



# ŚODHANA KRIYĀS : AN ANALYSIS

□ DR. M. L. GHAROTE, M.A., M.Ed., D.Y. P., Ph. D.

Principal, G. S. College of Yoga and Cultural Synthesis, Lonavla

## Importance of Śodhana

'Śodhana' is a very important concept in Yoga. Karma, Kriyā, Śuddhikriyā, Śauca, Nāḍīśuddhi, Ghaṭaśuddhi, Cittaśuddhi are some of the well-known terms used for representing the concept of 'Śodhana'. Literally translated 'Śodhana' means an internal cleansing or a purification. But in a wider sense of the term it also includes conditioning or strengthening. This idea of śodhana is very well expressed in *Gheraṇḍa Saṁhitā* as follows :

आमकुम्भ इवाम्भःस्थो जीर्यमाणः सदा घटः ।

योगानलेन संदह्य घटशुद्धिं समाचरेत् ॥—घे. सं. I-८.

(āmakumbha ivāmbhaḥstho jīryamāṇaḥ sadā ghaṭaḥ ।

yogānalena saṁdahya ghaṭaśuddhiṁ samācaret ॥ )

"Just as an unbaked earthen pot disintegrates in water so also is the case of the body. Therefore, bake the body in the fire of yoga so that it is purified and strengthened."

Yogabīja also, in the same connection, talks of 'apakva' and 'Paripakva' bodies. All the practices of Yoga aim at purification. The concept of 'Purgativum' in Mysticism is similar to the 'Śodhana'. The concepts of 'tapas' in Yoga and 'mortification' in Mysticism are intended for and used as 'Śodhana'. The process of 'Śodhana' is completed when *samādhi* is attained.

## Various Yogic Practices as a Means of Śodhana

From the following quotations, it will be clear how the various Yogic practices as a class act as Śodhana.

### Āsanās :

आसनेन रुजो (रजो) हन्ति ।—गो. श. ५४

( āsanena rujo (rajo) hanti )

"Āsanās remove disorders of the body (and fickleness of mind)."

ततो द्वन्द्वानभिघातः ।—पा.यो.सू. II-४८

( tato dvandvānabighātaḥ )

"Thereby (with the practice of Āsanās) dysrrhythmia in the tonic impulses, giving rise to tremors, disappears".

आसनेन भवेद् दृढम् ।—घे.सं. I-१०

( Āsanena bhaved dṛḍham )

"Āsanās strengthen the body."



**Prāṇāyāmas :**

प्राणायामेण पातकं (हन्ति) ।—गो. श. ५४.

( Prāṇāyāmeṇa pātakam (hanti) )

“Prāṇāyāma destroys the sins.”

प्राणायामैरेव सर्वे प्रशुष्यन्ति मला इति ।

आचार्याणां तु केषांचिदन्यत्कर्म न संमतम् ॥—ह. प्र. II-३८

( Prāṇāyāmaireva sarve praśuṣyanti malā iti )

ācāryāṇāṃ tu keṣāñcidanyatkarma na sammatam ॥ )

“With *prāṇāyāmas* alone all the impurities are removed. According to some authorities no other practice (purificatory) is necessary.”

**Dhāyana :**

ध्यानेन सदृशं नास्ति शोधनं पापकर्मणाम् ।—बृ. यो. या IX-१७८

( dhyānena sadṛśam nāsti śodhanam pāpakarmaṇām )

“There is no other purificatory process equal to *dhāyana* for overcoming the evil deeds.”

**Ṣaṭkarmas\* for Śodhana**

In a restricted sense *Śodhana Kriyās* represent *ṣaṭkarmas* or six cleaning processes. These are the special features of *Haṭhayoga*. Although the *ṣaṭkarmas* have some similarity with *Pañcakarmas* of *Āyurveda*, *Haṭhayoga* has developed the contents of *ṣaṭkarmas* very elaborately. Attempts have been made to synthesize the basis of *Pañcakarmas* with that of *ṣaṭkarmas* in *Ṣaṭkarmasamgraha*. There is no doubt that *ṣaṭkarmas* play a prominent role in the *Haṭhayoga* curriculum.

*Ṣaṭkarmas* refer to the following six cleansing processes which are summed up in the verse quoted in *Haṭhapradīpika* :

धौतिर्बास्तिस्तथा नेतिस्त्राटकं नौलिकं तथा ।

कपालभातिश्चैतानि षट् कर्माणि प्रचक्षते ॥—ह. प्र. II-२२.

( dhautirbastistathā netistrāṭakam naulikam tathā )

Kapālabhātiscāitāni ṣaṭ karmāṇi pracakṣate ॥ )

Really speaking, *ṣaṭkarmas* are not six cleansing processes but *six classes of cleansing processes*. A very elaborate description of these cleansing processes is available in the *Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā*. Table I gives divisions and sub-divisions of the *ṣaṭkarmas*. We do not know of any other authoritative *Haṭhayogic* text except *Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā* which gives exhaustive list of varieties of *Dhauti*. The efficacy of *ṣaṭkarmas* can be gathered from the following verse :

कर्मषट्कमिदं गोप्यं घटशोधनकारकम् ।

विचित्रगुणसंधायि पूज्यते योगिपुंगवैः ॥—ह. प्र. II-२३.

( Karmaṣaṭkamidam gopyam ghataśodhanakāṛakam )

vicitraguṇasandhāyi pūjyate yogipuṅgavaiḥ ॥ )

‘षट्कर्मयोगमाप्नोति पवनान्यासतत्परः’—Quoted by ब्रह्मानन्द in ज्योत्स्ना ।

( ṣaṭkarmayogamāpnoti pavanābhyāsataṭparaḥ )

“Practitioners of *Prāṇāyāma* resort to *ṣaṭkarmas*.”

‘षट्कर्मनिर्गतस्थौल्यकफदोषमलादिकः ।

प्राणायामं ततः कुर्यादनायासेन सिध्यति ॥—ह. प्र. II-३७

( ṣaṭkarmānirgatasthauḷyakaphadoṣamalādikaḥ )

prāṇāyāmaṃ tataḥ kuryādānāyāsenā sidhyati ॥ )

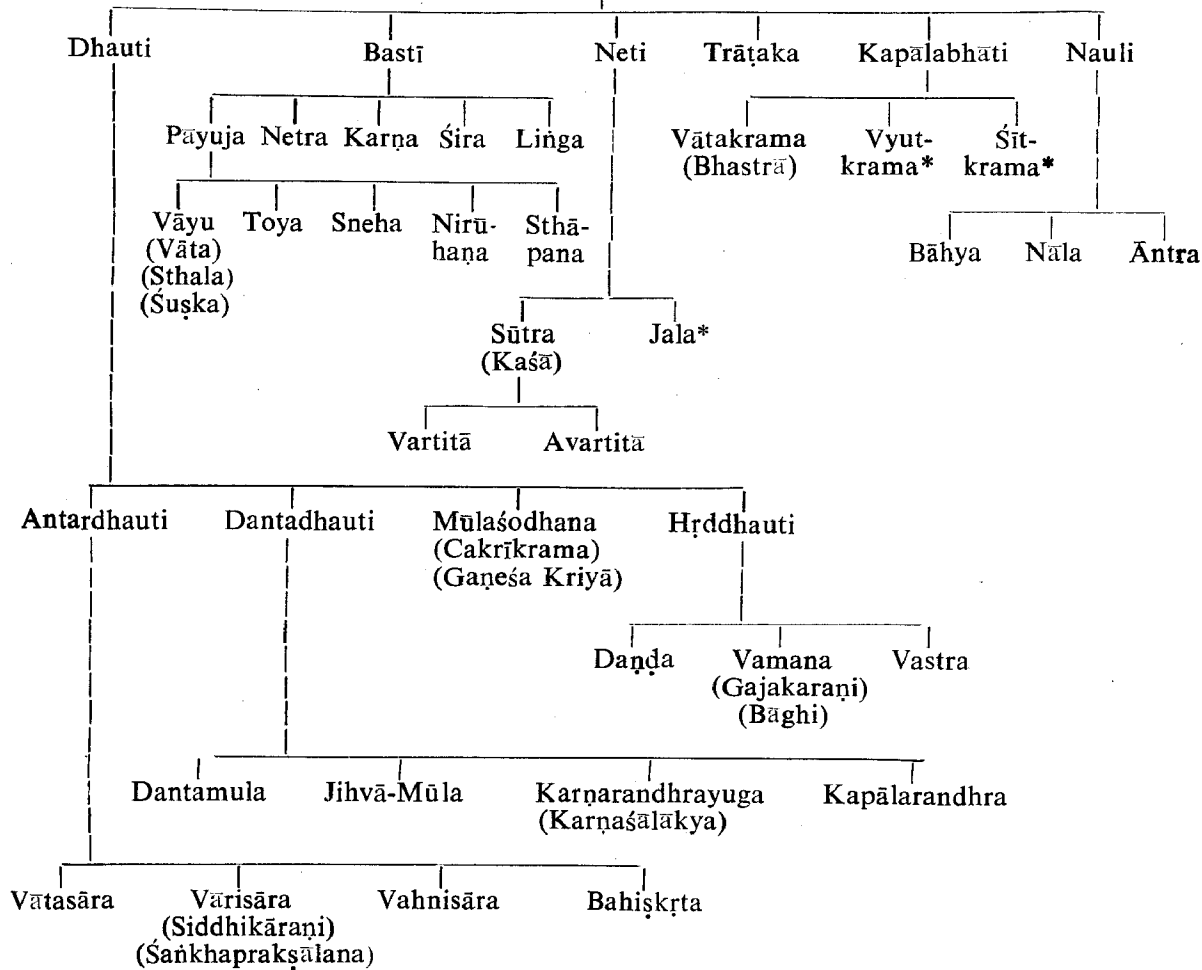
\* *Ṣaṭkarmas* in *Smṛtis* have different meaning. The *ṣaṭkarmas* mentioned in *Bṛhatparāśara Smṛti* are as follows :

सन्ध्या स्नानं जपश्चैव देवतानाञ्च पूजनम् ।

वैश्वदेवं तथाऽऽतिथ्यं षट्कर्माणि दिने दिने ॥—बृहत् पराशरस्मृति २७.

The above quotations bring home the utility and significance of the *ṣaṭkarmas* for the practice of *Prāṇāyāma*, which is the gate-way of higher states of consciousness. Although some authorities claim that practice of *Prāṇāyāma* alone is capable of bringing about thorough purification. *Swātmārāma*, the author of *Haṭhapradīpikā* takes a very practical view of *ṣaṭkarmas*. According to him persons suffering from excessive phlegm, fat and the like or having mucoid tendencies or tendency towards obesity, should do well to practise *ṣaṭkarmas* to establish humoural balance which will help in the comfortable practice of *Prāṇāyāma* and attain the results of *Prāṇāyāma* soon. Those who do not suffer from the imbalance of the humours may not practise *ṣaṭkarmas*. But in modern times, due to artificial and unnatural living conditions, rarely we may come across an individual who would possess a balanced humoural condition all the times. Therefore, practically considered, *ṣaṭkarmas* should be taken help of with due discrimination.

TABLE I  
Śodhana Kriyās



N.B. The bracketed words are synonyms referred to in different texts.

\* Vyutkrama and Śitkrama types of Kapālabhāti are the forms of Jalaneti. They have been included under Kapālabhāti only in Gheraṇḍa Saṁhitā.



### Classification of Śaṭkarmas

Śaṭkarmas can be classified according to : (A) Mode of cleansing, and (B) Region of cleansing.

#### (A) Mode of Cleansing

- (i) *Cleansing by air* : Vātsāra, Bahiṣkṛta-dhauti, Śuṣkabasti or Sthalabasti Kapālabhāti.
- (ii) *Cleansing by water* : Vaman-dhauti, Gajakaraṇi, Vārisāra or Saṅkhaṇḍaprakṣāṇa, Jalabasti, Jalaṇeti or Vyutkrama and Śītkrama Kapālabhāti, Netrabasti, Liṅgabasti.
- (iii) *Cleansing by Friction or with an appliance* : Daṇḍadhauti, Vastradhauti, Mūlaśodhana or Gaṇeśakriyā, Sūtraneti, Dantamūla, Jihvāmūla, Karṇarandhrayuga, Kapālarandhra karnaśālākya.
- (iv) *Cleansing by Manipulating Movements* : Agnisāra, Nauli, Trāṭaka, Vātabasti, Vāribasti or Jalabasti.

#### (B) Region of Cleansing :

- (i) *Cleansing of Naso-pharyngo-oro-cranial region* : Neti, Kapālabhāti, Trāṭaka, Dantamūla, Jihvāmūla, Karṇarandhara, Karnaśālākya.
- (ii) *Cleansing of Gastro-aesophageal region* : Dhautis like Daṇḍa, Vamana, Vastra, Gajakaraṇi, Vātsāra.
- (iii) *Cleansing of Ano-recto-intestinal region* : Vātsāra, Vārisāra, Vahnisāra, Jalabasti, Śuṣkabasti, Mūlaśodhana, Bahiṣkṛta, Nauli, Pāyujā basti.

### Therapeutical value of Śaṭkarmas

The materia-medica of Yogic therapy consists of several cleansing processes. Cleansing or 'śodhana' forms one of the basic concepts of Yogic therapy. The condition of *Dhātuvaiṣāmya* which gives rise to several psycho-physiological disturbances, is removed by resorting to appropriate 'śodhana Kriyās'. Kriyās bring about widened range of adaptability of the tissues forming the various systems and the organs, as also raise the threshold of their reactivity. Autonomic and proprioceptive neuro-muscular reactions seem to have an important bearing in bringing about these results. Voluntary control is established on different reflexes through the 'Śodhana Kriyās'. An illustration may be given about gaining control over vomiting reflex. This reflex is controlled by two methods :—(i) By inhibition during Daṇḍa Dhauti and Vastra Dhauti ; (ii) By stimulation as in Gajakaraṇi. The emphasis of these Kriyās as on establishing psycho-physiological balance after attaining which help is sought of other Yogic practices like Āsanas, Prāṇāyāmas and meditational techniques for strengthening and tranquillising psycho-physiological apparatus. The clinical evidence collected over five decades in the centres of Kaivalyadhāma and in many other Yoga centres in recent years indicates the utility and efficacy of the 'śodhana kriyās' in treating the chronic functional disorders.

### A Review of Scientific Experiments on Śodhanakriyās

Yoga was first brought into the laboratory by late Swami Kuvalayananda, the Founder of Kaivalyadhama Institutions, in early 1920's by providing scientific evidence about the efficacy of an important śodhana kriyā called Nauli, using X-Ray techniques of scientific investigations. It was the novel attempt to rationally explain the utility of Yogic practices in scientific terms. With the help of X-Ray studies he showed that sub-atmospheric pressures could be created voluntarily in the colon during the practice of different aspects of Nauli. Development of sub-atmospheric or negative pressure in colon during the practice of Nauli-kriyā was given by him the name "Mādhavadāsa Vacuum" in the sacred memory of his Guru Mādhavadāsa Mahārāj of Mālsar. Upto that time the possibility of creating such pressure changes in the internal cavities by voluntary manipulations was not known, nor investigated in the field of physiology.

Studies on the position of colon and distribution of colon contents during *Nauli* threw much light on physiological changes and also explained the principle of water suction during *Basti Kriyā* and *Vajroli*, the phenomena which were attributed till that time to some miraculous powers of Yoga. These studies showed that the normal function of the colon could be helped and clinically *Nauli* could be used in the treatment of adhesions, kinks, hernia and constipation. *Nauli* not only creates partial pressures in the colon but also in all the internal cavities and helps in proper circulation, secretion, assimilation and elimination.

Swami Kuvalayananda also studied *Vastra Dhauti* under X-Rays to know the treatment given to the *Dhauti* by the stomach under normal conditions and under different Yogic exercises. It was observed that the *Dhauti* is pushed down the pyloric sphincter (lower end of the stomach) if it is allowed to remain in the stomach for more than about 20 minutes. This finding is of a practical importance. To err on a safer side, therefore, the *Dhauti* should be withdrawn within 20 minutes after the swallowed end first reaches the stomach. The contents of the duodenum are pushed back into the stomach by opening the pylorus during *Uḍḍiyāna*.

Uropepsin excretion was studied during *Danḍa Dhauti* and *Vastra Dhauti*. The results indicated increased uropepsin excretion suggesting increased adreno-cortical activity. This explains the role of *Dhautis* in the treatment of Asthma, Eczema and other allergic conditions where cortisone therapy plays an effective role and brings forth the importance of *Dhautis* as a substitute or an adjunct to cortisone therapy.

Studies on the effect of *Danḍa Dhauti* on gastric acidity showed decrease in the secretion of free acid, while increase in the combined acid.

*Vāyubhakṣaṇa* (swallowing the air) a process in *Vātasāra* was also investigated for its effect on gastric acidity. This study indicated reduction in gastric acidity after filling the stomach with air during *Vāyubhakṣaṇa*. Its clinical trial in cases of hyper-acidity may give encouraging results.

Influence of *Trāṭaka* (still gazing) on behaviour, when studied suggested its usefulness as a means of psycho-therapy.

*Agnisāra* is an important *kriyā* classed under *Dhauti* by *Gheraṇḍa Samhitā*. It involves holding of breath out after deepest exhalation, followed by alternate retraction and protrusion of the abdomen several times until the breath is held. This was studied for the pressure changes in the stomach. It was observed that very high negative pressure to the extent of 155 mm. Hg. (-55 mm. Hg. maintained) are produced when the abdomen was protruded during *Agnisāra*. In retraction stage it was near about equal to the normal resting. Intra-thoracic pressure in protrusion was markedly positive, while during retracted stage it was near atmospheric.

*Gajakaraṇi*, a *kriyā* causing voluntary vomiting, was seen to produce very high positive pressures in the stomach to the extent of + 90 to + 120 mm. Hg.

Alveolar CO<sub>2</sub> percentages determined at the end of a two minute *Kapālabhāti* gave an average alveolar CO<sub>2</sub> percentage as 4.65. At the end of five minutes of *Kapālabhāti* alveolar CO<sub>2</sub> concentration reached 4.89 percent.

There are some of the results of scientific investigations about 'śodhana Kriyās' carried on in the laboratory of Kaivalyadhāma, Lonavla.

### Conclusion

Despite high values attached to the "Śodhana Kriyās" in maintaining psycho-physiological health of an individual and a great help rendered to the student of Yoga in attaining higher stages of consciousness, they have not attracted the attention of many practitioners of Yoga, especially in the West as much as other practices like *āsanas*, *prāṇāyāmas* and meditation. The efficacy of "Śodhana Kriyās" is not yet fully realised. Research workers in Yoga and medical men have not touched this aspect of Yoga. Therapeutical values of the "Śodhana Kriyās" have



yet to be scientifically investigated. There is much to be done about “*Sodhana Kriyās*” by way of training and research.

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