



**THE ROLE OF AIR AND VAYU IN YOGIC WELLNESS: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY  
ON PRANAYAMA, KUMBHAKA, AND AIR THERAPY**

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**ABSTRACT**

Air is an English word and Vayu is a Sanskrit word. Generally, for all purposes the words air and vayu are synonymously used. Air is lexicographically said to be "the mixture of gases surrounding the earth". Gas literally means, "an air like substance which expands to fill any available space". Air is a general expression and gas is an expression in terms of chemistry. All these gases are by-products of an element called vayu in Sanskrit. Vayu can be understood a cosmic variant functioning in all the organs of the human body. Even the manas, so called mind is of vayu matter only. According to Trisikhi brahmanopanishad of Sukla Yajurveda, Prana, Apana, Vyana, Udana and Samana are of Air origin and Naga, Kurma, Krukara, Devadatta and Dhananjaya are minor vayus. It has been already understood that yogic wellness is composed of physical wellness and emotional wellness. Air functions as the equalizing agent from womb to tomb for all the living beings. The vaayu is the dynamic mechanism to facilitate escalation of consciousness, tuning of body and mind and pacifying odds of pressure in all major physiological systems. The adepts could identify the levels of consciousness being in tune with mass, energy and space equilibrium. It is the function of vayu that makes a person hale and healthy, and worried and distressed. Hence the management of vaayu is having a key potential in the promotion of integral wellness in general and physical and emotional wellness in particular.

**KEYWORDS:** Vayu, Gases, Pranayama and Wellness.

**INTRODUCTION**

Air is an English word and Vayu is a Sanskrit word. Generally, for all purposes the words air and vayu are synonymously used. Actually, there is a gulf of difference between air and vayu. Air and Gas. Air is lexicographically said to be "the mixture of gases surrounding the earth". Gas literally means, "an air like substance which expands to fill any available space". Gas is a variant state of matter with different atomic combinations and gaseous state is one of the states of matter being different from solid state and liquid state. Oxygen, hydrogen, carbon dioxide, helium and the others are said to be gases. They are present in a complex atmospheric shield called air. Air is a general expression and gas is an expression in terms of chemistry. All these gases are by-products of an element called vayu in Sanskrit. There are five elements namely sky, air, fire, water and earth with which the living and non living, the material and etheric are composed of. The Upanishadic statement says: Akaasaadvaayuh – Vaayavoragni – Agnyaadapah – Aapaadprthvii. From Mahat Akasa has born. From Akasa air has been formed with touch. From air came fire with form. From fire has come water with taste (rasa). And from water emanated

the earth with smell. This self transformation is totally from orthodox texts and the science and experimentation is somewhat different from this orthodox perspective. Sankhya philosophy and Vaiseshika philosophy respectively spoken by Kapila and Kanada has much to speak of vayu. Vayu can be understood a cosmic variant functioning in all the organs of the human body. Even the manas, so called mind is of vayu matter only.

**TYPES OF VAYU**

According to Trisikhi brahmanopanishad of Sukla Yajurveda, Prana, Apana, Vyana, Udana and Samana are of Air origin. The invocation to famous Gayatri mantra says, "Pranaapaana vyaanoodaana samaana sapraana Svetavarnaa". It is substance, white in colour and is having integral motion (Praana) and is classified as Praana, Apaana, Vyaana, Udaana and Samaana. Praana is the air element in sky. Apaana is the air element in the earth. Vyaana is the air element in air. Udaana is the air element in fire. Samaana is the air element in water. Praana is composed of pra+ana - pra integral and ana motion. In the same way we can see apa+ana - being lowering down. Vi+aana-vyaana is revolving motion.

Ut+aana -udaana means upward motion. Sama,+aana - samaana means equilibrium motion.

The same upanishad further says, Praana, Apaana, Vyaana, Udaana and samaana are major vaayus and Naga, Kurma, Krukara, Devadatta and Dhananjaya are minor vayus.

#### Location and function of vaayus

Praana is located in nostrils, thoracic region, navel and toes. Apaana is located in anus, penis, thighs and knees. Samaana is percolating throughout the body. Udaana is located in all the joints. Vyaana is located in ears, thighs, pelvis, ankles, shoulders and throat. The minor vayus occupy skin, bones and other physical areas.

Praana is for catabolism, Apana is for excretion, Vyaana is for controlling, Udaana is for digestion, Samaana is for growth. Naga is for belching. Kurma is for eyelid activity. Krukara is for sneeze and cough. Devadatta is for sleep and Dhananjaya is for swelling of dead body (Upanishads and yoga P.57).

#### MANAGEMENT OF VAYU FOR YOGIC WELLNESS

It has been already understood that yogic wellness is composed of physical wellness and emotional wellness. The entire human body is a mass susceptible for flexibility. It moves as per the movement of vayu. Stretching, folding, bending, squeezing, spiralling the muscles in standing, sitting, moving, lying and running and jumping postures gradually promote physical wellness. Sitting and meditating and holding the air at different points and operating the stream of air through inhalation, retention and exhalation always provide an internal massage to all the internal limbs which are subjected to terrestrial gravitation, astral refraction and solar radiation. Air functions as the equalizing agent from womb to tomb for all the living beings. The vaayu is the dynamic mechanism to facilitate escalation of consciousness, tuning of body and mind and pacifying odds of pressure in all major physiological systems. The adepts could identify the levels of consciousness being in tune with mass, energy and space equilibrium. It is the function of vayu that makes a person hale and healthy, and worried and distressed. Hence the management of vaayu is having a key potential in the promotion of integral wellness in general and physical and emotional wellness in particular.

#### RESPIRATORY FITNESS FOR YOGIC WELLNESS

Yogic wellness always speaks about an integration of phenomenal consciousness and trans phenomenal consciousness. The trans phenomenal consciousness is traditionally told in Upanishads as Taaraka tattva. The texts of Upanishads related to Sukla Yajurveda distinguish taaraka as muurta taaraka and amuurta taaraka. Muurta taaraka means transcending form. Amuurta taaraka means transcending formlessness. This

taaraka concept is very much essential in yogic wellness because taaraka accelerates uparamana and catalyses pratyahaara. This process is controlled through the respiratory fitness.

#### RESPIRATORY FITNESS

Respiratory fitness literally means an efficient and potential activity of lungs. But in terms of Yoga respiratory fitness has totally a different meaning.

#### AERIAL SHIELD

The earth and all the other radiant astral bodies have an aerial shield. Air functions as a fence against the rotation of earth and other celestial bodies. Aerial shield offers a couch of pressure which articulates peripheral pressure waves and integrates with nucleic pressure waves. This is an equilibrium in the potential force of wave energy at the peripheral level and nucleic level. Every inhalation finds a symmetric expansion of peripheral waves and every exhalation speaks of penetrating external pressure towards the nucleus. In other words inhalation works on the orbit of earth accelerating apaana force and exhalation breaks the aerial shield to accelerate praana force. What you take as gaseous input effects the physical body and what you throw out as gaseous output effects the astral body. When an equilibrium is maintained between apaana and praana, terrestrial and astral forces, conducting and radiant forces through the medium of air, it can be called respiratory fitness. The breathing exercises only articulate the pressure of mass on mass but they do not contribute to the pressure of mass on energy current. A befitting respiratory control can touch the periphery of space, thus transcending energy currents.

#### CONCEPT OF PRANAAYAAMA AND KUMBHAKA

Praanaayaama is composed of two words Praana to mean vital air and aayama means to control. Praanaayaama can be found as one of the six limbs of yoga according to Amritanaadoopanishad of Krishna yajurveda. Trisikhi brahmanopanishad of Sukla yajurveda understands Praanaayaama as treating the world as illusion. (Upanishads and yoga P.56). Tejobinduopanishad of Krishna Yajurveda details Praanaayaama as, "Cessation of activity with the pervading and penetrating Brahman. Prohibiting the world is rechaka (exhalation). Imbibing unity with the Brahman is Puuraka (inhalation). Staying stably in union with the Brahman is Kumbhaka (Retention). Only the ignorant think that the Praanaayaama involves pressing the nostrils and pressuring the air" (Upanishads and Yoga P.67).

Bhagavadgita mentions those who practice praanaayaama as praanaayaama paraayanaas. (Bhagavadgita 4:29).

Yoga sutra of Patanjali defines Praanaayaama as "svaasaprasvaasayo rgati vicchedah praanaayaamah" (Yoga sutra 2:49).

Hatha Yoga Pradipika deals about Pranayaama and Kumbhaka in detail. "According to some teachers Praanaayaama alone removes impurities and therefore they hold praanaayaama in esteem and not the other techniques "(Hatha yoga pradipika 2:37). It has been mentioned by Svataama that by proper practice of Praanaayaama etc. all diseases are eradicated (Hatha yoga pradipika 2:16) It has been told that hiccups, asthma, cough, headache, ear and eye pain and various other diseases are due to disturbance of the vital air (Hatha Yoga Pradipika 2:17). The same text mentions," nothing in the three planes of existence is unobtainable by him who has mastery of Kevala kumbhaka and can retain the breathe as desired"(Ibid.2:74). According to this treatise, "Praanaayaama is said to be of three types, exhalation (rechaka), inhalation (puraka)and retention (kumbhaka). Kumbhaka is again of two types: connected (sahita) and unconnected (kevala)"(Hatha yoga pradipika 2:71).

### **EIGHT TYPES OF KUMBHAKA**

Kumbhaka is an organ of Praanaayaama. Kumbhaka is a Sanskrit word meaning retention. It is retaining the pressure of air. Such kumbhaka is considered to be very important in maintaining physical wellness and emotional wellness also.

Hatha yoga pradipika of Svataama speaks of eight types of Kumbhakas.

"Suurya bheedana mujjayii Siitkaarii Siitalii tathaa Bhastrikaa Bhraamarii Muurcchaa Plaavini tyashta Kumbhakaah "(Hatha yoga pradipika 2:44).

#### ***Suuryabheedana***

Sitting comfortably the yogi should become fixed in his posture and slowly breath the air in through the right nostril.

Retention should then be held until the breath diffuses to the roots of the hair and tips of the nails. Then slowly exhale through the left nostril.

Suryabheeda is so excellent for purifying the cranium, destroying imbalances of wind dosha, and eliminating worms. It should be done again and again (Hatha yoga pradipika 2:48, 49, 50).

#### ***Ujjayi***

Closing the mouth, inhale with control and concentration through Ida and Pingala, so that the breath is felt from the throat to the heart and produces a somorous sound.

Do kumbhaka as before and exhale through Ida. This removes phlegm from the throat and stimulates digestive fire.

This praanaayaama called Ujjayi can be done while moving, standing, sitting or walking. It removes dropsy and disorders of the nadis and dhatu (Hatha yoga pradipika 2:51, 52, 53).

#### ***Siitkaari***

By drawing the breath in through the mouth, make a hissing sound, without gaping the mouth, and exhale through the nose. By practising this one becomes a second Kaamadeeva.

He is adorned by the cycle of yoginis and becomes the controller of creation and dissolution, being without hunger, thirst, sleep and laziness.

And the Sattva in the body becomes free from all disturbances. (Hatha yoga pradipika 2:54, 55, 56).

#### ***Siitali***

The wise inhale air through the tongue, and practice kumbhaka. Then exhale the air through the nostrils.

This kumbhaka called Siitali cures an enlarged stomach or spleen, and other related diseases, fever, excess bile, hunger and thirst and counter acts poisons (Hatha yoga pradipika 2: 57, 58).

#### ***Bhastrika***

Sitting properly in Padmaasana, keeping neck and abdomen in alignment, exhale Praana through the nose.

And again the air should be quickly inhaled upto the heart lotus. Accordingly the resounding is felt from the heart and throat upto the cranium.

In that way it is inhaled and exhaled repeatedly, with the same motion as a pair of bellows being pumped.

Thus in this way, one keeps the breath moving with mindfulness and body steadiness. When the body is tired then inhale through the right nostril.

Accordingly, when the abdomen becomes full of air, then quickly hold the nostrils firmly, without using the index and middle fingers.

Having performed retention systematically, exhale through the left nostril. There by imbalances of wind, bile and mucus are annihilated and the digestive fire increases.

This quickly arouses kundalini. It is pleasant and beneficial and removes obstruction due to excess mucus accumulated at the entrance of Brahma naadi.

This kumbhaka called Bhastrika enables three granthis (psychic pranic knots) to be broken. (Hatha yoga pradipika 2:60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67).

#### ***Bhraamari***

Breath in quickly, making a reverberating sound like male black bee, and exhale slowly making the sound of the female black bee. By this yogic practice one becomes

lord of the yogis and the mind is absorbed in bliss (Hatha yoga pradipika 2, 68).

#### **Muurccha**

At the end of inhalation, gradually become fixed on Jalandhara bandha, then exhale slowly. This is called the fainting or swooning Praanaayaama as it makes the mind inactive and thus confers pleasure (Hatha yoga pradipika 2, 59).

#### **Plaavini**

The inner part of the abdomen being completely filled with air, one can float like a lotus leaf on water (Hatha yoga pradipika 2:70).

### **ROLE OF MUDRAS AND BANDHAS IN MANAGEMENT OF VAYU**

The above eight types Kumbhaka are performed with inhalation, retention and exhalation. In this process the connected retention and unconnected retention have a vital role to purify. The abdomen, heart, cranium are thoroughly purified. This purification removes the doshas of wind, bile and mucus. The equilibrium of the three dhatus is achieved making the mind blissful. This entire process of retention requires using the Muula bandha, Udyana bandha and Jaalandhara bandha. Upanishads very clearly mention that one has to be in Muula bandha before inhalation. Then he must go for Udyana bandha and retain. After the stipulated period of retention one must exhale and keep himself locked in Jaalandhara bandha. These three bandhas practised at a time are called Mahaa bandha. The use of Chinmudra or Jnana mudra is often seen in the practice of kumbhaka. The mudras and bandhas provide a proper scope to make use of the retained air force for all vital purposes.

#### **AIR THERAPY**

Air therapy can be understood a practical array for making use of the gaseous pressure on all the systems of physiology. Sitting, standing, bending, twisting, running, jumping, climbing and swimming are often found postures. These postures are integrated with different asanaas. Being the Purva ranga of Hatha yoga all asanaas help for the de-toxication of the body and mind. The air therapy functions as an efficient tool for the promotion of physical wellness. The mobility of the properly articulated through rotation, expansion, contraction, abduction provides soft and powerful health benefits with intervening relaxation. The scheme of air therapy includes breath and relax. Move and breath and relax. It also includes moving and holding. Activation of the breath current and neutralisation of breath force are two typical principles to balance pressure on all vital organs and basic systems of physiology. Hatha yoga practices with a blend of air therapy assure physical wellness and emotional wellness.

### **BREATHING EXERCISES FOR PHYSICAL FITNESS AND YOGIC ELEVATION**

The following select exercises from the menu of physical education will help for spiritual literacy also.

### **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BREATHING EXERCISES AND PRAANAAYAAMA**

Breathing exercises aim at biological vitality. Praanaayaama aims at spiritual vitality. Breathing exercises are totally found to effect physiological systems. But praanaayaama helps to stop the mind and get bliss. Breathing exercises cannot help bio chemical changes. But Praanaayaama brings about bio chemical changes also. Breathing exercises cannot go for the purification of dhaatus. But Praanaayaama purifies the dhaatus also. Breathing exercises can be more contemporary. Praanaayaama is typically classical. Breathing exercises allow food without restrictions. Praanaayaama is totally restricting food. Breathing exercises are of terrestrial nature. Praanaayaama has celestial function also.

### **ROLE OF PRAANA AND APAANA FORCES**

Praana forces are solar centric. Apaana forces are geocentric. Praana forces activate the zone beyond eye brow center. Apaana forces function below navel. Praana forces are having impact of sky and air. Apaana forces have impact of fire, water and earth. Praana forces contribute for bliss, serenity, peace, and immortality. Apaana forces contribute for desire, worry, suffering and death.

#### **AIR THERAPY**

Therapy is a complex of locating an ailment, identifying the symptoms, understanding intensity, prescribing proper meditation and suggesting proper food and relaxation.

### **MEANING AND SCOPE OF AIR THERAPY**

Air is one of the five constituent elements. According to Upanishadic tradition air originated from tanmatra called sparsa (sprus sparsane to mean in touching). The vayu is a word regularly used in Sanskrit for what we call air in English. Vayu means which expands and moves. According to Bhagavadgita vayu is one of the purifying agents. Vayu dries up every thing and contributes for decomposition also. By virtue of purifying nature vayu or air can be taken as a therapeutic medium.

#### **Formulae**

As there are different therapies like mud therapy, hydro therapy, gem therapy, magnetic therapy, one can find out a natural corollary in using air.

#### **FUNCTIONS OF AIR**

Air promotes vitality  
Air promotes mobility  
Air energises the mass  
Air soothes the pressure  
Air activates muscular expansion  
Air reduces intra organic pressure  
Air flushes out waste from gastero intestine systems  
Air helps to suck blood and diffuse blood  
Air balances bio magnetic forces  
Air provides relaxation.

The role of air in the body does not require particular emphasis.

### AIR IN TERMS OF YOGA

In terms of Yoga ten types of air are found in human organism. They are prana vital air, apaana, excretary air, vyaana, conjoining air, udaana, escalating air and samaana, balancing air.

The entire respiratory system, gastero intestine system, reproductive system and excretary system are totally air driven. The driving force is air only. Air inducts, conducts, operates and evaporates. All the problems in the system can be rectified through a proper management of current of air.

The cardiac arrest, the pulmonary pressure, the problems of gut like irritable bowel syndrome, the menstrual cycle and problems of sexual organs are due to improper management of air. A specific combination articulating the mass pressure, joints ' pressure and energy pressure sets the body erect and agile.

The stretching of the body from infancy to youth with expansion and the contraction of the body in old age is due to vagaries of pressure of air. Paralysis, Cardiac arrest, joint immobility manifest the short circuits in the flow of air.

### SHORT CIRCUIT IN AIR CURRENT

Short circuit in air current in bio metric scale is due to varying impulses of geo magnetism and astro magnetism. They create pressure on solid mass and liquid mass in human body and cause risk of mobility, adaptability and survival.

### MANAGEMENT OF PRESSURE IN AIR CURRENT

The sitting, standing, forward bending, twisting, prone and supine postures are important postures where the pressure of air current is managed. In the standing posture air pressure is subjected to gravitational pull and it becomes negative. In sitting position the earth force is neutralised and the air moves up with positive nature. In prone and supine postures air current remains with neutral force.

### MOBILITY OF LIMBS

As air has no tangible physical mass, it assumes the muscular mass. Then if a person can systematically tune the body mass and air, he can be very much relaxed and relieved of pain.

This is a technique which can save from the risk factors arising due to pressure in mass.

In an inter course the male body and female body articulate the movement of pressure of mass and pressure of air and get relaxed.

### APPLICATION IN CLINICAL CONDITIONS

Even in the case of clinical care, a proper use of coping techniques of pressure equilibrium not only reduces impact of pressure but also relieves in pain.

### CATALYSTS IN AIR THERAPY

The incense sticks, perfumes, flowers, brewing smell, odour of skin, hair and water activates the role of the pressure of air.

### BENEFITS OF AIR THERAPY

Air therapy provides catalysing factor for metabolism

Air therapy neutralises disease force

Air therapy maintains balance between mass and energy.

Air therapy tunes radiation forces.

Air therapy is palliative in conditions of ill health, risk and mental turmoil.

Air therapy is bio friendly measure promoting emotional and physical wellness through yoga techniques.

### CONCLUSION

The vaayu is the dynamic mechanism to facilitate escalation of consciousness, tuning of body and mind and pacifying odds of pressure in all major physiological systems. The adepts could identify the levels of consciousness being in tune with mass, energy and space equilibrium. It is the function of vayu that makes a person hale and healthy, and worried and distressed. Hence the management of vaayu is having a key potential in the promotion of integral wellness in general and physical and emotional wellness in particular.

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