

Development of a Conceptual Model of Pranayama as in Yoga Vasishtha (Nirvana Prakarana) and its Comparison with Concept of Pranayama in Patanjali Yoga Sutra and Hatha Yoga Pradipika

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Abstract:

Aim: To develop a conceptual model of Pranayama as in Yoga Vasishtha [Chapter 25, Nirvana Prakarana (I)] and compare it with Pranayama as in Patanjali Yoga Sutra and Swatmarama's Pranayama concept as in Hatha Yoga Pradipika.

Objectives: To build familiarity with the phenomenon of Yoga Vasishtha pranayama and gain new insights into it and to compare Yoga Vasishtha pranayama with the most prevailing concept of pranayama of Patanjali Yoga Sutra and Swatmarama's Pranayama concept as in Hatha Yoga.

Method: A fundamental study of Yoga Vasishtha and study of Vasishtha Pranayama [Chapter 25 of Nirvana Prakaran (I)] was done for this work. Elaborated diagrams were made to give clear idea of the Pranayama of Yoga Vasishtha in Chapter- 25. Study of Pranayama in Patanjali Yoga Sutra, study of Pranayama in Hatha Yoga Pradipika was also done.

Conclusion: The unbroken awareness with the flow of the prana is the essence of Yoga Vasishtha Pranayama. This Pranayama, we can say, is an absolute concept of pranayama. This Pranayama is similar to Patanjali's Pranayama to a great extent but more elaborative. Like Hath Yoga Pranayama there is no chance of harm for the practitioner.

Keywords: Yoga Vasishtha, pranayama, awareness, kumbhaka

Introduction

Yoga Vasishtha is a very less explored scripture. The yoga addressed in this text is not so much the physical asana practice that has become the mainstream yoga of current popularity. Today we see a widening interest in Yoga across the globe. If this method of pranayama as described in Yoga Vasishtha is proved potential, it can help the human race to ease their lives and also to evolve.

Prana: The Sanskrit word prana is a combination of two syllables, pra and na, and denotes constancy, a force in constant motion. The other etymological interpretation of prana is Pra (first unit) and na (energy) is the vital and primal energy of the universe. "He who

knows Prana knows Vedas" is the important declaration of the Srutis. In prana all moveable and immoveable beings merge (during dissolution) and rise out of prana (during creation).

Pranayama: The word 'pranayama' has two etymological explanations. It has been interpreted as a combination of the words prana + ayama, and also as a combination of the words prana + yama. The word ayama means 'expanding the dimension', so in the first sense pranayama means expanding the dimension of prana. The word yama means 'restraint' or 'control', so here pranayama refers to the control or restraint of prana, both etymological explanations are able to convey the meaning of pranayama.

Or one can break the word, prana into pra + na means that which is constant in motion or the vital, primal energy; and yama, differently as in "ya" (to bring forth) and ma (to nurture). Thus pranayama means to be aware (to bring forth) and expand (nurture) the vital and primal energy (which resides in you).

Yoga Vasishtha - A Legend: Yoga Vasishtha is a Hindu text attributed to Valmiki, but the real author is unknown. Scholars agree that the surviving editions of the text were composed in the common era, but disagree whether it was completed in the first millennium or second. Estimates range, states Chapple, from "as early as the sixth or seventh century CE, to as late as the fourteenth century." The text is named after sage Vasishtha who is mentioned and revered in the seventh book of the Rigveda, and who was called as the first sage of the Vedanta school of Hindu philosophy by Adi Shankara. The text is structured as a discourse of sage Vasishtha to Prince Rama.

Valmiki's full text is in six sections with the sixth part in two divisions:

- I Vairagya Prakaranam (Dispassion)
- II Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakaranam (Behavior of the seeker)
- III Utpatti Prakaranam (Creation)
- IV Sthiti Prakaranam (Existence)
- V Upasama Prakaranam (Dissolution)
- VI.1 Nirvana Prakaranam (Liberation)
- VI.2 Nirvana Prakaranam (Liberation)

The Complete Text contained 32000 verses. The problems addressed are primarily psychological, and the issues related to the mind and mental phenomena are the central themes found throughout the text. Also noteworthy are the concepts of relativism, the holographic nature of consciousness, parallel reality, different layers of time and space,

altered states of consciousness, and embodiment and the world.

The main principles of YV (Yoga Vasishtha): The world is the creation of mind, projection of mind. Prana gives stimulus to the mind.

The Main Theory of Yoga Vasishtha:

Prana Spanda ↔ Chitta Spanda ↔ Vasana (various desires)



Functioning of the body

Tattwagyana ↔ Prana Spanda Nirodh ↔ Chitta Spanda Nirodh ↔ Vasana Kshaya (elimination of desires- Para Vairagya)



Nirvana

Methods:

Pranayama as in Yoga Vasishtha [Chapter 25 Nirvana Prakaran (I)]:

This chapter of Yoga Vasishtha is on Samadhi in which the main topics discussed are on the breathing of inspiration, respiration and expiration and their rise and fall. It is also about the spirit of Brahman, the origin and about Nirvana.

The chapter is as Sage Vasishtha answering Rama's inquiry as heard from Yogi Bhushunda. The eight dimensions of pranayama- the octuple nature are described from 3 to 20 verses starting with explaining Prana and apana. Then, after describing the effects of such pranayama the author also takes us to ultimate level of pranayama and its results- Nirvana.

Pranayama is the contemplation of Prana. Pranayama does not aspire to alter or influence natural movement but rather employs breath regulation techniques which

are aimed at encouraging the remembrance and surrender to the natural flow of Prana.

Through contemplation and identifying with the natural movement of Prana and Apana, one can experience the natural state of oneself. This is Yoga Vasishtha's ultimate experience of immortal liberation.

This holistic, absolute approach to Yoga is completely exclusive to Yoga Vasishtha.

- Prana is a moving force by its nature. It is always suomotu in its own motion. And pervades everywhere; in the inside and outside of bodies which it animates, Verse 3.25.
The prana runs towards the open air, in the form of flames of fire. It resembles the sunshine, warms the inside of the body, Verse 32.25, 33.25.
- Apana - is also self motive power, in its incessant motion. It is both within and without living body, in its downward and receding direction, Verse 4.25.
The apana turns inward to the region of the heart, and goes downward like current of water. It is like the cooling moon light, and refreshes the body from without, Verse 32.25, 33.25.
- Always available instrument: It is good for living beings to restrain these vital breaths both in their waking and sleeping states, Verse 5.25.
- Rechaka - The Prana, extends from the lotus like heart to the crevice of the cranium, its effort to come out by the mouth and the nostrils is termed by the wise as rechaka or exhaled air. The expiration coming out of the heart, and reaching the cerebrum is called the rechaka breath, Verse 6.25.
- Puraka - The meeting of the breaths at the distance of twelve fingers from and below the

nostrils, is called puraka or inhaling breath, Verse 7.25.

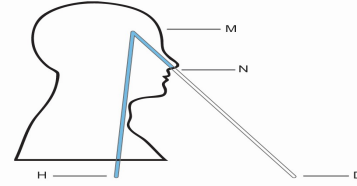
1. Antah Puraka

बाह्यात्परापतत्यन्तरपाने यत्त्ववर्जितः ।

योऽयं प्रपूरणः स्पर्शो विदुस्तमपि पूरकम् ॥ ८

Translation: It is also called puraka, when the breath passes from without, and enters within the inner apana without any effort, and feels the inside from the heart to cerebrum.

Figure: 1



Keys: M- Murchha, N- Nashika (Nostril), D- Dwadashangul Distance (Approx. 9 inch), H- Hriday (Heart Region), Prana- Red colour, Apana- Blue colour

Here awareness along with the prana shakti is on apana, the inhalation, starting from nose tip and filling up to heart region. (Figure 1)

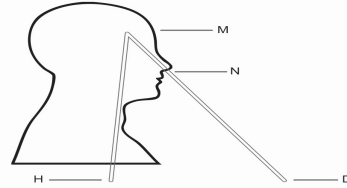
2. Antah Kumbhaka

अपानेऽस्तंगते प्राणो यावन्नाभ्युदितो हृदि ।

तावत्सा कुम्भकावस्था योगिभिर्यानुभूयते ॥ ९

Translation: When the apana air has subsided in the heart, and prana breath does not circulate in the breast, it is called the kumbhaka state and is known to the Yogis only.

Figure: 2



Keys: M- Murchha, N- Nashika (Nostril), D- Dwadashangul Distance (Approx. 9 inch), H- Hriday (Heart Region), Prana- Red colour, Apana- Blue colour

Here awareness along with the prana shakti is a little below the heart region where apana has subsided. This is a subtle phase to apprehend in the beginning as one has to do it without affecting the natural course of breathing. (Figure 2)

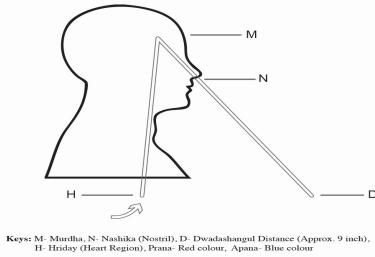
In other words the awareness is being expanded to comprehend the exchange of gases and distribution of energy beyond the lung level, at cellular levels in the body. The depth of awareness increases and the area of awareness expand with regular practice. Here one can come to know that trying to be aware of this phase, naturally increase this phase which is the beauty of this practice.

3. Kumbhaka

मृदन्तरस्थानिष्पन्नघटवद्या स्थितिर्बहिः ।
द्वादशाङ्गुलपर्यन्ते नासाग्रसमसंमुखे ॥ १३
व्योम्नि नित्यमपानस्य तं विदुः कुम्भकं बुधाः ।

Translation: As the outer part of a pot planted in the earth appears to the sight, so the apana breath stretching to the *dwadashangul* distance just opposite to the tip of the nose in the air on the outside, is perceptible to yogi, and is called Kumbhaka by the learned.

Figure: 3



Here awareness- witness principle- is on the rising prana to exhale while maintaining the natural flow of breath. The arrow below H denotes the rising urge of prana to exhale. Here still mind is not affected by the urge. (Figure 3)

Here only for uniformity we have quoted translation from Ravi Prakash Arya, but the explanation for this pranayama differs from the translation.

We can perceive the complete cycle of breathing by interpreting it like- The prana shakti which is in the state - as like the state of the clay before it becomes pot - means when it

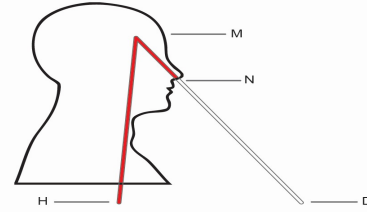
is not apana and nor yet become prana; the awareness of yogi should on that prana shakti. Sage Vasishtha also confirms that it is perceivable by a Yogi even up to *dwadashangul* distance in front of the nose.

4. Bahya Puraka-1

बाह्योन्मुखस्य वायोर्वा नासिकाग्रावधिर्गतिः ।
तं बाह्यपूरकं त्वाद्यं विदुर्योगविदो जनाः ॥ १४ ॥

Translation: The exhaling air which rises from the heart, and extends to the tip of the nose, is styled the primary and external puraka breath by adepts in Yoga practices.

Figure: 4



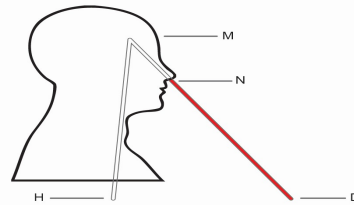
Here the awareness along with the prana shakti is on the rise of prana and also on outgoing breath from heart region to nose tip. (Figure 4)

5. Bhaya Puraka-2

नासाग्रादपि निर्गत्य द्वादशान्तावधिर्गतिः ।
या वायोस्तं विदुर्धोरा अपरं बाह्यपूरकम् ॥ १५ ॥

Translation: There is another (or secondary) external puraka air which is known to the wise, which takes it rise from the tip of the nose, extends to the *dwadashangul* distance.

Figure: 5



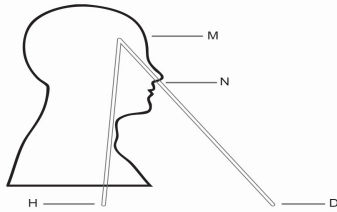
Here awareness along with the prana shakti is on prana and also on outgoing breath from nose tip to dwadashangul distance. (Figure 5)

6. Bahya Kumbhaka

बहिरस्तं गते प्राणे यावन्नाऽपान उद्गतः ।
तावत् पूर्ण समावस्थं बहिष्ठं कुम्भकं विदुः ॥ १६ ॥

Translation: After the prana breath sets outside the nostrils, and before the apana breath has yet its rise, this interval of entire abeyance of both is known as the state of perfect equalization, and termed as external Kumbhaka.

Figure: 6



Keys: M- Murcha, N- Nishika (Nostril), D- Dwadashangul Distance (Approx. 9 inch),
H- Heart (Heart Region), Prana- Red colour, Apana- Blue colour

Here the awareness along with prana shakti is below the *dwadashangul* distance where prana is subsided and apana has not risen yet. (Figure 6)

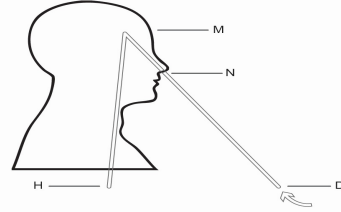
In this phase of time mind is free from effects of either.

7. Bhaya Rechaka

यत्तदन्तर्मुखत्वं स्यादपानस्योदयं विना ।
तं बाह्यरेचकं विद्याच्चित्त्यमानं विमुक्तिदम् ॥ १७ ॥

Translation: The air which breathes out in the heart or pulsates within it, and without rising of apana breath; [praspanand unmukhta of vayu (Goswami, 1989)] is styled the external rechaka in the Yoga system; and its reflection confers perfect liberation to man.

Figure: 7



Keys: M- Murcha, N- Nishika (Nostril), D- Dwadashangul Distance (Approx. 9 inch),
H- Heart (Heart Region), Prana- Red colour, Apana- Blue colour

Here the awareness along with the prana shakti of the practitioner is on the rising of apana in the region where arrow is placed. (Figure 7)

When the shining Apana Vayu takes an upward bent within, then it is styled the external Rechaka.

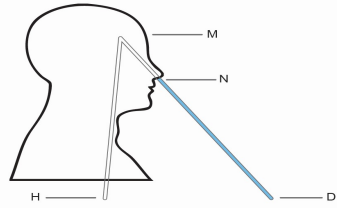
This may be the dimension a practitioner may find difficult to apprehend in the early stage of practice. It is a subtle and unique observation of Yoga Vasishtha which is described in pranayama practices in scriptures as far as we know.

8. Bahya Puraka-3

अपानस्य बहिष्ठं तमपरं पूरकं विदुः ।
बाह्यानाभ्यन्तरांश्चैतान्कुम्भकादीनारतम् ॥ १९

Translation: There is another kind of puraka, which is on the outside of apana: and when it stretches to the inside of the navel within, it is known under the name of Kumbhaka.

Figure: 8



Keys: M- Murcha, N- Nishika (Nostril), D- Dwadashangul Distance (Approx. 9 inch),
H- Heart (Heart Region), Prana- Red colour, Apana- Blue colour

Here the awareness along with prana shakti is on the apana which rise from D to N as shown in figure. (Figure 8)

Summary of above mentioned 8 practices:

To summarize, the above mentioned eight

practices are to be followed during one breathing cycle with smooth transition from one to another and so on to be continued as much and as many times possible to be aware of as shown in figure. (Figure 9)

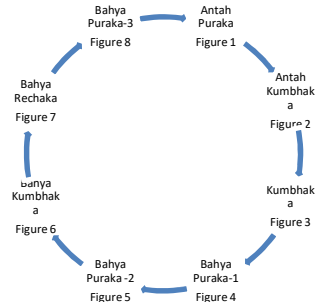


Figure 9: The complete cycle of Yoga Vasishtha Pranayama

After developing absolute awareness of breathing process, the author advises to practice Kumbhaka (retention of breath) with effort (verse-23).

Such long time practice leads the yogi again to effortless Kumbhaka which is known as Divine state.

Pranayama in Other Scriptures:

- Pranayama as Patanjali Yoga Sutra: It is the fourth Anga or limb of Ashtanga Yoga. “Tasmin Sati Svasa prasvasayorgativicchedah Pranayamah”—Regulation of breath or the control of Prana is the stoppage of inhalation and exhalation, which follows after securing that steadiness of posture or seat, Asana.
- According to Hath Yoga Pradipika:
 - By steadiness of the prana, the yogi attains steadiness of the mind (2.2)
 - Pranayama should be practiced so impurities of the nadis can be eliminated (2.6)
 - Large section devoted to description of various pranayamas.
 - Breath retention (kumbhaka) is a powerful technique to control the prana.

- Eight types of breath retentions are defined.

Discussion:

Similarity with Patanjali’s Pranayama: II-49 “A more succinct translation is that from success in asana there (tasmin) is established a firm foundation (sati) **to observe and analyze (vicchedah) the processes (gati) of inhalation and exhalation in order to effect the flow of prana more extensively (in the body/mind).** But what must be emphasized here is that prana means energy, not breath, so at best we can see that the observation of the breath is a coarse method to get us more in touch with the more subtle energy and holistic neurologic processes underlying the breathing process.” After establishing asana as the steady, joyful, and balanced seat of Infinite or Boundless Mind, in **pranayama the yogi learns how to extend and spread prana throughout the body, the breath, energy channels.**Error! Reference source not found. Here Patanjali is explicit that pranayama is an awareness/observation practice, not a **mechanical willful practice.** - This is same concept as YV pranayama concept.

“**Vicchedah** means making to break or cut apart, not control, restraint, or stoppage. It is conjoined to the Sanskrit word, gati, which refers to the procession of the breathing process. Thus we learn to expand and refine the prana by observing and breaking apart the movements of the breath as it occurs in inspiration and expiration so that it is no longer controlled by the unconscious winds of karma and unconscious habit, but rather it comes into the light of consciousness -- **vicchedah** being an act of consciousness not individual control over the breathing. In this way our energy and mind changes as well as our karma.

This will be made even clearer in next sutra (50) where Patanjali introduces the very pertinent technique of *paridrsto* which means to behold or to overview. Patanjali is mainly telling us that pranayama can be approached at first as the process (*gati*) of becoming aware of our energy by breaking it down into its gross external components as manifest in the profound linkages between mind and energy inherent in the breathing process -- how the energy enters our body/mind, how it leaves it, and how it becomes discontinuous or inhibited. Through this break down of these energetic (utilizing the breath as its coarse tangible representative), then we obtain awareness of how the energy is extended, refined, and made more subtle so that we open up the nadis (the container of the prana) which activates the body's higher circuitries and potential (the manifestation of brahman in this very body as the *Jivanmukti*). With this awareness we can sit in asana so that the meditation is energized without dissipation to activate its highest potential (in an accomplished *Samadhi*)."

The primary goal is not the control of the breath, but rather it is the awareness of the subtle and more causal intelligent primal operations of prana shakti. This is again a similar motive as YV pranayama.

Simplicity: Simplicity brings one closer to Reality. But lack of simplicity introduces deviations because the biases of a complicated and altered mind are too many, blocking progress towards Reality. Simplicity which is the main feature of Pranayama in Yoga Vasishtha enables the yogi to acquire enlightenment more easily. Yes depth of understanding and realization is to be developed otherwise, the knowledge remains superfluous.

Ultimate knowledge is so simple; it is present there everywhere. We need to observe silence in order to enhance depth.

Holistic: As we have seen in Chapter - 4 of this dissertation that all 8 - dimension of one breath are been aware of which make this Pranayama holistic and absolute.

Depth: Solitude, quietness and introspection of YV pranayama enhance our depth and take us away from complexity towards simplicity. On a daily basis, a yogi can start practicing by moving away to a corner, keeping silence. Slowly, the duration can be stretched and a time will come when eternal silence will start echoing in the midst of thundering sounds all around. That is when one has acquired the ability to cut oneself off from all distractions. The understanding that then develops comes from the depth of yogi's own existence.

No chance of "*anyatha hanti sadhakam*": "Just as lions, elephants and tigers are gradually controlled, so the prana is controlled through practice. Otherwise, the practitioner is destroyed."- H P (2.15).

As here we begin with and move forward with natural course and do not alter the breathing process and only being aware of it there cannot be any harm to the practitioner as said in *Hatha Pradipika* of Swatmarama.

No chance of "*Sarvarog smudbhavh*": "By proper practice of pranayama, all diseases are eradicated. Through improper practice, all diseases can arise."- H P (2.16).

Same as said above that as going with natural tendency no health issue can happen due to this practice.

For everyone: The above point can be justified by the simplicity of this practice.

Anytime:

जाग्रतः स्वपतश्चैव प्राणायामोऽयमुत्तमः ।
प्रवर्तते यतस्तज्ज्ञ तत्तावच्छ्रेयसे शृणु ॥ ५ ॥

It is good for living beings to restrain these vital breaths both in their waking and sleeping states.

“Whatever path you follow: As you advance to a high state on a path, your breathing will change automatically and it will be similar to that of one who practices yoga. You may not be even aware of it; the breathing will change on its own (without any effort on your part).

When we go higher on our path we will breathe through both our nostrils and when we will go still higher we will stop breathing that is we will be retaining our breath in what is called “kumbhaka”. But this does not mean that we will be gasping for breath, we will be feeling easy, light. Thus the movement of breath will change on its own. Finally (in our quest), the movement of breath will impinge on the nerves in the roof of our head and, create a flow of ambrosia.” This practical appeal also support YV concept of pranayama.

Analysis:

“Prana and apana are equal and opposite forces, they balance each other and so it results in continuous lifelong movement.”- A practitioner of this pranayama can experience this truth. This seems a potential method of pranayama for all, as the whole cycle of breathing with minutest precision with smooth, natural movement without breaks can be perceived in each breath gradually, which results in expansion of awareness. The

primary goal of YV pranayama is to recognize, perceive and realize the subtle and more causal intelligent primal operations of prana shakti.

Conclusion and recommendation:

The unbroken awareness with the flow of the prana is the essence of Yoga Vasishtha Pranayama. This Pranayama, we can say, is an absolute concept of pranayama. This Pranayama is similar to Patanjali's Pranayama to a great extent but more elaborative.

Like Hath Yoga Pranayama there is no chance of harm for the practitioner.

The Pranayama described in the text deserves a clear phenomenological, neuro-psycho-physiological, psycho-neuroimmunological, physiological and cognitive psychological interpretation in order for it to be widely accessible to the world.

The author has practiced YV pranayama and found that the sphere of her awareness has expanded; awareness of internal and external environment has increased to a great extent. Meditation has become more enjoyable. Actually to practice this pranayama of Yoga Vasishtha is in itself practicing meditation.

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