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Physiological appraisal of prana vayu in ayurvedic literatures

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Abstract

In spite of this changing scenario *Ayurveda* continuously has contributed as a major system in maintaining and fulfilling the health related needs of Indian society. *Tridosha Siddhanta* stands high as *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* are the three biological humors, present in the bodies which are responsible for the maintenance of homeostasis. If they are in balanced state, sustains our body and if they are in abnormal state, produces the many abnormalities in our body and imbalances our homeostasis. *Vata*, the supreme of all *doshas* is of five types, viz. *Prana*, *Udana*, *Samana*, *Vyana*, and *Apana*. It initiates all minute and gross motor activities of body as well as control the rest two *doshas* viz. *Pitta* and *Kapha*. Among the five types of *Vata*, *Prana Vayu* is of utmost important as it is used in different context representing more or less a vital substance or structure, responsible for the sustenance of life. This paper was aimed to summaries and analyzes the description of *Prana Vayu* made by various ayurvedic scholars.

Keywords: Prana vayu, tridosha, vata doshas

Introduction

Ayurveda the age-old science of life has been contributing to the health of society since times immortal. In spite of this changing scenario *Ayurveda* continuously has contributed as a major system in maintaining and fulfilling the health related needs of Indian society. *Tridosha Siddhanta* stands high among these; rather it provides foundation on which other many *Siddhantas* are depends. *Ayurveda* has explained this very complex, multidimensional phenomenon of life in a very simple yet equally effective method. Rather than giving importance to differences in structural entities; functional variations of various different body structures have been comprehensively categorized under three prominent groups namely *Dosha*, *Dhatu* and *Malas*.

The human body is supported by these three basic *Doshas*, in the same way as a dwelling house is supported by the supporting pillars. Thus the body is spoken as the *Tristhunam* or the three supported one by certain authorities. Among these *Doshas* are most vital entity which in *Samyavastha* maintain balanced state of *Sharira* and when in *Vishamavastha* they are causative factors of diseases. *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* are the three biological humors, present in the bodies which are responsible for the maintenance of homeostasis. If they are in balanced state, sustains our body and if they are in abnormal state, produces the many abnormalities in our body and imbalances our homeostasis [1]. *Vata* is considered as main or supreme of all the *doshas* and is responsible for all kinds of movements, perception and activities of body. *Vata* also plays important role in initiation and control functions of *Pitta* and *Kapha*. '*Pitta*' is responsible for digestion, metabolism, and production of heat. '*Kapha*' is responsible for the functions like protection, strength, stability and resistance.

Vata, the supreme of all *doshas* is of five types, viz. *Prana*, *Udana*, *Samana*, *Vyana*, and *Apana*. It initiates all minute and gross motor activities of body. Among the five types of *Prana Vayu* is of utmost important as it is used in different context representing more or less a vital substance or structure, responsible for the existence of life [2].

Material and methods

Literature regarding the various aspects of *Prana Vayu* was thoroughly screened from various ayurvedic texts, online journals. Contemporary literatures which can be used to justify its relevance in current scenario were also explored.

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Discussion

According to Charaka *Prana* is considered as one of the form of *Vayu*. It is said to be responsible for life, strength and sustainer of creatures. He believes that the *Vata* is the upholder of both structural and functional entity of the body. It is the very self of the five forms of the *Vata* in the body viz. *Prana*, *Udana*, *Samana*, *Vyana* and *Apana*. It is the impeller of upward and downward movements; the controller and conductor of the mind ;the controller of all the senses; the conveyer of all the sense stimuli; the marshaled of the body elements; the synthesizing principle in the body; the impeller of speech; the cause of feeling and audition; the source of the auditory and tactile senses; the origin of all excitement and animation; the stimulator of the gastric fire; the desiccators of the morbid humor ; the eliminator of excrement ;the modeler of the fetal form; the sustaining principle of life- all these are the function of normal *Vata* in the body [3].

Charak also states that *Prana* alone controls the living being and leads it to a different existence after death, “only the self leads itself to all the species of life, none else is its master, in the same way all beings are attached to different species by means of the vital energy & none else is there to control it [4]. There are 10 resorts in the body wherein life is mainly centered. They are- the two *shankha*, the three vital parts (viz. the abdomen, heart and head) the throat, the blood, the semen, the vital essence and the rectum [5]. The main cause of heat in body is the vital energy or *Prana* [6]. *Prana* is also believed to be located in the head, chest, throat, tongue, mouth and nose mentioned in *Charak chikitsa*.⁷Movement of *Prana* is the sign by which whether the body is abiding with a living entity is ascertained. Inspiration and expiration (respiration), blinking of the eye, living psychic movement are indication of the self. *Prana* flows along a current. The Channel carrying the vital energy, have their origin in the heart and the greater channels [8]. *Vayu* is the *Prana* in living beings. The vital breath (*Prana Vayu*) of men resides in heart, head and urinary bladder. Hence one should make effort to protect them. All the movements believed to be due to *Vata* and it is taken as life breath (*Prana Vayu*) in living beings [9].

Susruta says that “*Prana* is neither the vital air, nor air itself, but the very energy that activates the elements abiding in the body”. The commentator *Dalhana* adds a note here. He says that the above 12 elements beginning with *Agni* and some are essential for the body to survive, therefore the 12 factor (*Agni*, *Soma*, *Vayu*, *Sattva*, *Rajas*, *Tama*, five sense organs and self (*karma-purusha*) as they enliven the body (*Pranayanti Jivayantiti Pranah*) are called the vital energy. *Susruta* was aware that when this vital energy assumes or transforms itself as three vital airs (*Prana*) viz. *Prana*, *Apana* and *Samana* it abides in the body. *Prana*, *Udana*, *Samana*, *Vyana* and *Apana* -these five types of *Vayu* when situated in equilibrium sustain the body. *Vayu* which moves in mouth and holds the body is known as *Prana*. It carries food inwards and also sustain *Pranas*. If vitiated it generally produces hiccough, dyspnoea etc. [10].

Acharya *Vagbhata* states that [11] *Prana* is located in the head and moves in the chest, throat, supports (attends to) the mind, heart sense organs and intelligence, attends to expectoration, sneezing, belching, inspiration and swallowing of food [12] In the context of *Vaikalyakar marma* it is *Saumya* (predominance of *Ap bhutaj* nature), *soma* (water) supports life by its stability and cold properties. Blood is the life of all living beings, its loss causes decrease of the body temperature (*Agni*) and increase of *Vata*. So the patient should be given strengthening foods for saving life (*Prana*). In *Ashtanga*

Hridaya Prana is especially responsible for life and *Udana* for strength [13, 14].

Bhela considers four kinds of food eaten necessary for sustenance of life. (i.e. lodge themselves finally and vitally) in a 10 fold place: heat (of the body), sweating, stools, urine and the three *doshas* such as *Vata* and the others, milk in women, semen (in man), of blood. Life gets established and steady in such 10 fold (aspects) or we can consider that these 10 places are of cardinal significance to living and need to be taken care of most. *Prana* keeps (the body with life) while *Apana* stimulates action in beings. *Samana* holds on and sustains and does the act of collection together in beings [15].

Sharangdhar states that the *Prana Vayu* located near the *nabhi* (umbilicus) moves upward to the *hrdaya* (heart) and comes out of the throat to drink the *Vishnupad Amrita* (nectar of the atmosphere viz O₂) and having partaken it moves quickly inside to enliven the entire body and kindle the gastric fire (digestive fire). Because of this combination of *Vayu* (air) and *Sharira* (body) *ayu* (life) is existing. Combination of *Sarira* and *Prana* is said as *Ayush*. By the time separation of these combination is called as *Pancatva* (death) by ancient scholars [16].

Conclusion

Among the three biological humours *Vata* is considered as main or supreme of all the *doshas* and is responsible for all kinds of movements, perception and activities of body. *Vata* also plays important role in initiation and control functions of other two *doshas* viz. *Pitta* and *Kapha*. Among the five types of *Vayu*, *Prana Vayu* is of utmost important as it is used in different context representing more or less a vital substance or structure, responsible for the existence of life. *Prana* is energy without which body will not functioning. Body cannot survive without *Prana*.

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