



A Comprehensive Review of Prāṇāyāma in the Yoga Upaniṣads: General Features, Techniques, and Outcomes

Saibaba Chitikila¹, Prof. Ramesh Babu K², Madhavi Karweer³, Sridevi Devineni⁴
 Research Scholar¹, Professor & Head², Dept. of Yoga & Consciousness, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam,
 Email: csaibaba31@gmail.com, rbyoga6@gmail.com
 Head of Early Years³, Oakridge International School Visakhapatnam, Madhavikarweer@gmail.com
 Yoga Instructor⁴, RGUKT-AP, RK Valley. sridevidevineni@gmail.com

Abstract

Prāṇāyāma, a fundamental aspect of *Haṭha Yoga*, involves the regulation and expansion of the vital force. The *Yoga Upaniṣads* provide extensive discussions on various yogic concepts, including *Brahmavidyā*, *Prāṇa*, *Yoga-aṅgas*, and *Samādhi*. Among these, thirteen of the twenty *Yoga Upaniṣads* specifically elaborate on the general features, procedural aspects, *nāḍīs*, *vāyus*, types, techniques, and outcomes of *Prāṇāyāma*. This study aims to systematically review these aspects by analyzing the relevant *Yoga Upaniṣads*. The original Sanskrit verses were translated into English to ensure a precise and unambiguous interpretation of the concept of *Prāṇāyāma*. According to most of these texts, one should commence the practice of *Prāṇāyāma* only after mastering *Yamas*, *Niyamas*, *Āsanas*, and completing the purification of *nāḍīs*. The study systematically arranges and presents the various aspects of *Prāṇāyāma* as outlined in the texts. The *Trisikhī-Brāhmaṇa*, *Darśana*, *Yoga-Cūḍāmaṇi*, *Yoga-Tattva*, and *Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣads* offer detailed explanations on prerequisites, *nāḍī* purification, physiological indications during practice, frequency, types of *Kumbhakas*, and benefits of *Prāṇāyāma*. In contrast, the remaining eight *Upaniṣads* provide a more concise discussion on the concept.

Keywords: General Features, *Nāḍīs*, *Vāyus*, Types and Techniques, Outcomes of *Prāṇāyāma*, *Yoga Upaniṣads*.

Introduction

The word *Prāṇāyāma* is derived from two Sanskrit root words: *Prāṇa*, which means vital force, and *Āyāma*, which means to gain control. *Maharṣi Patañjali* defines *Prāṇāyāma* as “The regulation of the movements of inhalation and exhalation.” He also states that by the practice of *Prāṇāyāma*, the darkness that hides the light of wisdom is destroyed, and it is regulated by place, time, and number, meaning that at various times in our *Yoga Sādhana* (Nagendra H. R., 1998). The *Yoga Upaniṣads* define *Prāṇāyāma* as expiration (*Recaka*) of impurities from the body, followed by inspiration (*Pūraka*) of pure air, then purifying the air by holding (*Kumbhaka*), similarly holding after complete exhalation, and these four processes are said to be *Prāṇāyāma* (Laxmikanth R. & Gopinath V., 2021).



According to *Maharṣi Patañjali*, *Prāṇāyāma* is the intermediate step to achieving the state of *Samādhi*, and it is the fourth limb of *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga* (Siddappa N. & Vadirāja S. H., 2022). In the *Haṭha Yoga* texts, the concept of *Prāṇāyāma* was elaborated widely, as it plays a major role in the purification of *nāḍīs*, the awakening of *Kuṇḍalinī*, and the ultimate path to reaching the *Samādhi* state. Most of the *Haṭha Yoga* texts disclose *Prāṇāyāma* preparatory rules like yogic diet, place, climate, and also types of *Prāṇāyāma* (Chetry et al., 2022). *Svātmārāma* clearly defined that *Prāṇāyāma* should be practiced to remove the impurities in the *nāḍīs* so that the vital air can pass through the *Suṣumṇā*, and the *sādhaka* can attain the state of *Unmanī Avasthā*. It should be done with a *sāttvika buddhi*, which leads to the purification of the *nāḍīs* and *cakras*, allowing the *yogi* to retain *Prāṇa* (Swami Mukthibodananda, 1998).

The *Upaniṣads* are the roots of transcendental knowledge to attain the state of *Samādhi*, liberation, or *Mokṣa* (Dasgupta S. N., 1975). In order to gain transcendental knowledge, the *Upaniṣads* reveal various yogic practices and types of yoga, such as *Mantra Yoga*, *Jñāna Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga*, *Haṭha Yoga*, *Tāraka Yoga*, *Rāja Yoga*, and *Laya Yoga* (Chandrakānta P., 2021). Among the 108 *Upaniṣads*, the ones that specifically deal with yoga along with the theory of *Vedānta* are named *Yoga Upaniṣads*, and they number twenty (Paul Deussen, 1906). Among these twenty, only thirteen *Upaniṣads* discuss the *Prāṇāyāma* technique. In these thirteen *Upaniṣads*, *Prāṇāyāma* is discussed as one of the limbs of *Śaḍaṅga*, *Aṣṭāṅga*, and *Pañcadaśāṅga Yoga* (Saibaba Ch. & Ramesh Babu K., 2022). The thirteen *Upaniṣads* are *Amṛtanāda*, *Kṣurikā*, *Tejobindu*, *Triśikhibrāhmaṇa*, *Darśana*, *Dhyānabindu*, *Maṇḍalabrāhmaṇa*, *Yoga-kuṇḍalinī*, *Yoga-cūḍāmaṇi*, *Yoga-tattva*, *Yogāsikā*, *Śāṇḍilya*, and *Varāha*. All these *Upaniṣads* explain *Prāṇāyāma* as the intermediate stage to purify the *nāḍīs*, allowing *Prāṇa* to flow through them and awaken *Kuṇḍalinī*, leading to the next stage in the path of liberation (Manmath M. et al., 2009; Paul Deussen, 1980).

The purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive review of the concept of *Prāṇāyāma* in the *Yoga Upaniṣads*, focusing on its general features, preparatory steps, eligibility criteria for practice, suitable place and time, frequency, physiological indications, dietary recommendations, types and techniques, *Kumbhakas*, benefits, and safety measures.

Methods



The study systematically examines the *Yoga Upaniṣads* that discuss or mention *Prāṇāyāma* to extract its general features, procedural aspects, types, techniques, and outcomes. To ensure accurate and unambiguous interpretation, only the original Sanskrit ślokas from these texts were translated into English, avoiding potential misinterpretations from secondary sources. While various books on the *Yoga Upaniṣads* exist, this study relies solely on the translated ślokas for fidelity to the original texts.

The concepts of *Prāṇāyāma* are categorized and presented under the following aspects: general features (including suitable place, posture, and dietary guidelines), preparatory rules for *nāḍī* purification, classification of *nāḍīs* and *vāyus* with their functions and terminations, types and techniques of *Prāṇāyāma*, procedural guidelines, and its outcomes, such as health benefits and disease eradication through its practice.

General Features of *Prāṇāyāma* in *Yoga Upaniṣads*

Place and Posture

The *Yoga Upaniṣads* recommend a suitable place and posture for the practice of *Prāṇāyāma*. According to the *Trīśikhibrāhmaṇa Upaniṣad*, the practitioner should select a place conducive to the various stages of *Yoga*. The recommended posture is *Svastika-āsana*, seated on a wooden platform covered with *Kuśa* grass and the skin of an antelope (Cohen, 2018). The *Darśana Upaniṣad* advises practicing at elevated locations such as mountain summits, riverbanks, beneath a *Bilva* tree, or in a serene and clean forest. The practitioner should maintain an erect neck, head, and body while gazing at the tip of the nose with a closed mouth (Cohen, 2018). The *Yoga-cūḍāmaṇi* and *Yoga-tattva Upaniṣads* emphasize the use of *Padmāsana*. Additionally, the *Yoga-tattva* and *Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣads* specify that practice should occur in a *Maṭha*—a well-cleansed space, ideally treated with cow dung or lime, free from mosquitoes, bugs, and lice, regularly swept, and fragrant. The seat should be neither too high nor too low and should be covered with deer skin or *Kuśa* grass. The *Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣad* uniquely recommends a place abundant with fruits, roots, flowers, and water (Subrahmanya Śāstrī, 1938).

Qualities Required for *Prāṇāyāma*

The *Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣad* is the only text that explicitly details the qualities required for *Prāṇāyāma*. A practitioner must cultivate self-restraint, practice *Brahmacarya*, demonstrate proficiency in both the theory and application of *Yoga*, uphold truthfulness and moral conduct, maintain emotional balance, show obedience to parents and the *Guru*, and adhere to righteousness in all aspects of life (Perini & Ruth, 2020).



Rules for Purifying Nāḍīs

According to the *Trīśikhibrāhmaṇa* and *Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣads*, the practitioner must first attain mastery over *Yamas*, *Niyamas*, and *Āsanās*, as well as gain an understanding of *Nāḍīs* and *Vāyus*, their positions, and their functions. With this foundational awareness, one should proceed with the purification of *Nāḍīs* (Ruth Perini, 2021). The *Darśana Upaniṣad* states that a practitioner should be free from desires, firmly established in *Satya*, and well-rooted in his true self (Niranjanananda Sarasvatī, 2002; Swami Viṣṇusvarūpa, 2015). The *Yoga-tattva* and *Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣads* specify that *Nāḍī*-purification should be practiced gradually, four times a day (early morning, noon, evening, and midnight), with eighty *Kumbhakas* per session. The *Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣad* further emphasizes that just as a lion or an elephant is tamed gradually, *Prāṇa* should also be controlled progressively. However, it warns that improper practice may have fatal consequences.

Nāḍīs and Their Termination

Several *Yoga Upaniṣads* discuss *Nāḍīs*, including the *Trīśikhibrāhmaṇa*, *Dhyānabindu*, *Yoga-cūḍāmaṇi*, *Darśana*, *Varāha*, and *Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣads*. The first three mention ten principal *Nāḍīs*, while the latter three describe fourteen, detailing their origins and terminations. However, variations exist among these texts regarding specific *Nāḍīs* and their endpoints, with some *Upaniṣads* omitting certain details (Kālanidhi Satyanārāyaṇa Murthy, 2019; Subrahmanya Śāstrī, 1938). Table 1 provides a comparative summary of *Nāḍīs* and their termination points, with gaps left where specific *Upaniṣads* do not provide information.

Table 1: Nāḍīs and their termination

Sl no	Trīśikī-Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad		Trīśikī-Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad	Trīśikī-Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad		Trīśikī-Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad	Trīśikī-Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad		Trīśikī-Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad	Trīśikī-Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad	
	Nāḍīs:	Termination		Nāḍīs:	Termination		Nāḍīs:	Termination		Nāḍīs:	Termination
1		Brahmarandhra			Left nostril			brahmarandhra	Suṣumnā	Idā	Left nostril
2	Suṣumnā	Left nostril	Idā	Idā	Right nostril	Suṣumnā	Right nostril	Ālambusā	Piṅgalā	Piṅgalā	Right nostril
3	Idā	Right nostril	Piṅgalā	Piṅgalā	Brahmarandhra	Piṅgalā	Left nostril	Kuhu	Suṣumnā	Brahmarandhra	
4	Piṅgalā	Left eye	Suṣumnā	Suṣumnā	Left eye	Idā	Tongue	Varuṇī	Sarasvatī	Tongue	
5	Gāndhārī	Right eye	Gāndhārī	Gāndhārī	Right eye	Sarasvatī	Left eye	Yāśasvinī	Varuṇī	All direction	
6	Hastijihvā	Left ear	Hastijihvā	Hastijihvā	Right ear	Pūṣā	-	Piṅgalā	Pūṣā	Right eye	
7	Pūṣā	Right ear	Pūṣā	Pūṣā	Left ear	Varuṇī	Right big toe	Pūṣā	Hastijihvā	-	



8	Yaśasvinī	Anus	Yaśasvinī	Yaśasvinī	Mouth	Hastijihvā	Right ear	Payasvinī	Yaśasvinī	Right ear
9	Ālambusā	Genital	Ālambusā	Ālambusā	Genitals	Yaśasvinī	Anus	Sarasvatī	Viśvodara	-
10	Śubhanāḍ	Big toe	Kuhu	Kuhu	Anus	Ālambusā	-	Śaṅkhinī	Kuhu	Genitals
11	-	-	-	-	-	Kuhu	Navel	Gāndhārī	Śaṅkhinī	Left ear
12	-	-	-	-	-	Viśvodara	Left big toe	Idā	Payasvinī	big toe
13	-	-	-	-	-	Payasvinī	left ear	Hastijihvā	Ālambusā	Anus
14	-	-	-	-	-	Śaṅkhinī	Right eye	Viśvodara	Gāndhārī	Left eye

Vāyus and Its Functioning

The five Yoga Upaniṣads: the *Trīśikī-Brāhmaṇa*, *Dhyāna-Bindu*, *Yoga-Cūḍāmaṇi*, *Darśana*, and *Śāṇḍilya* Upaniṣads describe the importance, circulation, and functioning of the *Vāyus* in the body. These Upaniṣads explain the ten important *Vāyus* along with their circulation and functioning, except the *Varāha* Upaniṣad, which only mentions the names of the ten *Vāyus* (Vidyalankar 2018).

Table-2 shows the various *Vāyus* with their circulation and functioning in the body, as described in the respective Upaniṣad. The four Upaniṣads that mention the circulation of the *Vāyus* provide similar descriptions, but their functions differ slightly, as presented in Table-2.

Table-2: The *Vāyus* with their circulation and functioning

Sl no.	Name of the vayu	Circulation of vayus in the body	Functioning of vayus according to the respective Upanishads			
			Trishiki-Brahmana Upanishad	Darsana Upanishad	Yoga-Chudamani Upanishad	Sandilya Upanishad
1	Prāṇa	Neck, Nose, middle of Navel and Heart	Separation of food and water	Inspiration, Expiration and Coughing	Not mentioned	Inspiration, Expiration and Coughing
2	Apāna	Anus, Genitals, Hips, Thighs and Knees	Evacuation	Evacuation of faeces and urine		Evacuation of faeces and urine
3	Samāna	Entire body	Nourishing	Nourishing		Nourishing
4	Udāna	Joints of the legs and hands	Raising upward	Raising upward		Raising upward
5	Vyāna	Ears, Eyes, Wrist and Throat	Action of Prana and Apana	Seizing		Seizing
6	Nāga	Skin and Bones and the like	Belching	Belching	Belching	Belching
7	Kūrma		Closing and opening of eyes	Closing and opening of eyes	Closing and opening of eyes	Closing and opening of eyes
8	Kṛkara		Twinkling of eyes	Hungry	Sneezing	Hiccups
9	Devadatta		Sleeping	Sleeping	Yawning	Yawning
10	Dhanañjaya		Swelling and	Swelling	Pervade entire	Produce Phlegm



			dead body		body after death	
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Process of Purifying *Nāḍīs* (*Nāḍīsodhana*)

In the five Yoga Upaniṣads—*Triśikhī-Brāhmaṇa*, *Darśana*, *Yoga-Cūḍāmaṇi*, *Yoga-Tattva*, and *Śāṇḍilya* Upaniṣads—the process of *nāḍī* purification is described. Among these, except the *Triśikhī-Brāhmaṇa*, the remaining four Upaniṣads describe the same procedure. According to these four, after knowing the *nāḍīs* and *vāyus*, one should take a deep inhalation (*Pūraka*) through the *Idā nāḍī*, perform *Kumbhaka*, and then exhale (*Recaka*) through *Piṅgalā*. Then, inhale through *Piṅgalā*, hold in *Kumbhaka*, and exhale through *Idā*. This procedure should be continued for at least twenty *kumbhakas* in each session—morning, afternoon, evening, and midnight (Srinivasyogi 1964).

In contrast, the *Triśikhī-Brāhmaṇa* states that purification starts with exhalation through *Piṅgalā nāḍī*, followed by inhalation through *Idā nāḍī*, using the ratio 16 (*Pūraka*): 64 (*Kumbhaka*): 32 (*Recaka*) as an initial *mātrā* count for beginners (Brahmanayogi 1938).

Diet for *Prāṇāyāma*

According to the *Yoga-Tattva Upaniṣad*, the *sādhaka* should abstain from food that is harmful—such as excessive salt, mustard, overly hot, acidic, astringent, and pungent foods. Instead, they should consume a diet rich in milk and ghee, along with cooked wheat, green gram, and rice (Brahmana-Yogi, 1938). The *Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣad* also emphasizes a diet of milk and ghee, stating that it is most conducive for a *sādhaka*. However, once mastery over *prāṇāyāma* is achieved, strict dietary observances are no longer necessary (Brahmana-Yogi 1938).

Definitions of *Prāṇāyāma* according to the Upanishads

- *Amṛta-Nāda Upaniṣad*: Describes elongating the breath while reciting the *Gāyatrī* mantra thrice with *vyāhṛtis* and *praṇava*, incorporating *Pūraka*, *Recaka*, and *Kumbhaka* (Munindra Miśra, 2023).
- *Kṣurikā Upaniṣad*: States that one should restrain the mind in the heart like a tortoise, fill the entire body with air through the nostrils, block the *nava-randhras* by holding the vital air, and then slowly release the air while raising it upwards.



- *Tejo-Bindu Upaniṣad*: Defines *prāṇāyāma* as control over vital functions and modifications of the mind as *Brahman*.
 - *Recaka* = detachment from the external world.
 - *Pūraka* = internal recitation of "I am *Brahman*."
 - *Kumbhaka* = steadiness of this conception without agitation (Larson Gerald James et al., 1970).
- *Triśikhī-Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad*: Defines *prāṇāyāma* as the cycle of expiration, inspiration, cessation, and repetition (Hatangadi & Sunder, 2000).
- *Darśana Upaniṣad*: Describes *prāṇāyāma* as a combination of *Recaka*, *Pūraka*, and *Kumbhaka*.
 - *Pūraka* = left nostril, remembering the letter "A" for 16 *mātrās*.
 - *Kumbhaka* = letter "U" for 60 *mātrās*.
 - *Recaka* = letter "M" for 32 *mātrās* through the *Piṅgalā nāḍī* (Swami Viṣṇusvarūpa, 2015).
- *Dhyāna-Bindu Upaniṣad*: Associates *prāṇāyāma* with divine aspects:
 - *Pūraka* = *Brahmā*
 - *Kumbhaka* = *Viṣṇu*
 - *Recaka* = *Rudra* (Ruth Perini & Swami Satyadharma Saraswatī, 2019).
- *Maṇḍala-Brāhmaṇa*, *Yoga-Cūḍāmaṇi*, and *Yoga-Tattva Upaniṣads*: Describe *prāṇāyāma* as following the ratio 1:4:2 for *Pūraka*: *Kumbhaka*: *Recaka* (Manmath Gharote, 2012; Satyadharma Saraswatī, 2003).
- *Varāha Upaniṣad*: Describes the same process of *prāṇāyāma* with *Pūraka*, *Kumbhaka* and *Recaka* but without a specific ratio.
- *Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣad*: Defines *prāṇāyāma* as uniting *Prāṇa* and *Apāna*. It is performed with *Recaka*, *Pūraka*, and *Kumbhaka*, accompanied by the *praṇava* "A," "U," and "M" (Swami Ananta Bhāratī, 2015).

Types of Prāṇāyāmas (Kumbhakas)

The *Yoga-Kuṇḍalinī*, *Yoga-Śikhā*, and *Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣads* describe two types of *Kumbhaka*: *Sahita-Kumbhaka* and *Kevala-Kumbhaka*. *Sahita-Kumbhaka* involves the regulation of



breath through three components—*Recaka* (exhalation), *Pūraka* (inhalation), and *Kumbhaka* (breath retention). In contrast, *Kevala-Kumbhaka* is considered the advanced stage, where breath control transcends these three phases, leading to effortless retention. These texts further emphasize that one must first master *Sahita-Kumbhaka* through disciplined practice before attaining *Kevala-Kumbhaka*, which signifies complete control over the breath without dependence on inhalation or exhalation.

Additionally, these *Kumbhakas* are classified into four types: *Sūryabheda*, *Ujjāyī*, *Śītalī*, and *Bhastrikā*. However, the *Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣad* presents a slight variation by omitting *Bhastrikā* and instead including *Śītkārā Prāṇāyāma*, highlighting a different perspective on breath regulation and its effects (Vidyalankar 2018).

Table-3 Presents the types of *Prāṇāyāmas* along with their procedures and benefits according to the respective Upaniṣhads.

Kumbhaka	Yoga-Kundalinī	Yoga-Śikhā	Śāṇḍilya
Sūryabheda	Assuming the Baddha Padmasana, slowly drawing air through Pingala nadi and perform kumbhaka (holding the vital air as possible) and then expel through the Ida nadi. Benefits: This practice destroys four kinds of Vata disorders and intestinal worms.	Assuming secluded spot, temperament in food and after controlling the mind, should inhale through the right nostril, perform kumbhaka as possible and exhale through left nostril. Benefits: It destroys the diseases of belly and eradicates the worms.	Assuming comfortable posture, inhale through the Pingala nadi, perform the kumbhaka as the air reaches tip of nails and roots of the hair and expel it through the Ida nadi. Benefits: It cleanses the cranium and destroys the diseases caused by nadis.
Ujjāyī	By closing the mouth, slowly drawing air through both, Ida and Pingala nadis until it occupies the space from throat to heart by making baby snoring sound and hold the breath as possible and then exhale through the Ida nadi. It can be done by walking and standing Benefits: It removes heat in the head, and excessive phlegm in the throat, removes all diseases, raises warmth and destroys hydrops of nadis.	One should draw the air through both nostrils, direct towards the kundalini by holding in the belly and expel through the left nostril. It can be done by walking and standing Benefits: It destroys the diseases caused by phlegm in the throat, raises the temperature of the body, removes rheum of the nadis and heals the malfunctions of humours in the body.	Inhale through the nostrils by making noise, perform kumbhaka and exhale through the Ida nadi. It can be done by walking and standing. Benefits: It increases digestive fire and removes phlegm.
Śītalī	Before performing Kumbhaka, drawing air through the tongue and exhale through the nostrils. Benefits: This practice Removes Dyspepsia, enlargement of spleen, constipation, biliousness, fever, thirst and poisons.	The practitioner should draw the air through the tongue, perform kumbhaka and then expel through the both nostrils. Benefits: It destroys pitta doshas, hunger and thirst.	Inhale through the tongue, perform kumbhaka as long as and exhale through the nostrils. Benefits: It removes indigestion, Hepatomegaly, excessive bile, fever and hunger.
Bhastrikā	Assuming Padmasana, keeping neck and belly straight line, after	The practitioner should forcefully expel the air from the	Not mentioned



	<p>closing, one should expel through nose and inhale from throat to the lotus of heart with forceful and continue the process again and again as bellows of blacksmith. When fatigue is experienced by body, then inhale through the right nostril, perform kumbhaka and expel through Ida.</p> <p>Benefits: It removes heat in the throat, raises warmth, awakens kundalini, kills sin, destroys phlegm at the entrance of Brahmanadi and balances three gunas.</p>	<p>two breasts and similarly inhale till he feels fatigue, as the bellows of blacksmith. After overcoming with fatigue, inhale with Pingala nadi, perform kumbhaka and then exhale with through the Ida nadi.</p> <p>Benefits: It removes excessive bile and phlegm, raises warmth, awakens kundalini, it destroys impediments and it clears the Brahmanadi to flow the Prana.</p>	
Sitkarā	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	<p>Drawing air through the mouth with hissing sound, perform kumbhaka and exhale through the nostrils.</p> <p>Benefits: It removes hunger, thirst and sleep due to laziness.</p>

Role of *Bandhas*

The *Dhyāna-Bindu* (Ruth Perini & Swami Satyadharma Saraswatī, 2019), *Yoga-Kuṇḍalinī* (Swami Satyadharma Saraswatī & Ruth Perini, 2019), *Yoga-Cūḍāmaṇi* (Satyadharma Saraswatī, 2003), *Yoga-Tattva* (Swami Satyadharma & Ruth Perini, 2018), *Yoga-Śikhā*, *Varāha*, and *Śāṇḍilya* Upaniṣads (Madhu Khanna, 2011) explain three kinds of *Bandhas*: *Mūla-Bandha*, *Jālandhara-Bandha*, and *Uḍḍiyāna-Bandha*. According to these Upaniṣads, after mastery over *Kumbhakas*, one should practice *Bandhas* to remove impurities.

- *Mūla-Bandha* is performed by pressing the anus with the heel, inhaling as the *Apāna* moves upward, and generating a flame that helps awaken *Kuṇḍalinī*, allowing *Prāṇa* to reach the *Brahma-nāḍī*.
- *Uḍḍiyāna-Bandha* should be performed after *Kumbhaka* and before *Recaka*, raising *Prāṇa* into the *Suṣumṇā-nāḍī*.
- *Jālandhara-Bandha* should be performed at the end of *Pūraka*, constricting the throat to prevent the escape of vital air, thereby guiding *Prāṇa* into the *Brahma-nāḍī*.

The *Varāha Upaniṣad* describes the *Catuṣpāda-Bandha*, which raises and directs *Prāṇa* through *Suṣumṇā*.

Indications During the Practice of *Prāṇāyāma*

During the practice of *Nāḍīśodhana* and *Prāṇāyāma*, the *sādhaka* experiences various physical and mental indications depending on the effectiveness of practice.



- According to the *Triśikhī-Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad*, a *yogī* who controls his vital air overcomes the senses, maintains moderation in food, sleeps little, attains longevity, and avoids unnatural death.
- The *Darśana*, *Yoga-Tattva*, and *Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣads* state that the body becomes light, digestive fire (*Jāṭharāgni*) increases, the body becomes slim, and *Nāda* manifests (Brahmana-Yogi, *Yoga Upaniṣads* 1938).
- The *Triśikhī-Brāhmaṇa*, *Darśana*, *Yoga-Cūḍāmaṇi*, *Yoga-Tattva*, and *Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣads* describe three stages of *Prāṇāyāma*: first, the practitioner experiences perspiration; second, trembling of the body; and third, the body rises up (Brahmanayogi 1938). These are the signs of perfection in *Nāḍīśodhana* and *Prāṇāyāma*.

Destruction of Diseases

- According to the *Triśikhī-Brāhmaṇa*, a *yogin* who conquers the vital air becomes free from all diseases and fatigue. By directing the vital air to different limbs, diseases affecting those specific limbs can be cured.
- The *Darśana Upaniṣad* states that mastery over *Prāṇa* can cure ailments such as piles and anal fistula, as well as correct mental imbalances (*Citta*) (Brahmana-Yogi, *Yoga Upaniṣads* 1938).
- The *Yoga-Cūḍāmaṇi Upaniṣad* claims that all diseases can be cured through mastery of *Prāṇāyāma* but warns that improper regulation of the vital air can lead to disorders such as hiccups, asthma, difficulty in breathing, and ailments affecting the head, ears, and eyes.

Benefits of *Prāṇāyāma*

- The *Amṛta-Nāda* states that impurities, like those in mountain ore, and the misdeeds caused by the senses can be burned away through breath control.
- The *Triśikhī-Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad* explains that at the beginner's stage of *Prāṇāyāma*, ailments and sins are destroyed; at the intermediate stage, ailments, sins, and incurable diseases are removed; and at the advanced stage, small fecal matter and urine are expelled, the body becomes light, senses remain alert, intellect becomes sharp, and vision becomes clear.



- The *Darśana Upaniṣad* claims that *Prāṇāyāma* eradicates sins, bestows supreme knowledge, and brings happiness.
- The *Yoga-Cūḍāmaṇi Upaniṣad* states that all sins can be destroyed through *Prāṇāyāma*.
- The *Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣad* mentions that the eyes become purified, all diseases are eliminated, and *Bindu* (semen or vital essence) is controlled (Srinivasyogi 1964).

Conclusion

Among the twenty *Yoga Upaniṣads*, only thirteen mention *Prāṇāyāma*. Among these thirteen, six Upaniṣads—the *Trīśikhī-Brāhmaṇa*, *Darśana*, *Yoga-Cūḍāmaṇi*, *Yoga-Tattva*, *Varāha*, and *Śāṇḍilya* Upaniṣads—broadly elaborate on general aspects such as the place and posture, qualities required for *Prāṇāyāma*, rules for purifying *Nāḍīs*, *Nāḍīs* and their termination, *Vāyus* and their functions, types of *Prāṇāyāma*, *Bandhas*, and the outcomes of *Prāṇāyāma*. The remaining seven of these thirteen Upaniṣads describe only the definition of *Prāṇāyāma*. The *Yoga-Śikhā* and *Yoga-Kuṇḍalinī Upaniṣads* describe *Prāṇāyāma* without mentioning any limbs (*aṅgas*). However, the other eleven Upaniṣads among the thirteen describe *Prāṇāyāma* as one of the limbs of *Śaḍaṅga*, *Aṣṭāṅga*, and *Pañcadaśāṅga Yoga*.

Limitations

This study focuses solely on *Yoga Upaniṣads* to examine the general features, types and techniques, benefits, safety, and potential adverse effects of *Prāṇāyāma*.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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