Avalambana* is defined as *Hridaya Dharana*.

- 3) *Phuphusadhrik*- While defining the functions of *Pranavayu*, *Phuphusa* word is not directly used still taking *Ura* as *Phuphusa* the function *Phuphusadhrik* is given here. Explaining the functions of *Prana Vayu* the word *Nishwash* is used for inspiration. For *Pranavayu* to enter in *Phuphusa* through *Kanthnaadi* there needs to be a coordinated activity of the *Phuphusa*. This activity is involuntary in nature and is done by *Pranavayu* present in the nutrition providing vessel of the *Phuphusa*. That's why *Phuphusadhrika* is the important function of *Pranavayu*. During inspiration there is contraction of thorasic cavity. It is done by the involuntary muscles. By the stimulation of *Pranavayu* the expansion of *Phuphusa* takes place and this cannot happen without the *Prayatna Guna* of *Aatma*. During *Nishwash* the components are developed by the *Prana Vayu* that's why the expansion of *Parshukantargata Snayu* and the *Snayu* of *Nabhi Pradesh* requires the stimulation of *Prana Vayu*.

- 4) *Sthivan*- *Sthivan* means to expel out the waste produced in mouth. It is a voluntary action done with the help of cheeks, lips and tongue. It takes place with the help of *Prayatna Guna* of *Aatma* and by the stimulation of *Prana Vayu* present in the vessels which provide nutrition to the parts involved.

- 5) *Kshavathu*- It is a reflex action and *Prana Vayu* is the cause of *Kshavathu* due to irritation of nasal mucosa. When an irritant enters the nose

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or because of rhinitis irritation of nasal mucosa occurs. To overcome this, the voluntary or involuntary reflex action with the help of *Prana Vayu* to expel out the irritant and producing some sound is called *Kshavathu*.

6) *Udgar*- The process of expulsion of *Vayu* through *Annanalika* is known as *Udgar*. This is done by the contraction of abdominal muscles with the help of *Prana Vayu*.

7) *Shwasha*- *Prana Vayu* remain situated in *Nabhi Prsdsha* and comes upward, touching the lotus like heart and after getting saturated with *Vishnu Padamrata* (oxygen) from atmospheric air again enters back forcefully. Thus, the deoxygenated blood, brought by pulmonary arteries gets spread over the surface of the lungs and after getting oxygenated with the *Prana Vayu* carried in by bronchioles the blood goes back into the heart through the pulmonary veins. This description concludes that the take up and Carry of the “*Pranavayu*” are mainly conducted by lungs and its accessory channels.

8) *Annapravesha*- It consists of mastication, salivation and deglutination. The 7th cranial nerve (facial nerve) contains sensory, motor and parasympathetic fibres. The parasympathetic fibres arise from the superior salivary nucleus and supply the submandibular and sublingual salivary glands.

Prana is the supporting system of the whole body. The body cells will die if body is unable to absorb it. According to *Acharya sushruta*, “*Praanaanacha Avalambate*” which means by making the external air needed for life activities

to enter into the body and filling the entire body with air will support and esteem the body, body functions and the 13 types of *Pranas*¹². In the description of *Prana Vayu*, there are two types of functioning of *Prana Vayu*-one is higher functions and other is lower functions.

- Higher functions of *Pranavayu*- When *Pranavayu* functioning in the *Murdha* means head or brain performs higher functions like *Buddhidharana*, *Hridayadharana*, *Indriya* and *Chittadharana*. All the functions of the mind are manipulated, controlled and administered by *Pranavayu*.
- Lower functions of *Pranavayu*- While *Pranavayu* is in circulation down through trachea, salivary glands, pharynx, heart, lungs and stomach, it condenses lower functions like *Nisthiva*, *Kshavathu*, *Udgaara*, *Nishwasa* and *Annapravesha*.

All these functions of *Prana Vayu* can be understood in the purview of modern medicine. Mainly the functions of limbic system, cranial nerves, cerebral cortex, basal ganglia and other structures might be compared with the functions of *Prana Vayu*. So, we should easily understand the basic principles of *Ayurveda* which is critically required in this present era.

DISCUSSION

The word *Prana* is used in *Ayurveda* at many places. In the context of *Vayu*, *Prana* is a subtype of *Vata* which is pivotal to carry out essential body functions. As the word ‘*Prana*’ itself means

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life, which indicates how important it is for the survival of a living being. On vitiation, it causes illness related to *Pranavaha Srotas* i.e. *Shwasa*, *Kasa*¹² etc. These diseases are if not treated timely and their complicated state can be manifested as *Rajayakshama*, *Kshata-ksheena*, *Dhatukshaya* etc. Thus, efforts should be made to keep the *Prana Vayu* in its normal form as its vitiation may result in fatal consequences. It can be achieved by avoiding the *Vata* aggravating factors and following Yoga practices i.e. *Pranayama*, in which *Prana Vayu* is regulated. In *Ayurvedic* texts, *Prana* is considered as a form of *Vayu*. It is said to be life, strength and sustainer of creatures. This is the first and the main among all the subtypes of *Vata*. Its area of functioning is between throat and the diaphragm. Predominantly it is located in the head or brain.¹¹ All organs of thorax like heart and lungs are supported by *Pranavayu*. *Pranavayu* also maintains the basic functioning of respiration and heart pumping. It can be thought of as upward movements. According to *Acharaya Vagbhatta* *Pranavayu* controls the functions of all the *Dhamanis* (*Dhamani Dharana*)¹³. In this context *Dhamani* can be correlated with nerves. *Pranavayu* control the transmissions of signals to and from brain. By all this, it is clear that pathological manifestations and the territory afflicted by the *Vikrata Pranavayu* is chiefly the respiratory system. Most of the *Vataja* diseases discussed in *Ayurveda* are being diagnosed under neurological disorder in modern science. But a very few works have been on conceptual features

of *Vata*. In *Manas Swasthya*, *Prana Vayu* implies to the five senses and what we feed them. This *Vayu* can be weakened by exposure to extremely loud or consistent noise, watching violent television shows or negative news, listening to angry or sad songs—basically any sensory overload. Because most of us live in very stimulating environment, we are often unaware of excess stimulation and the need for silence and space. With a healthy *Pranavayu*, one is able to walk away from disturbing stimulants and cultivate silence, allowing time to turn the attention inward.

CONCLUSION

After critical analysis of various classical and contemporary texts, it can be concluded that *Prana Vayu* is responsible for all the vital activities which are required to maintain the state of life. Respiration is considered in ‘Tripod of life’ without which life is not possible. Through respiration, *Prana Vata* helps in metabolism and provides nutrition to the body. Other functions like *Sthivana*, *Kshavathu*, *Udgaar*, *Annapravesha* are also a part of general human physiology and all these requires the involvement of *Prana Vayu*. Though modern theory states that all the activities of body are controlled by nervous system still there is something which stimulates the organs to do their functions properly and that is none other than the *Prana Vayu*.

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