



Prana – The Vital Energy in Different Cultures: Review on Knowledge and Practice

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Abstract

The subtle energy or *Prana* is essential for keeping our body healthy and alive. This article aims at analyzing the existence of subtle energy and the development of people's perception of this concept across different cultures. The review is made on understanding the influence of this vital energy on people's lives, health, spirituality, customs, and traditions. This article has reviewed, how the eastern and western cultures seemed to differ and are also alike in interpreting and utilizing the benefit of vital force. It also has addressed the need for perceiving vital force to get the desired outcome in one's wellbeing. It can be summarised that the concepts of subtle energy may be innate, widespread, and in general, proved to be a pathway for reaching into the spiritual realm. Despite varying in the schematic illustration of the subtle energy from distinct cultures, however, the different perceptions and understandings have a common rationale on its application. Further theoretical and experimental research is essential for the scientific establishment of this area of implication.

Keywords: Culture, Perception, *Prana*, Subtle Energy, Wellbeing

1. Introduction

Energy has been manifested in different ways. Science defines energy as a spectrum made up of frequencies¹. Energy is identified as four basic types or forms in conventional science: electromagnetic, the gravitational, the strong and the weak nuclear force². However, humans as energy beings have largely ignored the vital energy to maintain the activity of life. A considerable body of evidence has proved the existence of subtle energies that are not recognized in conventional science^{3,4}. "Subtle energy" a modern term for something that has assumed myriad names in history. In addition to being an umbrella term by which the concept of *Prana*, *Qi*, *Ki*, vital energy, etc. are all posited to be one phenomenon⁵. The subtle energy is described in Sanskrit as '*Prana*', in Chinese Medicine as '*Qi*', and in Japan, it is known as *Ki*. This subtle force or odic force is considered to be significant for keeping our body healthy and alive^{6,7}. People have acknowledged

this phenomenon in the past. Hence, it is realized that the concept of subtle energy is not a new fact that is grabbing our attention; but instead, a new remark, an advanced and scientific outlook in understanding the vital energy⁸.

Traditionally, one's direct experience with the *Prana* plays a prominent role in understanding and defining this concept. Practice or applications of *Prana* have many facets like, to heal, to achieve *Siddhis*, and even to control and manipulate others⁹. It was believed that energy exists within and around the physical body. There are several layers of energy beyond the physical body, named as the etheric, emotional, and mental fields. It is the etheric field that acts as the relation between the physical fields and the others. The etheric field contains what is defined as the "etheric double" or counterpart to the physical particles and elements, such as organs and other parts of the body. Although the systems are generally identical across different cultures,

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names and methods of categorizing knowledge vary from one system to another¹⁰⁻¹³.

2. Review and Discussion

2.1 Meaning and History of Vital Energy: Across Cultures

For thousands of years, numerous cultures have depicted the prominence of the subtle or vital energy in healing. In the long history of eastern culture subtle energy has been deep-rooted in self-defense, medicine, and health^{14,15}. In western culture, the concept of subtle energy is being revealed in the Holy Spirit, Old Testament, and practice of Laying on hands¹⁶. Though *Prana* itself has gone unchanged According to the tradition, it is the understanding, the knowledge, and the familiarity of the concept of *Prana* that continues to progress⁹.

2.2 Eastern Culture

2.2.1 *Prana*

Modern sources have understood that *Prana* is the form of vital cosmic energy. Whereas traditional or oldest textual resources have claimed that *Prana* was worshiped, admired and lauded in hymns as if it were a God, instead of merely perceiving it as a conscious cosmic entity⁹. In India, many ancient Hindu texts have mentioned about the concept of *Prana*; Around fourteen spiritual traditions have spoken of *Prana*. It was assumed that interest and investigation into human energy fields or *Prana* traced back into the time of Mahabharata or earlier. The concept of *Prana* is explained in detail in the texts of Hatha Yoga, Tantra, and Ayurveda¹⁷. The way in which the concept of *Prana* is depicted in *Vedas* changes from the way in which *Prana* is narrated in the *Upanishad* as an influence of time. Each depiction has its characteristics as according to the text it represents revealing the ongoing change in worldview of human beings of the time. Those who survived in the *Vedic* period were believed to have a lack of interest in otherworldly issues, such as obtaining *moksa*, or in spiritual development. Instead, they were more concerned with pacifying the Gods through

worship and sacrifice to attain these-worldly benefits, like a successful crop year. The *Vedas* considered *Prana* as a divinity that is out to be conciliated to achieve benefits in the life⁹.

During the *Vedic* age (1500 BCE) the *Atharva Veda* was regarded as the youngest of the four *Vedas* and has an in-depth description of how the concept of *Prana* perceived at that time⁹. Amongst the spells, prayers, and hymns, one hymn, in particular, portrays the importance of *Prana*, describing it as a conscious agent¹⁸. In chapter eleven, the fourth hymn describes *Prana* as a supreme being, one that is admired and adored by the author. The hymn states that “Reverence to *Prana*, to whom all this (universe) is subject, who has become the lord of all, on whom the all is supported!”¹⁸. These lines clearly say that in ancient times *Prana* was regarded as the strong and powerful force, all life forms are solely dependent on *Prana*. The hymn affirming that all plants survive because of *Prana*, and therefore all creatures. Modern sources held a vastly different view from *Vedic* script, stating that *Prana* exclusively as a substance that controls the “subtle” realms of the world, and is mainly utilized for strength in regulating body through the chakras⁹.

Lines nine to eleven portray understanding the significance of *Prana*:

“Of thy dear form, O *Prana*, of the very dear form, of the healing power that is thine, give unto us, that we may live!

Prana clothes the creatures, as the father his dear son. *Prana*, truly is the lord of all, of all that breathes, and does not breathe.

Prana is death, *prana* is fever, the gods worship *Prana*. *Prana* shall place the truth- speaker in the highest world¹⁸”

Prana that heals and grants life, something that rules over even that which does not breathe, pointing its enormous power. Declaring that even the Gods worshiped it, shows that it is regarded as the ultimate⁹. The last line of the hymn says “O *Prana*, be not turned away from me, thou shalt not be other than myself! As the embryo of the waters (fire), thee, O *Prana*, do bind to me, that I may live.”¹⁸ From this line, it is clear that the *Prana* was viewed as something that could unite with the body⁹.

According to Upanishads, *Prana* is considered as an element of the material world, significant for sustaining the life of living beings. A story mentioned in *Chandogya Upanishad* describes the dispute in the human body on deciding who amongst them is the most precious⁹. The ears left their function for a year, after its return to its function; it asks other senses whether his absence caused any disturbance to them. Similarly, all other senses except the breath did the same. But the absence of those senses for a while caused no threat to survival. But when the breath (*Prana* = life) is ready to leave, all other senses recognize that he is the most vital. In the absence of *Prana*, there is no survival at all¹⁹.

The subtle energy called *Prana* comes up from *Rajoguna*. It acts as a distinction between gross and fine body, being responsible for every psycho physiological function. Sometimes confusions arise on the concept of *Prana* with *Jiva*. They both are interconnected to each other, the *Jiva* is balanced in *Prana* in the heart cavity.

The *Katha Upanisad* describes *Prana* as;

*RtaMpibantausukRtasyaloke guhAMpraviStau
parameparArdhe chAyAtapaubrahmavidovadanti
paJcAgnayo ye ca tri-NAciketAH*

This means, “O Naciketa, the expansions of Lord Visnu as the minute living being (*jiva*) and the super soul both stay inside the cave of the heart of this body. In that cavity, the living being, resting on the main *Prana*, enjoys the results of activities, and the super soul, acting as witness enables him to enjoy them. Those who are well-versed in the knowledge of Brahman and those householders who sensibly follow the Vedic guidelines say that the variance between the two is like the difference between a shadow and the sun”²⁰.

The *Kausitaki Upanisad* states,

“Life is *Prana*, *Prana* is life. In as long as *Prana* stays in the body, so long is there life. Through *Prana*, one acquires, even in this world, immortality”²¹.

As mentioned in *Mundaka Upanishad*, *Prana* is responsible for the identification of *Jiva* with the gross body. This says

*“eshoanuratmacetasaveditavyayasmnpranahpanc
adhasamvivesha pranaiscittamsattvamotamprajana
myasminvishuddhevibhavatyeshaatma”*

This means, “The atomic soul can be perceived by perfect intelligence as floating in the five kinds of

life air that is *Prana*, *Apana*, *Vyana*, *Samana*, and *Udana*. When the consciousness (that pervades from the soul through the entire body) is purified from the contamination of the five kinds of material airs, its spiritual effect is exhibited”²².

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* mentions that human existence is understood in terms of five coverings or sheaths called ‘*Panchakoshas*’. Every *Kosha* is considered to be an indication of the immense energy having a different degree of autonomy²². The second layer named *Pranamaya kosha* is considered to be a part of cosmic life which is possessed with *Prana*, or life force. This *kosha* is the mixture of three syllables viz., *Prana* (life force), *Maya* (encircled with or sheath), *Kosha* (sac or compartment). The pranic forces drive and recharge the physical body. After the last breath *Prana* dissipates from the body²³.

The *Taittiriya Upanisad* also emphasizes the importance of *Prana* to all living things

Lifebreath – gods breathe along with it

As do men and beasts.

For lifebreath is the life of beings,

So it’s called “all life”.

A full life they’ ll surely live, when they

Worship *Brahman* as lifebreath.

For lifebreath is the life of beings,

So it’s called “all life”²⁴.

Stating that the god’s breath “along with it” can mean that gods breathe similarly to how human breath, utilizing the substance it in the same fashion. It is not uncommon in the Hindu tradition to find the deities taking part in the same practices as humans; by looking into the practice of *Tapas*, or *Austerities*, and even *Brahmacharya*, this can be seen. All of these practices are done by both humans and Gods, which not only stress their importance but also may make the practice appear most credible; if it is good enough for the Gods, it is good enough for the people⁹.

It is in the *Prasna Upanisad* where the origin of *Prana* is addressed to an extent, and details the paths it takes throughout the body. According to this *Upanisad*, it arises from the *Atman*, as a shadow arises from a man²⁴. This passage goes on to explain the various areas in which *Prana* can permeate, and the numerous routes it takes throughout the physical body⁹. Though *Prana*

and the soul, or *Atman* are not described as being the same, *Prana* is at one point depicted as a *part* of the *atman*: “These are what constitute the self (*Atman*)-it consists of speech, it consists of mind, and it consists of breath”²⁴. In this way, *Prana* is not the *Atman* itself but seen as a way in which one can discover the self⁹.

The demise of the senses, the psyche, and *Prana* are seen as an important step as well as the goal of the *Yogi's* path to *samadhi*, or it is the objective of yoga itself²⁵. Based on the most common observations from the Mahabharata, the *Upanishads*, *Ayurvedic*, and *Yogic* sources *Prana* is typically divided into five classifications, when related to the human body processes. This list includes *Prana* (circulation), *Apana* (elimination), *Vyana* (circulation/movement of energy), *Udana* (vocalizing sounds-), and *Samana* (digestion and assimilation). These processes are sustained by body fluids known as *Pranavayu*^{21,26}. The *Yogis* who are able to survive on water or air alone can accumulate their life energy directly without the help of any leaf to carry it²⁷. Ancient Indian texts depict that the body consists of three parts, i.e. physical parts (*Sthulasrira*), the casual body (*Karanasarira*), and the other one is a subtle part (*Sukshmasarira*). *Prana* exists in this subtle part of the body²⁸. The meridians which stand different from nerve fibers and circulatory channels have not been defined anatomically are involved in distributing subtle energy into various bodily organs²⁹. Out of several thousand channels, three are regarded as the most important, i.e., *Ida*, *Pingala*, and *Sushumna*. Usually, *Prana* travels through either *Ida* or *Pingala* channels. The *Ida* channel controls aspects of the body related to the moon, the *Pingala* controls features related to the sun, when the two are fully in balance *Sushumna* channel opens³⁰.

Theosophy says that there is an existence of subtle, unseen bodies that are like outline and framework, mold upon and around which the outer shell of our physical body is built. Men have many bodies or vehicles through which they can define themselves on the various planes of life –physical, astral, mental, causal, and so forth^{31,32}. The *Auras* and *Halos* are stated as “fields of the light,” and were referring to those of higher consciousness. The universal energy *Prana* is defined as the basic source of all life. This subtle energy is a part of a psycho-physiological system and it

consists of an active network of the subtle path, “winds,” inner air, or essences^{33–36}. The *Prana* is different from the breath. The *Prana* is a subtle tendency within us. It does not have any particular location in the parts of our body as such. Although it has maintained a special prominence on different parts of the body, it is equally distributed everywhere³⁷. The activities of the body like nerve currents and thought force are manifested by *Prana*³⁸.

There are three major sources of *Prana* or subtle energy. The *Prana* from sunlight constitutes solar *prana*; the *Prana* which is absorbed through the soles of the feet is called ground *Prana*; *Prana* obtained from the air is called air *Prana* and it is absorbed through breathing. It is also absorbed directly by energy centers called *chakras*. Where the physical body has major and minor organs, the energy body also has major, minor and mini *chakras*. These *chakras* would absorb universal energy ‘*Prana*’ and distribute it to major and minor organs of the physical body through meridians^{11,39}.

Some complementary healing medicines evolved worldwide utilize *Prana* as a major basis of healing. *Pranic Healing* was one such healing medicine that involves the transference of *Prana* to the patient. The healer projects *Prana* or vital energy to the patient; thereby healing occurs. Master Choa Kok Sui, the introducer of *Pranic Healing* describes that it is possible to scan the aura and diagnoses problem areas of the patient energy field. *Prana* or energy can be used to heal, or transfer energy to people; since energy is everywhere³⁹. The practice of *Yoga* is very much concerned with controlling the mind, and uses *Prana*, in terms of breadth, as one of the means of doing so, in addition to controlling the physical body. From this, it is easy to see why a connection of *Prana* to the mind would be important. The fact that *Prana* is not merely a breath, however, allows for a much more supernatural connection to the mind⁹. *Pranayama* is the combination of two syllables viz., *Prana* – life force, and *Ayama* – expansion⁴⁰. It is a technique that makes the *Prana* expand everywhere in the body or with uniform circulation throughout the body²³.

The *chakra* method was just one feature of a much more comprehensive structure of conventional Indian medicine, known as *Ayurveda*. *Ayurveda*, which

means knowledge (Sanskrit, *Veda*) of life (Sanskrit, *Ayur*), traces its roots back to the *Vedas*, a series of texts produced as early as the third millennium BCE that are the foundation of classical Hinduism. As Ayurvedic medicine developed, Ayurvedic doctors maintained a holistic emphasis on such familiar things as diet, herbal and mineral drugs, and massage, but also on such practices as *Yoga*, breathing techniques (*Pranayama*), meditation, in addition to *Chakra* balancing. At the root of the Ayurvedic cosmology is a belief in *Prana*, an energy that pervades the universe and provides the life force for the body. Free flow of *Prana* is essential both for the functioning of the macrocosm, but also for the functioning of the microcosm, the human body. The efficacy of ayurvedic medicine is based on the traditional Indian worldview, the understanding of which is key to understanding the claims made for its treatments⁴¹.

2.2.2 Qi

The concept of *Qi* in Traditional Chinese Medicine resembles Indian systems to '*Prana*', which has two structures, *Prana*, and *shakti*, corresponding to the two forms identified by the Chinese system: *Yang Qi* and *Yin Qi*⁴²⁻⁴⁴. Since 3000 B.C., the Qigong masters were practicing their thoughtful command to balance and strengthen the energy field of the human beings⁴⁵. In China, *Qi* is regarded as the most essential fuel that is vital for the operation of the human body. The *Qi* can be acquired from different sources, it is partially generated from the air we breathe and acquired partially from food and drinks. A significant part of *Qi* is inherited from the parents and will be consumed in the passage of life. The major roles of the *Qi* are divided into "Defensive *Qi*" and "Nutritive *Qi*"⁴⁶. Nutritive *Qi* provides nourishment to the body, while Defensive *Qi* protects the body against attacks. They believed illnesses result from either the creation of disrupted, blocked, and unbalanced *Qi* movement through meridians or insufficiencies and imbalances of *qi* in the *Zang-Fu* organs⁴⁷. Hence, *Qi* is manipulated to fight against diseases and recover health.

Traditional Chinese Medicine depicts that the fundamental energy of the body is called *Qi*; while *Gong* involves the ability to move and manipulating this *Qi*. The objective behind the manipulation of *Qi*

is not limited to achieving wellbeing and long life, but also to gain knowledge, psychic powers, and interest in spirituality. The two traditions *Confucian* and *Daoist* described the *Qi* as the "breath of life". They had an opinion that the wellbeing of the human being can be achieved through the right distribution and stability of a person's *Qi*, hence both traditions give prominence for the development and promotion of *Qi*. According to Neo-Confucians, gentlemen or *Junzi* were actively involved practicing daily for refinement of *Qi*. Daoist started focusing on the employment of *Qi* to conquer human transcendence and immortality. These religious and philosophical discourses were put together into the general Chinese culture that *Qi* has become a bridge between the objective world and the non-tangible psychological, and spiritual aspects of human endurance^{8,48,49}.

The promotion of *Qi* has been described in many Ancient Chinese medical writings. Nurturing of one's *Qi* can be achieved by healthy food habits and gaining mental peace, physical exercises. Another means of cultivating the *Qi* involves martial arts. The basis of many martial arts has emphasized that well-being and power can be achieved through the cultivation of *Qi*. *Tai Chi* was a one such internal martial art system oriented towards the exercise style of practicing. The *Tai Chi* system involves natural meditation and movement of the body driven by inner power, called *Qi*. *Tai Chi* includes two equal powers: *Yin*, known as negative power, and *Yang*, known as positive power. Even though these two stand as resistant to each other by nature, the harmony of *Yin/Yang* acts as a crucial factor in developing mental and physical ability^{50,51}. Chinese medicine, acupuncture also deals with maintaining the balance of '*Qi*'. In acupuncture, there is the insertion of needles into shallow structures of the body well known as acupuncture points (acupoints) – and their succeeding manipulation is done. This therapy is significant for influencing the healthy circulation or flow of *Qi* and blood in the body. Besides, acupuncture therapy influences the major mechanism of repair and restoration activated by the Central Nervous System. It is also useful for getting rid of the pain and treatment of various diseases⁵²⁻⁵⁴. The safety, effectiveness, and low- cost features of Chinese medicine motivated the West to make use of this medicine⁵³. Traditional Indian

and Chinese systems thus treat the body and mind absolutely in an integrated fashion when restoring the normal health of a patient⁵⁵.

2.2.3 Ki

In Japan, subtle energy was more commonly referred to as “*Ki*”. During the fifth and sixth centuries, Japan got familiar with Chinese medicine through an array of travellers such as court emissaries, physicians, and monks⁵⁶. Japanese presents the view that, the source of wellbeing results from the universal energy *Ki* that runs in and around the human body and around the individual and which animates the physical organs and tissues. Hence, *Ki* is responsible for making the person healthy and energetic. The illness results in an interruption in the stream of *Ki* in the physical organs. One’s views and feelings are influenced by *Ki* as well. The stream of *Ki* either more powerfully or is undermined in its action depends on the feature of one’s thoughts and feelings. The negative thoughts and feelings might lead to restrictions in the flow of *Ki*⁵⁷.

As with Korean medicine, basic medical ideologies of *Ki*, *Yin-Yang*, and the notion of stability were being included in Japanese medicines. Traditional Japanese medicine which goes forward to grow specialized knowledge of acupressure (*Shiatsu*), the distinct technique in Acupuncture, bone manipulation, and sitting techniques as well⁵⁶. Another widely used energy medicine is called ‘*Reiki*’, an ancient laying-on of hands healing technique developed in Japan by Usui in the mid-1800s. The sources of *Reiki* are found in the Tibetan *sutras*, ancient texts of cosmology, and philosophy. *Reiki* is an effective way of connecting the divine force to the inherent healing power of the body. This hands-on healing art, a powerful adjunct to conventional therapeutic modalities, fuel the homeostatic mechanisms of the body, and help to restore the physical, mental, and emotional balance. In *Reiki*, the therapist utilizes hands-on treatment or use a no-touch method to promote healing. Here, the therapist is not taking the entire role of healing, but he acts as a medium to allow the patient to get used to the vital energy, and thereby healing occurs. Five principles are used in the *Reiki* healing promising on long-term results and improvement in the patients. *Reiki* is dealing with the physical, emotional, mental, and

spiritual imbalances of the individual. *Reiki* promotes the higher healing good for all living things because this life-force energy supports optimal development and fulfillment^{58,59}.

Today the integrated form of Chinese medicine in Japan is called *Kampo* which utilizes *Ki* as the source. According to Japanese perception, this energy allows running the psychophysiological functions in a smooth manner⁵⁶.

2.3 Western Culture

Within the historical world, the concept that non-empirical energies have been spiritual in nature became accepted without any comment since it -fits within the control of worldviews of the day. But, with the growing up of materialistic science and technology in the west, such energies became suspect⁵. The concept of *Prana* or subtle energy has a brief history of western culture.

2.3.1 Greek

Hippocrates (460-370 BCE), well known as “father of medicine” who united fire with nous to create “ether, the subtle fire which has existed from all infinity and is present in air and all matter”. Later, Plato (428-347 BCE) would restrict this “subtle fire” in various centers in the body, which he named as *Pnuema*, translated here as “soul” to distinguish it from the more basic meaning of simply “breath.” Plato’s equation of *Pnuema* with a soul was a concept that would later be developed in complex ways by his students⁶⁰. The famous Greek healer, Pythagoras, recognized vital energy as a radiant body that could produce cures. Other European countries had their concepts of energy and named energy according to their traditions^{61,62}.

2.3.2 Afro-Brazilian

The ideology of energy in Afro-Brazilian religions named as *axé*. African slaves who arrived from *Yoruba* traditions initiated this concept into Brazil. According to them, an axe is the life force that is invisible in nature, blessed, and basic for all creatures in the world. The characteristics of this energy is such that it can be increased, refined, utilized, and even renewed. There is always a steady interaction of axe between the material representation of the physical world (*Aiye*) and the

symbolic representation of the spiritual world (*Orun*). This *Axé* is found in the animal (e.g., human and animal blood), vegetal (e.g., *dendê* oil and honey), and mineral (e.g., copper, bronze, and gold) kingdoms. Hence Afro-Brazilian religious groups *Candomblé* and *Umbanda*, define *axé* as a magical force which responsible for physical health, spiritual and psychological well-being⁶³.

2.3.3 Inca Culture

Dollman⁶⁴ expresses that there were two forms of energy being considered in *Inca* culture i.e., *Hucha*, a heavy, dense black energy, and *Sami*, a high frequency, light, positive energy that humans can acquire by being in harmony with the universe. *Sami*⁶⁵ is considered positive energy spread throughout the world; it distributes ‘power’ to all objects and places where it accumulates. The harmony with others and the world can be achieved by a high amount of *Sami* present in one’s body. The energy named *Hucha* is created by human beings, naturally acquired through human social interactions and uncontrolled emotions. The increasing levels of this energy will negatively affect physical, emotional, and spiritual states. A high amount of *Hucha* will not allow the run of *Sami* in the human body, leading to the person to acquire diseases.

The *Kabbalah*, the Jewish mystical teachings in 538 B.C., viewed energies as astral light. Christian paintings and sculptures display a halo around the head of Christ and spiritual leaders. Similarly, we see aura on statues and paintings of Buddha, and also light coming from the hands of many of the gods^{8,66}.

Roman physician, Claudius Galen’s ideas in the Greek shaped the basis for a theory of life that dominated the advancement of European medicine until well into the early modern period, when more empirical approaches, such as those of Paracelsus (1493-1541), began to chip away at the details of Galenic dogma⁶⁰. Despite the increase of more mechanistic theories of life and health, the theory of vitalism continued to guarantee subtle energy healing as it developed in the west. Vitalistic theories still survived and multiplied, and in addition to declaring that life was dependent on a vital force, these new systems also encouraged the idea that vital force could be systematically manipulated and infused into the human body to encourage health and

healing. Such early vital force healing systems would lay the foundations for modern subtle energy healing in the West⁶⁷.

2.3.4 Mesmerism and Magnetic Healing

The Viennese physician Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815) created a somewhat different method of subtle energy healing, one not based on drugs. Mesmer had been trained in traditional medicine but was dissatisfied with mechanical theories of life and health. Mesmer maintained that health indicated a significant supply of “vital fluid,” while disease suggested a “vital fluid” shortage or its stagnation in the body. Besides, Mesmer theorized that this “vital fluid” impregnates the entire universe. Because Mesmer believed that vital fluid could be regulated and directed by magnets, he called it “animal magnetism.” Mesmer taught that some human beings can channel “animal magnetism” into those people who suffer from ill health, and thus heal them by energizing them. Besides, he believed that “animal magnetism” could be transported into inanimate objects⁶⁸. Other intellectual children of Mesmer were Baron Karl von Reichenbach (1788-1869), a successful German scientist and industrialist. His patients’ experiences of energetic sensation led the Baron to postulate new subtle energy that he called “*Odic force*” or simply “*Od*” after the pagan God, Wodin. It seems that *Od* could infuse all materials and under certain conditions of total blackness, it could be perceived as heat or cold, as different flavors, or as a slight luminosity that haloes objects, plants, and people (this last led the Baron to consider the validity of certain supersensitive people who could spontaneously perceive the aura of a person). Besides, many materials such as magnets, metals, minerals, glass, water, and herbs could concentrate the *Od* which was continuously flowing in from the universe or cosmos, with the highly ordered crystal structure producing the strongest *Od* effects on human subjects. And finally, *Od* was either more or less vitalizing to the human body depending on the luminous color it gave off, ranging from *Od* positive to *Od* negative. This led him to the belief that certain forms of *Odic force* were the foundation for the universal “life-force” long sought by the vitalists⁶⁹.

2.3.5 Orgone Energy

Following both Mesmer and Reichenbach's footsteps, was Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957), a psychiatrist who was trained under Freud in Vienna (who was also influenced by Mesmer in his way). Freud himself rejected the literal understanding of libido as energy; Reich persisted in this belief, and ultimately postulated that all health, not just mental health, depended on the free flow of this energy, which he named "Orgone energy." Reich was convinced that Orgone energy had an objective existence and could be measured if properly sensitive devices could be developed⁷⁰. By the end of his life, Reich was referring to orgone energy as "Cosmic Life Energy," and under both names, Reich's work continued to inspire inventors desirous of harvesting this subtle energy for healing purpose¹¹.

If we look into the way each culture has perceived and manipulated subtle energy, there is a clear difference observed between Reich's concept of bioelectrical energy and the *Prana-Shakti* of the Indian savants. This difference also was seen in the concepts about bioplasma or life force presently held among many of the scientists in the West. The manifestation of this energy is somehow similar to other material energies in the universe. In contrast to this, the ancient Indian concept of bioenergy or *Prana* is an indicator of one's existence and the existence of the world around him⁷. Body, mind, cognition, emotion, and spirituality are accepted as discrete things in western cultures. But, Eastern tradition adopts an integrated approach of individuals and their surroundings. This integrated body- mind - spirit model has been linked with achieving a sense of wellbeing and hence to promote health and cure illness⁷¹. The above lines depict the different ways in which cultures perceive the concept of *Prana* generating these diverse representations. It was observed that there is a common innate core underlying this diversity of thoughts. Despite this cultural diversity, peoples' concepts of vital or subtle energy are being drawn out to realize biological, psychological, and spiritual processes. Understanding of subtle energy offers an integrated model of healing. Models of the subtle energy vary in different traditions throughout the east and west, but they share most of their major components and concepts. Despite varying in a schematic representation, however, the different

perceptions and understandings have a common purpose. Despite the disparities in adopting these anticipated energies, a common thread within their theories is the advancement of specific techniques that exclusively use vital energy to stimulate one's healing process^{65,72,73}.

2.4 Perception of Prana

Science and medicine are deep-rooted in Newtonian theory. This theory viewed the body as a machine composed of levers and pulleys, wherein every action had an equal but opposite reaction. However, many common human experiences largely ignored by this mechanistic concept^{74,75}. Human subjective experiences of these vital energies are being considered as secondary to, and derivative of, objective, physical processes. Science has usually ignored concepts when it didn't understand or couldn't prove through experiments and measure through laboratory equipment such as auras. Mechanistic science is fixed in the framework of "naïve realism" what you see is all there is. This metaphysical assumption results in a major imbalance between scientific knowledge of the physical world and subjective experience^{76,77}. As *Prana* is existential, anybody with and willingness to feel the vitality can effortlessly view and experience various sources of *Pranic* energy. Besides, results from some pranic energy perception studies and experiences of healers have supported the fact that *Prana* can be experiential as well as experimental. The details of studies on the perception of energy represented from different cultures like *Qi* from China and others are portrayed here.

As shown in Table 1, an exploratory study conducted to understand the psychological wellbeing results from experiencing the *Pranamaya Kosha*. About 811 of adolescents and adults participated in the study. An exploratory study design was used. An open-ended questionnaire was used to gather the experiences of participants. The majority felt warmth sensation, pulsation, tingling sensation, magnetic sensation through sensitizing their hands. Participants felt the relaxed and happy feeling besides⁷⁸. In another exploratory study, 178 participants with a mean age of 26.8 years have participated. In session one, participants were asked to view their hands and record

their observations in an open-ended questionnaire. In session two, participants were guided to feel the prana between the hands and recorded their experiences using the same questionnaire. The results revealed that the Sensation of warmth was significantly more in post-session, compared to pre-session⁷⁹. A study was conducted to understand the experiences of participants viewing the aura surrounding a person. An exploratory research design was used in the study. In session one, participants were asked to observe a person in front without any guidance to view the aura, followed by an open-ended questionnaire that intended to record their experiences. In session two, participants were guided to view the aura surrounding a person and their experiences were recorded using the open-ended questionnaire. Results show that participants viewed aura as an outline which reflected the energy body, it appeared to be shining in different colors such as white, yellow. *Aura* was found varying in thickness such as 1-2 inches, 2-4 inches, and 5-6 inches⁸⁰. Besides, a study examined whether the appearance of an aura-like phenomenon around the hand is perceived visually after a brief training session. The results revealed a significant increase in positive thoughts ($X^2=6.8$, $p=.009$), after viewing ALP around one's hand in session 2⁸¹.

Studies are concentrated on understanding the energy sensations through perceiving and absorbing different sources of prana such as air *Prana*, ground *Prana*, and tree *Prana* with guidance. A study was conducted to reveal the experiences of viewing air and ground *Prana*. An exploratory study design was used and 413 adolescents participated in the study. Results revealed that 66.8% of them witness air *Prana* as a small globule. 51.3% of participants experienced a relaxed and good feeling after viewing air *Prana*. While viewing ground *Prana*, 15% of participants witness it as lines and 12.3% witnessed it as waves emerging from grounds⁸². In another similar study on viewing the aura surrounding the tree and air *Prana* revealed that viewing and experiencing these sources of *Pranic* energy led them into relaxed sensation, mentally strong and enhanced positive emotions, and also felt other bioplasmic experiences^{83,84}. In addition to this, numerous healers have reported *Pranic* energy sensations while treating the patients. They have narrated their experiences as heat, coolness, tingling, stickiness, etc in their hands³. Healers perceive different colors when examining a person's aura⁶². The findings of some of these *Pranic* energy perception studies have proved that common man with interest can perceive and assess the *Prana* or vital energy. Besides, it was understood that perceiving the energy itself has positive outcomes on health and wellbeing.

Table 1. Summary of studies on the perception of *Prana* and *Aura*

Participants	Research Design	Findings	References
811	Exploratory	Results revealed that 99.5 % of participants perceived pranic energy.	78
178	Exploratory	Results revealed that all the participants felt the pranic energy between their hands. 52.8% of the respondents felt relaxed	79
178	Exploratory	Participants viewed aura as an outline that reflected the energy body.	80
47	Quasi-experimental research design	The findings suggest that an aura-like phenomenon can be detected around the hand.	81
413	Exploratory	66.8% of them described air prana. 15% of them perceived ground prana and narrated.	82
178	Exploratory	Experiencing pranic energy led them into relaxed sensation, mentally strong	83
178	Exploratory	The results of this study proved that air Prana exists and it was seen and felt by the majority of the participants.	84

3. Conclusion

We have tried to shed light on the complex history of the concept of *Prana* across different cultures and tried to gather in-depth philosophy about this topic. Besides, the practices of *Prana* as various treatment modalities in different cultures have been discussed here. The vast body of ancient literature is depicted about *Prana*. Even though the symbolic representation of the concept of *Prana* seems to vary in nature, the understanding and practice of *Prana* have a common purpose. The known facts are suggesting to us that subtle energy is existential and even a common man would be able to bring in to his awareness with proper guidance. The concepts of subtle energy may be innate, widespread, and general and proved to be a pathway for reaching into the spiritual realm. Exploring and manipulating such energies may lead to the desired outcome in one's wellbeing.

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