
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 LITERARY RESEARCH: CONCEPT OF *PRANA* FROM ANCIENT INDIAN TEXTS

2.1 BACKGROUND AND SCOPE

Prana or vital energy is the vital force according to traditional Indian literature. It is considered to be the life force. It is manifested in the gross form through the process of breathing. *Prana* is considered to be the *sukñma*, subtle, whereas the breath is considered assthula, the gross one. It enters the body when Atman enters the body and leaves with atman when it leaves the body. Since it is prana that sets the mind in motion, the process of regulation of breathing is said to influence the flow of Prana, and thereby the mind. The process, by which the *Prana* is controlled by the regulation of external breath, is termed Pranayama.

2.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF LITERARY RESEARCH

- To understand the concept of *Prana and Pranayama*

2.3 CONCEPT OF PRANA FROM THE ANCIENT INDIAN LITERATURE

The “life” in a living being is represented by breathing. Breath has been indicated as man's sole companion. However, the process of breathing is generally ignored and it co-exists with life. Breathing is not just the physical entity, is also the representation of the life force, Prana. Thus, the regulation of breathing (*Pranayama*) is considered to have physical, psychological as well as spiritual benefits.

Upanishads are considered to be the treasures of the traditional knowledge base of Vedas. They consider the process of breathing as an essential means to reach the ultimate goal of a spiritual aspirant.

Prana is a Sanskrit word derived from two roots '*prā*' is a prefix used to denote constancy and '*ana*' means 'movement'. Therefore *Prana* is a force (or energy) that is in a state of constant movement. The gross form of *Prana* is considered to be the flow of air through either nostril while breathing. The nature of *prana* is not static; it expands and contracts (Muktibodhananda, 1999). The importance of breathing and its diverse effects on the human body has been described in an ancient text called *Śiva Sarvodaya*, described in a monograph named *Svara yoga* (Muktibodhananda, 1999). The text describes the mind as *Citta*, the life force as *Prana*, and the spirit as *ātmā*. *Citta* controls the five senses: vision, smell, taste, hearing, and touch. *Prana* controls the five organs of action: speech, hands, feet, reproductive and excretory organs. *Ātmā* is the overall witness or controller.

THE ORIGIN AND IMPORTANCE OF PRANA

A student asks the teacher as to the origin of *Prana* as follows:

भगवन् कुत एष प्राणो जायते कथं आयात्यस्मिञ्शरीर

आत्मानं वा प्रविभज्य कथं प्रातिष्ठते केनोत्क्रमते कथं बाह्यमभिधत्ते कथं ध्यात्ममिति ॥

Bhagavan kuta eṣa prāṇo jāyate katha māyātyasmiñśrīra

Ātmānam vā pravibhajya katham prātiṣṭhate kenotkramate katham bāhyamabhidhatte

kathamadhyātmamiti.

(Praśnopaniṣat, 3.1)

“ O almighty sir, from where *Prana* is born? How does he come into this body? How again does he dwell by dividing himself? How does it depart? How does he support the external and internal physical things?”

An answer was given to Kaushalya’s Question:

आत्मन एष प्राणो जायते । यथैषा पुरुषे

छायैतस्मिन्नेतदाततं मनोकृतेनायात्यस्मिञ्शरीरे ॥

Ātmana eṣa prāṇo jāyate | yathaiṣā puruṣe

chāyaitasminnetadātataṁ manokṛtenāyātyasmiñśarīre ||(Praśnopaniṣat, 3.3)

Prana is born of the *ātmana*. Like the shadow of a man, it is spread out on that. It comes into the body by the acts of the mind.

प्राणो वसति तत्रैव वासनाभरलंकृतः ।

अनादिकर्मसंश्लिष्टः प्राप्याहङ्कारसंयुतः ॥

Prāṇo vasati tatraiva vāsanābharalaṅkṛtaḥ,

Anādi karmasanshliṣṭaḥ prāpyāhaṅkārasanyutaḥ.

(*ŚivaSaṁhitā*3.2)

“The *Prana* lives there adorned with various desires, accompanied by its past works that have no beginning, and joined with egoism (*Ahaṅkāra*).”

According to *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*

देहेऽस्मिन्देहनाडीषु वातः स्फुरति योऽभितः ।

स्पन्देष्विव भुवो वारि स प्राण इति कीर्तितः ॥

Dehe'smindehanādīṣu vātaḥ sphurati yo'bhitah,

Spandēṣviva bhuvo vāri sa Prana iti kīrtitah.

(*Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, 5.91.10)

“There is a circulating air breathing through the lungs and arteries of the body, as the water flows through the veins and power of the each, which is called the vital breath of life.”

प्राणाधीनपरिस्पन्दं चित्तं आहुः मनीषिणः ।

तस्मिन् संरोधिते नूनं उपशान्तं भवेत् मनः ॥

Prāṇādhīnapariṣpandaṁ cittam āhuḥ manīṣiṇaḥ|

Tasmīn saṁrodhite nūnam upaśāntaṁ bhavet manaḥ||

(*Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, 17:3:45)

Wise man call the Prana as having the movement dependent on *Prana* (or vital air or bio-
energy). When that *Prana* is controlled, the mind certainly become tranquil.

Prana is considered to be the reason for the existance of consciousness

प्राणासमाचरे समदर्शनम् ।

Prāṇāsamācare samadarśanam|

(Śiva Sūtra, 3. 22)

Prana the vital force which controls and regulates the activities of a vehicle of consciousness on smacre on proper regulation and direction of *Prana* reffered to as Pranayama. The attainment of the *turīyā* state of consciousness which integrates all the three lower states of consciousness into the unified state of *ātmik* consciousness.

नैसर्गिकः प्राणसंबन्धः।

Naisargikaḥ Pranasambandhaḥ|

(Śiva Sūtra, 3. 43)

The principle of *Prana*, though it connects the pure consciousness of *puruṣa* with his vehicles in the realm of manifestation, belongs really to the realm of *Prakṛti* and so when the consciousness of the *puruṣa* reverts to the world of Reality as pointed out in the last aphorism, the *Prana* remains behind with the vehicle and its association with *puruṣa* is dissolved completely.

Breath is referred as the vehicle of supreme consciousness(*Brahman*)according to Upanishads such as *Taittirīya*, *Brāhmana* and *Maitrī*. *Praśnopaniṣat* describes that the *Prana* is born from the supreme self (*ātman*).

Prana is considered to be orginated at the origin of cosmos and therefore the eldest in existance.

Chāndogya Upanishad describes this in the following verse:

यो ह वै ज्येष्ठं च श्रेष्ठं च वेद ज्येष्ठश्च ह

वै श्रेष्ठश्च भवति प्राणो वाव ज्येष्ठश्च श्रेष्ठश्च ।

Yo ha vaijyeṣṭam ca śreṣṭam ca vedajyeṣṭaśca ha

vaī śreṣṭaśca bhavati prāṇo vāva jyeṣṭa ścaśreṣṭaśca ।

(Chāndogya Upanishad V.I.I)

Om, verily he who knows the eldest and best, surely becomes the eldest and the best. *Prana* is indeed the eldest and the best. (of the organs)

This whole creation is said to be created out of *Prana*

यदिदं किं च जगत्सर्वं प्राण एजति निःसृतम् ।

Yadidamkim ca jagatsarvam Prana ejati niḥsṛtam ।

(Kathopanishad2:3:2)

This whole world - whatever there is - vibrates having originated from *Prana*.

This cosmic *Prana*, also called *mahāPrana*, came into being at the time of creation. Thus, in order to fully understand *Prana*, one must go back to the beginning of creation.

The soul of the gods is also manifested through the vital force-

या प्राणेन संभवत्यदिर्देवतामयी ।

गुहां प्रविश्य तिष्ठन्तीं या भूतेभिर्यजायत । एतद् वै तत् ॥

Yā prāṇena sambhavatyaditirdevatāmayī

Guhām praviśya tiṣṭhantīm yā bhūtebhiroyajāyata | Etad vai tat ||

(Kathopanishad2:1:7)

Āditi, the soul of gods, who is manifested in the form of *Prana* and was created with the elements, dwells having entered the heart. He who knows her, knows the Brahman indeed. This is verily that.

This cosmic *Prana*, which is known as *mahāPrana* has come into existence since the time immortal when the creation came into existence. The other names described for *mahā Prana* are *mahāsakti* and *mahāmāyā*.

Hymns from *Ṛgveda* state that the “Breath which is the life” (1:66:1, 1:113:16). “All the cosmos moves and breathes” implies another hymn from the *Ṛgveda* (1.101.5), meaning the breath pervades the entire world. *Atharva Veda* considers *Prana* as the fundamental basis of whatever is, was, and will be (10:XI, IV).

Prana is considered to be the protector, which pervades in the whole existence of universe, is also considered to confer the vigor and intelligence to the living beings.

प्राणस्येदं वशे सर्वं त्रिदिवे यत् प्रतिष्ठितम् ।

मातेव पुत्रान् रक्षस्व श्रीश्च प्रज्ञां च विदेहि न इति ॥

Pranasyedam vaśesarvam tridiveyat pratiṣṭhitam |

Māteva putrān rakṣasva śrīśca prajñām ca videhi na iti ॥

(Prašnopaniṣat 2.13)

Prana the vital force pervades all the three worlds. All the activities are directed by the *Prana*. We request the *Prana* to protect us as a mother protects her children. We also request the *Prana* to stimulate our intellect.

This verse is considered as prayer to be recited prior to practice of *Pranayāma* practices as a mark of respect to that life energy because of which we are existing.

As described in the *śiva svarodaya*, Devi asks *Shiva*, “In this universe, who is the greatest friend of man?”. *Shiva* replies:

प्राण एव परं मित्रं प्राण एव परः सखा ।

प्राणतुल्यः परो बन्धुर्नास्ति नास्ति वरानने ॥

Prana eva paraṁ mitraṁ Prana eva paraḥ sakhā |

Pranatulyaḥ paro bandhurnāsti nāsti varānane ||

(śiva svarodaya 219)

Prana is the greatest friend, *Prana* is the greatest companion. O fair one, there is no closer friend in this universe than *Prana*.

Haöha Yoga Pradépikā elaborates the importance of *Prana* in life stating the following:

यावद्वायुः स्थितो देहे तावज्जीवनमुच्यते ।

मरणं तस्य निष्क्रान्तिस्ततो वायुं निरोधयेत् ॥

Yāvadvāyuhḥ sthito dehe tāvajjīvanamucyate

Marāṇaṁ tasya niṣkrāntistato vāyurṁ nirodhayet||

(HaṭhaYogaPradīpikā 2.3)

As long as the *vayu* (*Prana*) remains in the body, there is life. Death occurs when the *vayu* leaves the body, therefore, retain the *vayu*.

The *brahmananda valli* of *Taittirīya Upanishad* describes the importance of *Prana* in an individual's life in the following words:

तस्माद्वा एतस्माद्भ्रसरसमयात् । अन्योऽन्तर आत्मा प्राणमयः ।

तेनैष पूर्णः । स वा एष पुरुषविध एव ।

तस्य पुरुषविधताम् । अन्वयं पुरुषविधः ॥

Tasmāddā etasmādannarasamayāt | *anyo'ntar ātmā Pranamayah* |

Tenaīṣa pūrṇah | *sa vā eṣa puruṣavidha eva* |

Tasya puruṣavidhatām | *anvayaṁ puruṣavidhah* |

||*Brahmānandavalli 2*||

Verily, besides this physical body, which is made of the essence of food, there is another, inner self comprised to vital energy by which this physical self is filled. Just as the fleshly body is in the form of a person, accordingly this vital self is in the shape of a person.

In the *Bhṛuguvalli* of *Taittirīya Upanishad*, the *Prana* is described as

प्राणो ब्रह्मेति व्यजानात् । प्राणाद्धेव खल्विमानि भूतानि जायन्ते । प्राणेन जातानि जीवन्ति । प्राणं
 प्रयन्त्यभिसंविशन्तीति । तद्विज्ञाय । पुनरेव वरुणं पितरमुपससार । अधीहि भगवो ब्रह्मेति । तं होवाच । तपसा ब्रह्म
 विजिज्ञासस्व । तपो ब्रह्मेति । स तपोऽतप्यत । स तपस्तप्त्वा ॥

*Prāṇo brahmeti vyajānāt | prāṇāddhyeva khalvimāni bhūtāni jāyante | prāṇena jātāni jīvanti |
 Pranam prayantyaabhisamvisantīti | tadvijñāya | punareva varuṇam pitaramupasasāra |
 adhīhi bhagavo brahmeti | taṁ hovāca | tapasā brahma vijijñāsasva | tapo brahmeti | sa
 tapo'tapyata | sa tapastaptvā ||*

(TaittirīyaUpanishad 3.1)

After *Prana*, do *Devas* live, as also men and beasts. *Prana*, verily, is the life-duration of beings; thence it is called the life-duration of all. The whole life-duration do they reach, who *Prana* as Brahman regard. *Prana*, verily, is of beings the life duration; thence it is called the life-duration of all. Thus (ends the verse). Thereof, of the former, this one, verily, is the self-embodied. Than that, verily, than this one formed of *Prana*, there is another self within formed of *Manas* (thought-stuff). By him this one is filled.

Prana is considered to pervade all the physical dimensions, and therefore the magnitude of it described as:

शरीरात्प्राणो द्वादशाङ्गुलाधिको भवति । शरीरस्थं प्राणमग्निना सह योगाभ्यासेन समं न्यूनं वायः करोति स

योगिपुङ्गवो भवति । देहमध्ये शिखिस्थानंत्रिकोणं तप्तजाम्बूनदप्रभं मनुष्याणाम् ।

Śarīrātprāṇo dvādaśāṅgulādhiko bhavati |

*Śarīrastham Pranamagninā saha yogābhyāsenā samam nyūnam vāyaḥ karoti sa
yogipuṅgavo bhavati | Dehamadhye śikhisthānam trikoṇam taptajāmbūnadaprabham
manuṣyāṇām |*

(Śāṅḍilya Upanishad I 15)

The body is ninety-six in digits in length. *Prana* extends twelve digits beyond the body. He who through the practice of yoga reduces his *Prana* within his body to make it equal to or not less than the fire in it becomes the greatest of the yogins. In a man, the region of the fire which is triangular in form and brilliant as the molten gold is situated in the middle of the body.

The spiritual significance of understanding the Prana is described as:

यः प्राणे तिष्ठन् प्राणादन्तरो यं प्राणो न वेद यस्य प्राणः शरिरं ।

यः प्राणमन्तरो यमत्येष त आत्मान्तर्याम्यमृतः ॥

Yaḥ prāṇe tiṣṭhan prāṇādantaro yaṁ prāṇo na veda yasya Pranaḥ śariram |

Yaḥ Pranamantaro yamatyeṣa ta ātmāntaryāmyamrutaḥ ||

(BṛhadāraṇyakaUpanishadIII.vI.17)

The intelligent soul is placed in Prana, inside the *Prana*, it pervades the *Prana*, yet the non-intelligent are unaware of the it. Prana itself become the body of the chief master, who controls it from the inside. Thus, the soul is immutable, indestructible and immortal.

2.4 THE CONCEPT OF PANCHAPRANA AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

There are five major and five minor divisions of Prana described in the traditional texts, each of which is designated to perform specific actions. *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* illustrates the composition of subtle layer of human existence

वागादि पञ्च श्रवणादि पञ्चप्राणादि पञ्चाभ्रमुखानि पञ्च ।

बुद्ध्याद्यविद्यापि च कामकर्मणीपुर्यष्टकं सूक्ष्मशरीरमाहुः ॥

Vāgādi pañca śravaṇādi pañcapraṇādi pañcābhramukhāni pañca |

Buddhyādyavidyāpi ca kāmakarmanīpuryaṣṭakaṁ sūkṣmaśarīramāhuḥ |

(Vivekacūḍāmaṇi 96)

The five organs of action such as speech etc., the five organs of knowledge beginning with the ear, the group of five *Prana*, *Buddhi* and the rest, together with Nescience, desire and action these eight 'cites' make up what is called subtler body.

कर्मेन्द्रियैः पञ्चभिरञ्चितोऽयंप्राणो भवेत्प्राणमयस्तु कोशः ॥

येनात्मवानन्नमयोऽनुपूर्णः प्रवर्ततेऽसौ सकलक्रियासु ॥

karmendriyaiḥ pañcabhirañcīto'yaṁprāṇo bhavetPranamayastu kośaḥ ॥

yenātmavānannamayo'nupūrṇaḥpravartate'sau sakalakriyāsu

(Vivekacūḍāmaṇi 165)

The *Prana*, with which we are all familiar, coupled with the five organs of action, forms the Vital Sheath, permeated by which the Material Sheath itself in all activities as if it were living.

The division of Prana from the mukhya Prana is further described in the following verse:

प्राणापानव्यानोदानसमाना भवत्यसौ प्राणः ।

स्वयमेव वृत्तिभेदाद्विकृतिभेदात्सुवर्णसलिलादिवत् ॥

Prāṇāpānavyānodānasamānā bhavatyasau Prāṇaḥ ।

Svayameva vṛttibhedādvikṛtibhedātsuvarṇasalilādivat ॥

(Vivekacūḍāmaṇi 95)

The same Prana becomes *Prana*, *Apāna*, *Vyāna*, *Uḍāna* and *Samāna* according to their diversity of functions and modifications, like gold and water etc.

Praśnopaniṣat describes at length the function of each of the Prana.

यथा सम्रादेवाधिकृतान् विनियुङ्क्ते । एतन् ग्रामानोतान्

ग्रामानधितिष्ठस्वेत्येवमेवैष प्राण इतरान् प्राणान् पृथक्पृथगेव सन्निधत्ते ॥

*Yathā samrādevādhikṛtān viniyunkte | Etan grāmānotān
grāmānadhitiṣṭasvetyevamevaiṣa Prana itarān prāṇān pṛthak
pṛthageva sannidhatte||*

(*Praśnopaniṣat*, 3.4)

As the emperor orders his officials, ‘Do you reside in and rule these villages and those’, so does this (the chief Prana), engage the other *Prana* as differently (in different functions).

पायूपस्थेऽपानं चक्षुःश्रोत्रे मुखनासिकाभ्यां प्राणःस्वयं

प्रातिष्ठते मध्ये तु समानः । एष ह्येतद्धुतमन्नं समंनयति

तस्मादेताः सप्तार्चिषो भवन्ति ॥

Pāyūpasthe'pānaṁ cakṣuḥśrotre mukhanāsikābhyāṁ Pranaḥ

Svayaṁ prātiṣṭate madhye tu samānaḥ |

Eṣa hyetaddhutamannaṁ samānnayati tasmādetāḥ saptārciṣo bhavanti ||

(*Praśnopaniṣat*, 3.5)

The *Apāna* is in the organs of excretion and the organs of generation. The eye, ear, nose and mouth are governed by the Prana itself. In the middle is *Samāna*, as it distributes the offered food equally to all parts. From it originates the seven flames.

हृदि ह्येष आत्मा । अत्रैतदेकशतं नाडीनं तासां शतं शतमेकैकस्या द्वासप्ततिर्द्वासप्ततिः प्रतिशाखानाडीसहस्राणि

भवन्त्यासु व्यानश्चरति ॥

*Hṛdi hyeṣa ātmā | Atraitadekaśataṁ nāḍīnaṁ tāsāṁ śataṁ śatamekaikasya
dvāsaptatirdvāsaptatiḥ pratiśākhānāḍīśahasrāṇi bhavantyaśu vyānaścarati ||*

(*Praśnopaniṣat*, 3.6)

In the heart, dwells the atman. There are a hundred and one *nāḍis*, in each one of them, there are hundred and each one of these branch again has seventy two thousand *nāḍis*. In all these, Vyāna moves.

अथैकयोर्ध्व उदानः पुण्येन पुण्यं लोकं नयति पापेन पापमुभाभ्यामेव मनुष्यलोकम् ॥

*athaikayordhva udānaḥ puṇyena puṇyaṁ lokam nayati pāpena pāpamubhābhyāmeva
manuṣyalokam ||*

(*Praśnopaniṣat*, 3.7)

And then, through one of them, the Uḍāna carries the soul to the virtuous world by virtuous deeds, to the sinful world by the sinful acts, and by both to the world of men.

Different *Pranas* are said to have different colors, as described in the *Amritanāda Upanishad*.

रक्तवर्णो मणिप्रख्यः प्राणवायु प्रकीर्तितः । अपानस्तस्य मध्ये तु इन्द्रकोपसमप्रभः ।

समानस्तु दधोर्मध्ये गोक्षीरधवलप्रभः । आपाण्डर उदानश्च व्यानो ह्यर्चिसमप्रभः ॥

Raktavarṇo maṇiprakhyaḥ Pranavāyu prakīrtitaḥ |

Apānastasya madhye tu indrakopasamaprabhaḥ |

Samānastu dhdyormadhye gokṣīradhavalaprabhaḥ |

Āpāṇḍara udānaśca vyāno hyarcisamaprabhaḥ ||

(Amritanāda Upanishad. 34-37)

Prana is said to be blood-red, the color of ruby or coral; apāna is the color of Indra-Gopa, (an insect which is white or red in color); *samāna* is in-between the color of pure milk and crystal (oily and shining); *udāna* is anandara (pale white) and *vyāna* is the color of archis (a ray of light).

Of all the Pranas, Prana and *apāna* are considered to be the most influential ones. The *Śiva Samhita* states:

अत्रापि वायवः पञ्च मुख्याः स्युर्दशतः पुनः ।

तत्रापि श्रेष्ठकर्तारौ प्रानापानौ मयोदितौ ॥

Atrāpi vāyavaḥ panca mukhyāḥ syurdaśataḥ punaḥ |

Tatrāpi śreṣṭhakarttārau prānāpānau mayoditau ||

(Śiva Samhita 3:6)

Out of the ten (major and minor *Pranas*), the first five are the leading ones; even among these, *Prana* and *Apāna* are the highest agents.

2.5 SUMMARY

The Literature review on *prāṇā* implies that the origin of life is due to the manifestation of *prāṇā* through the mind. Due to its role in the manifestation and maintenance of life, *prāṇā* is considered holy and is worshiped. Various scriptures describe the importance of *prāṇā* and its division of it. The functions of each of the divisions of *prāṇā* have been elaborated in detail. Among the five major facets of *prāṇā*, the *mukhyaprāṇā* and *apānaare* considered to be the most vital ones, and their union is considered to be of great spiritual significance. *Prāṇā* is also manifested physically through the process of breathing.