

PRANIC EXERCISE IN ŚVETAŚVATAROPANIṢD

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Abstract

Prana at first is breath, then the life as it is connected with the process of breathing. At the period of early Upanisads, all the vital powers such as speech, breath, eye, ear, manas etc. were also called as pranas. In the latter period manas and the indriyas as the representatives of conscious life were separated from the prana.

Pranic exercise is the knowledge about inhalation, exhalation and retention of prana or the breath awareness and its techniques through which the highest knowledge is realized. Otherwise, we can say it pranayama or breath control. Among the five subdivisions of prana, prana and apana play the vital role in this process.

Sve.Up. of the Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda corresponds with the advanced standpoint of Yoga which has already its beginning in Kathopanishad. Most of the verses in the Chapter II of Sve.Up. deal with Yoga; so also with pranic exercise. The conduct, the place the preliminary symptoms, the attainment of the Yogic power and its consequences are found to be discussed here.

This paper aims to bring into light the age-old indigenous technique and hopes creating awareness among the people to utilize it for a healthy and happy society.

Introduction

Prana at first is breath, then the 'life' as it is connected with the process of breathing. In the older period. i.e. at the period of early **Upanisads**, all the vital powers such as speech, breath, eye, ear, manas etc. were also called a **Pranas**. In the latter period manas and the indriyas as the representatives of conscious life were separated from the **Prana**. **Prana** with its five subdivisions i.e. **Prana, apana, udana, vyana, samana** is always active in the subtle body.

Pranic exercise is the knowledge about inhalation, exhalation and retention of prana or the breath awareness and its techniques through which the highest knowledge is realized. Otherwise, we can say the breath awareness as **Pranayama**. Among the five subdivisions of **Prana, Prana** and **apana** play the vital role in this process. There are many controversies among the scholars like George William Brown¹ and P.E. Document² etc. about the meaning of **prana and apana**. Through the function of five **Pranas** are different in the body still then it is quite clear from the early Vedic literature that **prana** is

out breathing or exhalation and **apana** is inbreathing or inhalation.³ The opinion of **Sayana is also clear in this context as prana** is expiration and apana is inspiration.

0.1 Upanisad as the Source of Pranic Exercise

This origin and development of **Pranavidya** is to be found in the early Vedic literature from Rgveda to Upanisads. Upanisads have an elaborated discussion about the doctrine of Prana, which is quite mystic in the ancient Upanisads and quite clear in the latter ones. The techniques of breath control is **pranavidyopasana** in the early Upanisadic period which is **Pranayama** in latter period. It is Pranavidyopasana in Chandogya period which is pranayama in latter period. It is pranavidyopasana in **Chandogya** and **Brhadaranyaka**, in the meditative process it is quite clear in the commentary of Śve. Up. And exactly written as **pranayama** in Maitrayani Upanishad.

The post- Paninian Śve. Up.⁴ reveals the process of Pranic exercise which technically known

as **Pranayama** with prior preparation and posterior achievements. The paper aims to highlight upon it.

I. The meaning of Pranayama:

‘Prak anititi prāṇah’⁵ which means the eastern door among the four doors of heart is **Prana**. The word has its form the root an (to breadth) with the pre-fix ‘pra’. But it is very difficult to translate the word **Prana** into modern English to give an accurate meaning. The original sense of ‘spirit’ might come close to it. Also the words vital energy and consciousness are used by some scholar for its identity. And consciousness about the way of **Prana** in the body is **Pranayama**.

‘**Pranayama**’ literally means ‘to expand **prana**’ (the vital force). In the 49th Sutra of Sadhanapada of **Patanjaliyogasutra**, the great Rishi Patanjali has defined **pranayam** as a process in which respiration is interrupted and **prana**, that is the vital force is controlled and regulated.⁶ **Prana** means something more than air. **Prana**, in fact, is the vital power which is the force motivating every element of the earth and which is the origin of the force of thought. There is a deep affinity between **prana** and mental force, between mental force and intellect, between intellect and soul, and between soul and the Supreme Being. Thus, the purpose of **pranic** exercise is to inspire, motivate, regulate and balance the vital force (**prana**), pervading in the body. This is the reason why **pranayama** is considered one of the efficacious means of attaining yoga.

II.1 The importance of Pranayama

Much importance has been attached to **pranayama** in Yogasastras. According to Vyasabhasya of **Patanjaalyogadarsanam** II/52 there is no ‘**Tapa**’ (penance) greater than pranayama.⁷ It cleanses the body and knowledge is manifested. Manu says, that just as gold and other metals melted in fire and become pure. So also the sense organs of the body get rid of impurities by pranayama.⁸

Pranayama is the fourth and very important state of **aṣṭāṅgayoga** shown by Patanjali in a latter

stage. Yoga without pranayama is not yoga at all. That is why pranayama is called the soul of yoga. Bathing is necessary for purifying the body. Similarly, pranayama is essential for purifying the mind. The bondage of mind is more than the body and it is directly related to prana.⁹

II. The yogic process is Śve. Up.

The Śve.Up. belongs to the Taittiriya School of Yajurveda. Its name is derived from the sage who taught it. Though it is not included among the ten major Upanisads, still then the beauty and profundity of its teaching and the commentary of Acarya Sankara upon it make it counted as eleventh one among the Principal Upanisads. It begins with an informal discussion among themselves by students desirous of knowing the eternal verities of life. The practical science discussed in this Upanisads is the yogic process. Only 8 śrutis of the Second Chapter of Śve. Up. deal with yoga. the conduct and behaviour, the place, the preliminary symptoms, the attainment of the yogic power and its consequences all are discussed in a very significant manner.

II.1 Pranic Exercise as Depicted in Śve.Up.

From the very beginning of the Second Chapter of Śve. Up. almost all the śrutis give emphasis on controlled mind (yukta manas). The control of mind is the important thing in any yogic process. But the control of mind is so difficult like the control of the wind, because it is fickle.¹⁰

To control the mind regular practice of meditation and concentration are the basic requirements. But how to meditate, upon which one concentrate are the preliminary tests for a beginner. In this context Śve. Up. teaches pranayama from the 8th sloka of Chapter-II as a teacher teaches the pupil. It is said that sit erect, with upright body, head and neck and lead the mind and its powers into the heart. Then the syllable Aum of Brahman will be thy boat to cross the rivers of fear.¹¹ Here the fear is of birth and death. Before practicing the process of pranayama one has to make stable his sitting posture

for which only the āsana is also important. When the external parts and the whole body become controlled then one concentrates for the control of internal activities. So, in the yogic practice of Śve.Up. limb control is directed first. Then in commentary Acharya Śankara describe the pre-paranayamic nāḍīsodhana. Before the actual pranic exercise this nāḍīsodhana is necessary. Śankara says that after this nadisodhana one is efficient for pranayama.¹² Pressing the right nostril one should inhale as much as possible in the left one.

Then making free the right one and pressing the left, one should exhale in the right. Again inhaling (puraka) in the right, one should exhale in the left. Like this if one practices three or five cycles four times a day i.e. in early morning, in afternoon, in the evening and in mid-night then he will attain nadisuddhi within a quarter or a month. After the nadisodhana there are three types of pranayamas-

- i) Exhalation (recaka)
- ii) Retention (kumbhaka)
- iii) Inhalation (puraka)

In this context Sankara quotes the words of Yajñayalkya perhaps from Yajñavalkya **Yatidharma** which is addressed to Gargi elaborately in his commentary.

The exact reference to pranayama is in the chapter II/9 of Sve.Up. which means repressing his breathings here is body, let him who has controlled all his movements, breathe through his nostrils, with diminished breath, let the wiseman restrain his mind very carefully as (he would) a chariot with vicious horses.¹³ Here the control of mind only depends upon the diminished breath. Breathing and mind are inter-related. As one controls the breath, mind functions accordingly. And the mind rules over our each and every activities. According to Patanjali also are one should inhale and exhale slowly and rhythmically during the practice of prāṇāyāma.¹⁴ Rhythmic and slow breathing makes the mind steady and calm. In Yogasastra the control of mind is known as

pratyahara.¹⁵ So, before pratyāharā and dhārāṇa one have the command over pranayama first.

A few mistakes are committed in the early stage of practice. But one should not give up the practice. How to maintain the ratio of puraka, kumbhaka and recaka will be learnt automatically through regular practice. Common sense, intuition and spiritual voice within will guide one to the path of accomplishment.

II.2 The place of the Pranic practice in Śve. Up.

Each and every work towards success demands a suitable atmosphere. Śve. Up. is not silent in this point rather the śruti describes clearly the atmospheric condition to practise pranayama. In a level clean place, free from pebbles, fire, noise and the murmur of waters and other features, not offensive to the eye, in a hidden retreat protected from the wind, let the sadhaka practise his exercise of yoga or pranaic exercise. In Bhagavadgīta about 8 verses of Chapter-VI elaborately described the atmospheric condition for the practice of yoga.¹⁶

So, pranayama should be practiced in a clean, airy place in complete solitude. It is best done sitting on the floor. One can select any convenient posture to sit steadily in an erect posture.¹⁷ For the effective and proper study of pranayama an aspirant should strictly follow the conditions.

III. The Preliminary Symptoms and the Attainment of the Yogic Power :

In the beginning of the accomplishment the sadhaka feels fog. Because with the pranas cittavrttis are also active. Then he feels smoke, sun, fire, wind, fireflies, lightning, crystal, moon. All these are the preliminary forms which produce manifestation of Brahman in yoga.¹⁸

In the next stage when the fold quality of yoga is produced as earth, water, fire, air and ether, then there is no longer sickness, on old age, no death to him who has obtained a body made of the fire of yoga.

The symptoms of the progress in yoga are lightness, healthiness, steadiness, clearness of completion, pleasantness of voice, sweetness of odour and slight exertions. Svetasvatara says these are first the results of perfect pranic exercise.¹⁹ After this yogic achievement one becomes free from all sorrows and bondages.

IV. Conclusion :

Each and every human being is a mirror stained by dust; but he shines rightly when it has been cleaned. The only he can see the real nature of his own self which is integrated. He can participate in the final goal and be freed from sorrow. When own knows the essential nature of his own self through the perfect pranic exercise overcoming all the bodily and mental obstacles he becomes a torch for himself and society. He releases himself from the material world and becomes free from bondages which is the ultimate aim of a human being.

References :

1. Brown, George William, "Prana and Apana" Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol.39 (1919)., p.104-112.
2. Dumont, P.E. "The meaning of prāṇa and apāna in the Taittiriya-Brāhmaṇa". www.oclc.org.
3.Taittiriya-Brāhmaṇa, III/iii/1/5
4. Nakamura, Hajime, A History of Early Vedanta philosophy, Part-I, pp. 14,15.
5. Cha.Up. III/13/1, Commentary of Ācārya Sankara.
6. "tasmin sati śvāsapraśvāsayorativedaḥ prāṇāyāmaḥ", Pātañjalayogadarśanam II/49.
7. tatha cuktam- "tao na paraṁ pranayāmā tato/ visuddhirmalanam diptiscājnasyeti//
8. Dahyante dahyamānānām dhatūnām hi yathā malah/ tathendriyāṇām dahyante doṣāḥ prāṇāsya nigrhāt// (Manusmṛti VI/71)
9. prāṇabandhanam hi saumya mana iti/ (Chāndogya VI/viii/2)
10. cancelim hi manah kṛṣṇa pramāthi balavad dṛḍham / tasyāham nighraṁ manye vāyoriva suduṣkaram// (Gitā-VI/24)
11. trirunnataṁ sthāpya samāṁ sarīram
hṛdindriyāni manasā samniveśya /
brahmoḍupena pratāreta vidvān
srotaṁsi sarvāṇi bhayāvahani// (Śve.Up.II/8)
12. prathamam nādisodhanam kartavyam/ tataḥ prāṇāyame, dhikarah// (isadi nau Upanisad, p. 1205)
13. Prāṇāprapīḍha samyuktaceṣṭaḥ kṣiṇe prāṇe nāsikayocchavasita / duṣṭāśvayuktamiva vāhamenaṁ vidvānmano dhārayetā-pramattaḥ // (Sve.Up. II/9)
14. bāhyābhyantarastomabhavṛttirdeśakālsasrīkhyābhīḥ paridṛṣṭo dīrghasukṣmaḥ// (patañjalayogadarsanam) II/50)
15. Pātañjalayogadarśanam II/54
16. yogi yūñjīta satatmātmānam rahāsi sthitaḥ/ yuktasvapnāvavodhasya yogo bhavati duḥkhaḥ// (Gita VI/10-17)
17. "tadāsane sukhāsīnah...." (iśādi nau Upanisad, p. 1206)
18. nihāradhūmārkānilānilānām
khadyotavidyutsphaṭikaśaśīnām/
etāni rupāṇi puraḥsarāṇi
brahamāṇyabhiyaktikarāṇi yoge// (Śve.Up. II/11)
19. laghutvamārogyamalolupatvaṁ
varṇaprasādam svarasauṣṭhavaṁ ca/
gandhaḥ śubho mūtrapurīṣamalpaṁ
yogapravṛttim prathamam vadanti// (Śve. Up. II/13)