

An Ayurvedic Understanding on Applications of Yogic *Prana Mudra* in Relation with *Prana Vayu* as a Supportive Measure during Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Our body is a mini universe made of *Panchamahabhuta* (five basic elements). The *Panchamahabhuta siddhantha* is a basic principle of *Ayurveda* on which the fundamentals such as *sharira* (physical body), *dosha* (biological humors), *dhatu* (tissues), and *mala* (excretory products) are explained. The disturbance in these elements leads to an imbalanced mind and body to cause various diseases. There are various *mudra* (hand gestures) explained in Yoga which helps to balance these basic elements within ourselves to maintain good health. Out of these, *Prana mudra* has been chosen as it is one such simple yogic gesture designed to balance the *Prana Vayu* in the body which is very essential in maintaining the proper functioning of the lungs, to energize the heart and increases vitality. **Objectives:** The study aims to generate a simple conceptual framework for understanding the applications of *Prana mudra* and to distinguish its utility in terms of *Ayurveda*. **Methods:** Appropriate literatures of both sciences are referred, and a concept has been framed. **Conclusion:** *Prana vayu* is considered as a type of *vata dosha* in *Ayurveda*. It represents the functions of vital structures such as lungs and heart, and it is also responsible for the actions which aids in sustenance of life, and it complements well with *prana* (vital energy), a subtle counterpart of *vata* as stated in the former.

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INTRODUCTION

Swasthya or Health is maintained by the equilibrium of three *dosha* (regulatory functional factors of the body), *agni* (digestive/metabolic factors), *dhatu* (major structural components of the body), *mala* (waste products) together with the pleasant state of *atma* (soul), *indriya* (sensory and motor organs), and *manas* (mind).^[1] When this homeostasis is disturbed, it leads to various illnesses ranging from infections, communicable to life threatening, deteriorating diseases such as COVID-19. Ancient scholars have very well described regarding the epidemics, pandemics of communicable diseases affecting mankind since time immemorial. They have termed them as *Janapadodhvasa roga* or *Aupasargika roga's*. There are also references of measures to be adopted to prevent and protect from these illnesses.

In present scenario, we are coming across outbreak of viral illnesses such as COVID-19 which is part of the worldwide pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 which has caused severe distress to the mankind.^[2]

To overcome this pandemic and deal with it effectively along with other necessary strategies, the present supportive measure has been addressed. To understand this concept appropriately, we need to appreciate the basic principles of *Ayurveda* such as *Panchamahabhuta Siddanta*, and *Tridosha siddanta*. It is a well known fact that every *dravya* (substance) in the universe including *dosha* (regulatory functional factors of the body), *dhatu* (major structural components of the body), *mala* (waste products), *rasa* (tastes), and *oushadha* (medicines) are *Panchabhautic* (*akasha*- space, *vayu*- air, *agni*- fire, *jala*- water and *prithvi*- earth) in nature.^[3] *Ayurveda* which is based on *tridosha* theory gives major importance to *vata dosha* which plays a vital role in controlling all the movements and major activities of the body.^[4] These *tridoshas* namely, *vata* (responsible for movement and cognition), *pitta*

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(responsible for regulating body temperature and metabolic activities), and *kapha* (responsible for regulating body fluids and keeping the body constituents cohesive) also derive their qualities from the *Panchamahabhuta*. Out of these, *vata* is formed out of combination of *vayu* and *akasha bhutas*; *Pitta* from *agni (tejas) bhuta* and *kapha* from *ap* and *prithvi bhutas*.^[5] The normalcy of them are maintained by the proper understanding about *Mahabhutas* and hence this concept of *Tridosha* theory can be established.

Among five types of *vata* mentioned in classics, *prana vayu* has utmost importance as it is primarily situated in the *shira* or *murdha* (head) and performs activities (brain and sense organs) by circulating along *uraha* (chest), *kanta* (throat), *karna* (ear), *Jihva* (tongue), *Asya* (mouth), and *nasika* (nose). While circulating along the oral cavity (throat), it brings about functions such as *shtivana* (process of salivation), *kshavathu* (sneezing), *udgara* (eructation), *nishwasa* (*prashvasa uchchwasadi kriyaha*- respiration) and *anna pravesha*

Aharadi karma (deglutition) and does *dharana* (maintenance) of *budhi* (intelligence), *hridaya* (heart), *indriya* (sense organs), *chitta* (mind), and *dhamani dharana* (blood vessels/nerves).^[6,7]

In yoga, *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha* are believed to consist of its subtle counterparts called *prana*, *tejas*, and *ojas*. Unlike the *doshas* in *Ayurveda*, which when accumulated create diseases, the latter is believed to promote health, creativity and well-being. While *Prana* is considered as the life force and healing energy of *vata*; *Tejas*, the inner radiance and healing energy of *pitta*; *Ojas* is the ultimate energy reserve of the body derived from *kapha*. Increased *prana* will be associated with enthusiasm, adaptability and creativity, all of which are considered necessary when pursuing a spiritual path in yoga and to enable one to perform.^[8]

As mentioned, imbalances of *Panchamahabhuta* in the body disrupt body homeostasis and are the root cause for most of the diseases. Thus, this can be corrected by practicing various *mudras*. These *mudra*'s are used since time immemorial for restoring ones physical and mental wellbeing. They are evolved for use during rituals and *dhyana* by *rishis* in various forms. They are carved on idols, statues and paintings depicting special understanding.

Rather than competing and veering toward the Western medicine, the *Ayurvedic* scientists should work to enhance the core competency of *Ayurveda* without compromising its fundamental principles.^[9] Thus, in the present study, an understanding on the prime function of *prana mudra* with *prana vayu* as a supportive measure involving the *Ayurvedic* basic principles was undertaken to contribute during the pandemic. Hence, a critical understanding of the both has been experimented.

DISCUSSION

After the decline of first wave of COVID-19 during the past September 2020,^[10] the second wave began in March 2021 with sudden spike which was much larger than the first, with the shortage of hospital beds, oxygen supply and medicines in parts of the country with highly-infectious variants leading to severe respiratory distresses and increased fatality in the country.^[11]

Prana vayu is more significant among other as it is used in different context representing more or less a vital substance or structure, responsible for the existence of life.^[12] *Murdha* (head) is considered as the chief site of *Prana vayu* according to various *acharyas*. It helps in maintaining vitality and sustaining life (*Pranan cha avalambate*) by protecting the 13 types of *pranas* (*dosas- vata, pitta* and *kapha; mano gunas such as satva, raja* and *tama; Jnanendriyas- shrotra* (ear), *twak* (skin), *netra* (eyes), *jihva* (tongue) and *ghrana* (nose); *bhutatma* (soul) and *mana* (mind).^[13] While *Acharya Sharangdhara* refers the location of *prana vata* as *nabhi* (umbilical region), and here it performs its function by nourishing *jihva* and *jatharagni*.^[14] It is also stated that this *prana vata* being settled in *murdha* (head) controls all the sensory and motor activities of the body.^[15]

Contrarily, practicing *mudras* engages both the body and the mind and helps in a very focused and powerful healing practice. They consider that every physical body is made up of five basic elements (*Pancha mahabhuta*) which are well represented by the five fingers of our hands such as thumb for *agni* (fire); index finger as *vayu* (air); middle finger is *akasha* (space); ring finger as *prithvi* (earth); and little finger for *jala mahabhuta* (water).^[16] When specific *mudras* are performed, any imbalance in the above stated five elements (*pancha mahabhuta*) is restored and the person recovers.^[17]

Among, *Prana Mudra* has been chosen for the study, as it is single of the most vital *mudras* which help to turn on the inactive energy in the body. This energizes the body and awakens all the organs.

This *Mudra* is done with the help of both the hands. Tips of ring and little finger have to be joined by the lean of thumb. All other fingers must be extended straight. *Prana mudra* alters the energy in the body, making you fit in conscious breathing by your hand *mudra* practice.^[18]

In yogic science, this *Mudra* is also considered as a psychic gesture of *Prana* (vital energy) which performs in conjunction with the activities of *Prana vayu*, and it adjuncts by stimulating body and mind, and thereby affecting the flow of *Prana* (vital energy) in the body.^[19] It also energises all the vital organs and helps in proper functioning of the organs such as lungs, heart and helps in proper blood circulation, enhances immunity, eye sight, makes person mentally, and physically fit and it complements with other *mudras* such as *Apana, Vyana, Vayu mudra* in combating chronic diseases such as Diabetes, Blood pressure, Insomnia, Arthritis, and Anxiety.^[20]

Despite the fact that in *Ayurveda* it is mentioned that when *prana vata* is *vikrita* (vitiated), it may cause diseases such as *hikka* (hiccough), *shwasa* (dyspnoea/respiratory illnesses), *pratishyaya* (sinusitis), *svara bheda* (hoarseness of voice), and *kasa* (cough).^[21] This clearly suggests that pathological manifestations and diseases afflicted by vitiated *prana vayu* is predominantly the respiratory system.

Hence, the normal function of *prana vayu* and benefits of practicing *prana mudra* complements with each other critically in maintaining the health of vital organs such as lungs, heart etc., due to the site of its action and diseases afflicted. This balance is very crucial and is of utmost importance during this pandemic to sustain the normal respiration, oxygen level and to enhance ones immunity.

CONCLUSION

The new pandemic which is virulent is causing severe economic and social disruption leading to the risk of many lives. It is devastating to the entire mankind affecting 1's day to day life. Practicing *prana mudra* normalizes *prana vayu* which thereby assists in maintaining the proper functioning of vital organs such as lungs, heart together with improved metabolism and balanced mind. This is just an attempt to merge both the sciences and doesn't promise any result without proper regular practice and initial supervision by subject experts. This concept is also an effort to contribute to this society by extracting the appropriate knowledge necessary to provide a supportive measure which is cost-free and a well-known vital technique.

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