

Yogasana- A Heuristic Study

Abstract

“Every human being is the author of his own health or disease” -
Gautam Buddha

The science of yogasana is an ancient one. It is a rich heritage of our culture. Several older books make a mention of the usefulness of yogasana in the treatment of certain diseases and preservation of health in normal individuals. The Yogasanas open up all major joints and relaxes the muscles of the bodies. They also remove the blockages preventing the free flow of energy in the body and mind. They promote total health and eliminates stress and strain from the practitioner.

Keywords: Yogasana, Health, Prana, Consciousness, Physical.

Introduction

Asana is the first part of hatha yoga. Asana refers to the sitting position, but in hatha yoga it means something else. Asana is a specific position which opens the energy channels and psychic centers. Hatha yoga is a process through which purification and control of the body take place by restructuring the Pranic flows. The hatha yogis also found that by developing control of the body through asana, the mind is controlled. Therefore, asana practice is foremost in hatha yoga. When you practice asana, steadiness develops. Prana moves freely and there is less chance of disease occurring. Just as stagnant water is the breeding ground for all sorts of creatures, when Prana stagnates anywhere in the body, conditions are perfect for bacteria to flourish to; Prana should move like swift flowing water.

When Prana flows freely, the body also becomes supple. Stiffness of body is due to blockages and an accumulation of toxins. When Prana begins to flow the toxins are removed from the system and you will be able to bend stretch in a relaxed manner without having to do vigorous warming up exercises. When the store of Prana is increased to a greater degree, the body will move by itself. You may find yourself spontaneously performing asanas and various bodily postures. You may find yourself performing postures you could never have done before. This is due to a relaxed state and to a greater vibrational rate of the prana. The yogic tradition says that in all, there are eighty- four lakh asanas. There are as many asanas as forms of life. No wonder Swatmarama says he is only going to describe 'some' of the; Asanas were done to evolve the consciousness from the lowest to the highest state. Therefore, some asanas imitate the shapes of the bow or boat; plants like trees and the lotus; reptiles, fish, the foetus, birds, saints like Vashishtha and gods such as Nataraja.

In the yogic texts the maximum number of asanas described is thirty-three. Thus Swatmarama describes those which are essential and which were performed by the founders of hatha yoga.

It is interesting that Swatmarama should narrate asanas practiced by munis such as Vashishtha. It is natural that he would discuss those performed by Yogi Matsyendranath as he is the founder of this hatha yoga system, but Vashishtha was a jnanayogi, so we would assume that he would have mainly utilized sitting and meditative postures rather than the more dynamic postures. It shows that even those concerned with contemplation and higher wisdom realized the necessity of yogasana. It also implies that the influence of asanas is more than physical. If saints such as Vashishtha were able to become honoured as jnanis, asanas must also be beneficial in the development of higher wisdom. The sloka seems to infer that whether you are specifically practicing hatha or any other form of yoga, asana is important and should be incorporated.

Classification of Asanas

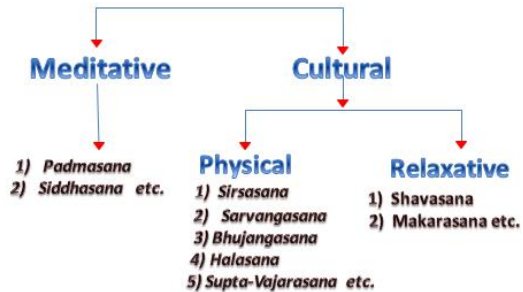
Great yogi swami Kunalayananda has classified Yogasana in main levels. The two main categories are Meditative and Cultural. Cultural also has sub classification viz. relaxative. The relaxative postures are

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fatigue releasing postures. The lower back is naturally held straight and one can almost feel the balancing effect on the body.

Asanas



**Meditative
Padmasana**



Fig.1

Padmasana is very well-known asana which is also called kamalasana. Padma and kamalasana mean 'lotus'. When one thinks of a yogi one usually imagines somebody sitting in padmasana as it is the traditional meditative posture. Place the right foot on the left thigh and the left leg foot on the right thigh, palms in the jhama mudra and slowly raise the prana upward. The body is locked firmly in its position and physical movements are reduced to a minimum. The lower back is naturally held straight and one can almost feel the balancing effect on the body. This is called padmasana, destroyer of all diseases.

Siddhasana

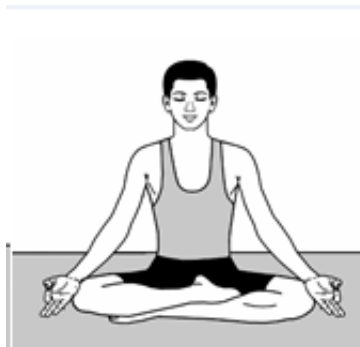


Fig.2

The traditional method of siddhasana is done in the following manner.

Sit with the heel of the left foot pressing the perineum, the area between the anus and genital organ. Place the foot so that the heel presses the pubis, directly above the generative organ. Siddhasana is a purely meditative posture. It is designed to channelize the prana or vital energy directly to ajana chakra.

Physical Shirshasana

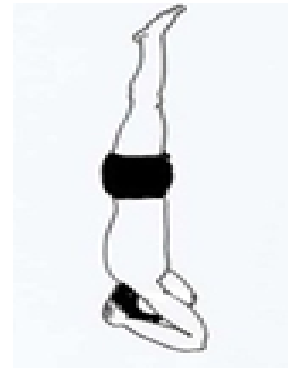


Fig3

The practice in which the navel is above and the palate below, the sun above and the moon below is known as Sirshasana. It can be learnt from the words uttered by Guru. On the first day one should remain for a very short time with one's head below and feet above. The duration of this practice should be gradually increased day by day. Sirshasana by its name is not found in old yogic text. Instead, the verses mentioned in Viparitakarani suggest about Sirshasana.

Sarvangasana



Fig.4

Sarvangasana means the Asana which influence the whole body. This removes the symptoms of immature old age. Diseases like dyspepsia, constipation, hernia and visceroptosis can be treated by it. Those, suffering from high-blood pressure, should not practice it.

Bhujangasana

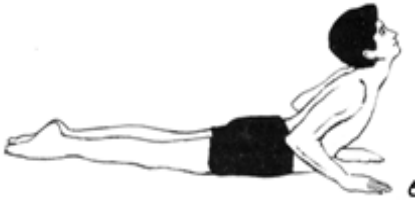


Fig.5

Let the lower part of the body from the toes upto the navel touch the ground. Place the palms on the ground and raise the head like a cobra. This affects the muscles of the body deeply. It is more effective for Asthma, Dyspepsia and Vata diseases and helps in keeping the spine flexible.

Halasana

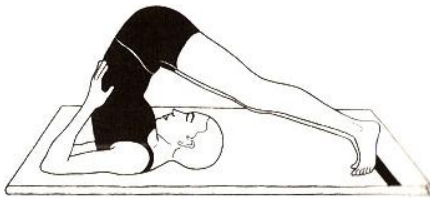


Fig.6

It is known as Halasana because in its final position the body resembles the shape of Indian plough. Due to the disturbance of abdominal muscles if there is a complaint of Dyspepsia or constipation, it can be corrected by the practice of this Asana .

Supta- vajrasana



Fig.7

Supta-Vajrasana is further development of Vajrasana. We lie on our back with folded legs, hence it is called Supta-Vajrasana . This strengthens abdominal muscles. It is useful in high blood pressure and sciatica. It is a good remedy for constipation.

Relaxative Shavasana

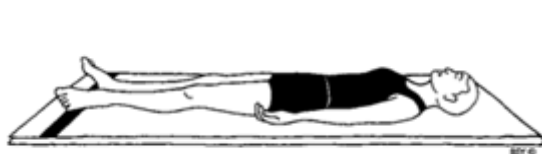
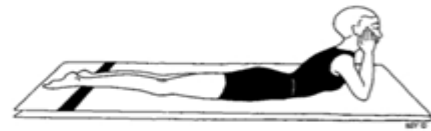


Fig.8

Lying flat on the ground with the face upwards, in the manner of a dead body, is Shavasana. It removes tiredness and enables the mind and whole body relax. This practice is useful for developing body awareness and pratyahara.



Makarasana

Fig.9

Lie prone, the chest should touch the ground and both the legs stretched out. Hold the head with both the arms. This is beneficial in Asthma. Abdominal muscles get automatic massage.

While doing Asanas, we should keep in mind that if Asanas are done merely by seeing here and there they will lead to several diseases. Therefore, some important points to be remembered, while performing Asanas are:

1. Asanas should not be practiced merely from books, guidance of a teacher is also necessary.
2. Asanas should not be performed with jerks, but slowly, step by step and gradually upto the final pose. The return should be in the same way.
3. The final posture should be maintained for some time, but in no case under tension and stress.
4. Asanas are not to be performed beyond one's limitation.
5. The performance of the Asanas should not be guided by competitive attitude. This has harmful impact and hence should be avoided.
6. Concentrate on the effects of Asanas on mind and the body.
7. Every Asana is to be followed by Shavasana. It does not mean that it is harmful if you cannot perform shavasana after every Asana.
8. If possible, maintain a diary of Asana showing the duration of the practice of each Asana.
9. In case of an injury or illness the teacher should be consulted and his valuable advice is required to be followed.
10. Never think about breathing while doing asana. The constitution of whole body is such that the breathing is adjusted as per the situation e.g. when we put a thread into the needle or when we lift weight or when we do Salabhasna, Mayurasana the breathing is adjusted automatically. Hence, we should not mix breathing with postures. But during Pranayama people suffering from High blood pressure, Heart Disease, Asthama, the teacher should be consulted.
11. The place should be clean and ventilated.

Frequently some basic questions are raised regarding the performance of Asanas. Hence next part deals with such questions. The answers and solutions of the respective question are provided simultaneously.

Time

What is the best time for practicing Asanas?

The early morning is the best time to perform Asanas. It is to be kept in mind that after lunch up to four hours, no Asana, Mudra or Pranayama should be

practiced. But Vaman, Dhauti may be performed, if necessary. For people having weak gastric fire, even for hours gap is not sufficient. They should start practice at least 5 to 6 hours after lunch.

Bath

It is usually asked whether Asanas should be performed before or after the bath ? Whether the water used for bathing should be hot or cold? We will answer these questions as per Swatmarama who says that adhering to the rules strictly is also an obstacle. This is also true with regards to bathing. The people from Kashmir or any other cool place would like to have bath in hot water. It will facilitate the flow of blood and will also make the muscles flexible. In the same way people from warmer region should take bath in cold water. Hence while dealing with the question of time and bath their respective effects on one's body should be considered. Normally, it is preferable to have a bath before the performance of Asanas. Moreover, the people who sweat more and also their sweat stinks, then in this situation bathing after the performance of Asana is also desirable. However the time gap between the Asanas and bath should be minimum 30 minutes.

Diet

With regard to the Diet, the most common question asked is what and how much should a yoga practitioner eat? Swatmarama has very simply and aptly answered indicating towards 'Mitahara'. "Eating sweet and junctuous food offered first to the almighty (that is, not eaten for one's satisfaction), leaving one-fourth of the stomach empty- this is known as Mitahara".

Regarding constituents of food, he says: "the good grains, wheat, rice, barely and Shastika (a special variety of rice), milk, ghee, sugar, butter, sugarcandy, honey, dry ginger, the Patolaka fruit (Paravara-a kind of cucumber), the five leafy vegetables, green gram and rain water collected when the sun is in Magha (the tenth lunar mansion) etc. are considered to be wholesome food for advanced Yogins".

Another important question regarding the diet is whether the non-vegetarian food is advisable? Here there are two pertinent points to be considered. As far as our mental state is concerned we can get rid of tensions by avoiding rich protein food. Today it is well established fact that vegetarian food also contains all those nutrients which are present in non-vegetarian food.

Hence it is the duty and obligation of the vegetarians to popularize the vegetarian food amongst the non-vegetarians and the westerners, because they are unaware of the fact that equally nutritious and delicious food can be prepared using the vegetarian articles. Now, I wish to invite your attention to the question- why should the life of another living being be the source of our palatable (taste) happiness? It should be kept in mind that the animals that are led to slaughter houses are terror-stricken before the actual act of slaughtering hence the bloodstream of such animals gets contaminated by release of certain hormones which are detrimental

and harmful for those who consume the non-vegetarian diet by way of mental and physical strains. And, have we ever considered another pertinent question: Why do Non-vegetarians consume the vegetarian animals only?" I request the readers to ponder on this question.

Place

Many a time, it is asked whether the Asanas have to be performed in the solitude or in the open air ? Otherwise, what should the people of the cities do? Clean air is definitely better and hygienic. While doing Asanas, we should avoid artificial air. The place chosen should be such that the disturbance is minimum. The quotation "Ekantemathika Madhye..." does not refer to common man. Rather, it refers to the yoga practitioners engrossed in meditation and higher pursuits.

Research Design

This is a literary research where the researcher aims to present an in depth analysis of the Yogasnas. The paper addresses popular concerns with regards to the practice of Yogasanas. Thereby, a simplified and valid procedure has been provided for the practice of various types of Yogasnas after a thorough research based on various authoritative books and articles on the same topic. It is considered view of the researcher that by providing an insight to the effects, benefits and usefulness of certain posture or Asana along with the correct procedure, a new form of inclination and awareness, with reference to Yogasnas can be awakened among the common people. The process of research was based on following steps:

Systematic Review of Scriptures, Traditional Yogic Text and Research Literature

The ancient as well as modern literatures were reviewed systematically to identify the major dements of human health in relation to the Practice of various types of Yogasnas.

Source of Data and Data Collection

Each of the selected Yogic Texts (Hath Yoga Pradipika, By Swami Muktibodhananda etc.) and modern research reports were available in the R.D.V.V. Library, Jabalpur, India.

Procedure of Data Collection

Since this is a literary research, the researcher intended to collect the information and Data pertaining to this study mostly from the books and article available in the library and Internet Websites. For the Library books and article the researcher has fully relied on the Literature available in the R.D.V.V. Library.

Data Analysis

Importance of different types of Yogasnas that claim to have beneficial impact towards the human health were identified, accumulated and categorized. Further, a simplified procedure was identified to help the practitioners facing confusions by way of different ways of practicing certain Yogasana.

Objective of the Study

Presently, it is a popular habit that people whenever fall ill or face certain health issues they thereafter rely on medication. In this process the basic

human immunity suffers further the medication for certain diseases also have side effects that are harmful for human organs. Hence a regular and righteous practice of Yogasana becomes indispensable in present world. Such practice benefits the working of each and every part of Human Body and thereby provides an immunity which further saves one from various diseases. Moreover, different types of Yogasnas targeting to benefit specific part of Body are also useful to fight against prevailing disease. This paper thus aims to provide knowledge with reference to Yogasanas with an objective to encourage its practice among common people. For the said purpose the researcher has duly provided with the benefits and categorization of Yogasanas based on the type of effects and posture involved therein.

Review of Literature

1. The souvenir Edition "Experience of Yoga" (2013) represents these four topics of deliberation. The contributions span a wide spectrum of interest from specific physical and mental conditions. Three generations of masters, Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh, Swami Satyananda Saraswati of Rikhia, and Swami Niranjanan and a Saraswati, of Munger, have dedicated their lives to the upliftment of human kind through the Experience of Yoga.
2. "Secrets of Mind-Body Health through Holistic Care" (2000) this book can be said to be a medical understanding of various yoga practice and is full of genuine ideas that give substantial food for thought on a number of potential mechanisms by which yoga may mediate its beneficial effects. The book starts with a passage quoted from the "Principals of holistic management of Mind & Body Health" and is divided in seven sections; this book has appeared with new dimensions on influences of Yoga Practices on Management of Mental and physical stress.
3. "Yoga Vijnana" (2008) a quarterly journal from MDNIY will certainly help the people to understand the more about basic physiological mechanisms and other aspects of Yogic Science. Yoga is a science of body and mind; it has definite scientific principles to establish a harmony in body mind complex.
4. "Asna, Pranayama, Mudra, Bandha" (1983) by Swami SatyanandaSaraswati, the book starts with a passage quoted from "The Science of yoga" when scientists began to investigate yoga at the physical level, they found that it had a tremendous influence on the physical body. The yoga postures harmonized the endocrine glands. The practice of pranayama created a balance in the nervous system. The effect of asana, pranayama, mudra and bandha on the different organs of the body was also investigated
5. "Yoga Sagar" World Yoga Convention (2013) While the hatha yoga and the raja yoga centres will fail in the next five years time the need for yoga for the development of an integrated human personality is going to increase manifold. This

World Yoga Convention has become the stepping- stone into the new world of yoga that will develop and evolve in the years to come.

6. "Hatha Yoga Pradipika" (2006) by Swami Muktibodhananda. This book gives us a glimpse of the historical aspect of hatha yoga. For centuries these books has guided spiritual aspirants.

Conclusion

There has always been an urge or desire among the people to practice Yogasanas but the major problem that people face is regarding the correct procedures with regards to its practice. There has always been disparity and differences among the scholars and practitioners of Yogasana with regards to the correct procedure. Hence, this paper throws light on the popular concerns that common people face while practicing Yogasanas. Secondly various types of Yogasanas based on the specific posture and its respective effect along with the benefits entailed and correct procedure has been rightly mentioned. The writer considers that to lead to a successful practice of Yogasana the practitioner should be well aware of the types such as Meditative, Physical and relaxative Yogasanas which thereby enable one to have an in depth knowledge. This knowledge further provides encouragement to the people as now they have sufficient reasons for the practice. It should be kept in mind that to achieve the desired effects not only the practice of Yogasana is essential but also its correct form of practice based on instructions given by a learned Yogasana practitioner is required. Lastly, it is important to know that there are various sources which provide guidance on Yogasanas but people should consider only authoritative and reliable sources so as to avoid any detrimental effect.

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