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Shatkriya and its mechanism

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Abstract

The term Shatkriya translates as six actions. Each one is powerfully purifying profoundly cleansing at all levels of 'being' and induces the self-study. This practice of Kriya is quoted in *Hathayoga Pradipika* and *Gheranda Samhita*. Here in this paper Shatkriyas its importance precautions related shatkriya and its mechanism is discussed.

Keywords: Shatkriya, shatkarma, toxins, detoxification, dhauti, neti, nauli, kapalbhati, basti

Introduction

Hathayoga is famous for six cleansing techniques starting from forehead to anus; these techniques are called Shatkriya or Shatkarma. 'Shat' means 'six' and 'Kriya' means 'action'. The Ancient Rishis considered these Kriyas as essential to practice of Yoga. These Kriyas have powerful effects on both the physical and energy bodies (Koshas); they have dynamic impact on the *Doshas* (Vat, Pitta, Kapha)

Therefore the aim for Hathayoga and the Shatkriyas are to clean the internal organs thereby creates a harmony between the major Pranic flow, *Ida* and *Pingala* and attaining physical and mental purification.

Shatkriyas are described in the Classic Yogi Text. These Kriyas are listed in Shloka 12 in *Gheranda Samhita*.

Dhauti-vasti-tatha Netir, Tratakam, Nauli

Kapal-bhati-c-aitani, sat-karmani Samacaret (G.S.1/12)

Hathayoga Pradipika Chapter 2 verses 21-36 describes the Shatkriyas, benefits and precautions

Types of shatkriyas

Dhauti

The literal meaning of Dhauti is internal cleansing. It is classified into four types of Dhauti: (H.P. describes Vatsara Dhauti; and other Dhauti practices are describe in the *Gheranda Samhita*)

- Antar dhauti (Internal cleaning)- Vatsara (plavini, wind), Varisara (sankhaprakshalana, water), Vahnisara (agnisara), and Bahiskrita (rectal cleansing)
- Danta dhauti- as the name suggests, it is the cleansing of not only teeth but also Jihva (tongue), Karna (ear), Kapalrandhra (frontal sinuses), and Chakshu (eyes).
- Hrid dhauti- Vatra (cloth), Danda (Stick), Vaman (Kunjil)
- Mool Shodhana (base purification)

Basti-Active enema process

- Jala basti- Water is sucked into the colon through the anus and expelled
- Sthala basti- Air is sucked in anus.

Neti

Nasal irrigation technique Neti is all about the cleansing of nasal cavity.

- Jala Neti (water)
- Sutra Neti (catheter)
- Dugdha Neti (milk)
- Ghrita Neti (ghee).

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Trataka

The yogic exercise of eyes, it involves steady and continuous gazing at a point of concentration. It is of two types,

- Antaranga Trataka (internal)
- Bahiranga Trataka (external)

Nauli

Practice involves isolating the rectus abdominal muscles.

- Dakshina Nauli- When muscles are isolated at the right side
- Vam Nauli- When muscles are isolated at the left side
- Madhyama Nauli- When muscles are isolated at the centre

Kapalbhati

An optimum functioning of frontal lobe can be expected through this practice. This is divided into three,

- Vatkarma (breathing)- which means inhalation and exhalation through both the nostrils as we do during the practice of Bhastrika Pranayama
- Vyutkarma (reversed)- which means sucking water in through nostrils and expelling through mouth,
- Sheetkarma (cooling)-which means sucking water through mouth and expelling through nose.

Mechanism of shatkriya

Drainage of waste and toxins

Vaman Dhauti, Vastra dhauti, Basti and Shankhaprakshalana are associated with the excretion of the waste from the digestive system. They are also associated with cleaning of all body systems. During yogic cleansing toxins are drained towards the digestive track to get flushed out of the body. In *Neti* the mucus secretion is increased. Along with the usual secretion, some toxins are also excreted through secretion. Practice of all three type of *Kapalbhati* causes excess removal of carbon dioxide from the frontal lobe of brain.

Action of vagus nerve-increased secretions and mobility

Vagal activation is one of the important mechanisms of cleaning process. Vagus nerve is tenth cranial nerve which connects Brain to the Respiratory track, Heart, Digestive track and glands in abdomen. In *Vaman Dhauti, Vastra Dhauti* and *Shankhaprakshalana*, due to activation of vagus nerve, the effect can be seen on all three systems.

After *vaman dhauti*, vagal stimulation increases the movements of large intestine, thus helps to wash out the stool from the large intestine, it increases secretions of digestive glands because of that the digestion is improved and vagus nerve restores the resting rhythm of the heart.

Pressure mechanism

Kapalbhati, Agnisar, Nauli, produces pressure inside the abdomen. This pressure on abdominal muscles produces massage on the internal organs. The massage improves the micro circulation which nourishes internal organ and also drains waste or toxins towards blood from the interstitial spaces. Even in *Vaman Dhauti* the pressure mechanism is created.

Improves the blood supply to nervous system

Blood supply towards nervous system is more when the digestive track is significantly empty. Cleansing processes help to empty the digestive track. All three *Kapalbhati* practices are good for activating the frontal lobe which is mentioned in Hatha Yoga as *Kapala*. Practice

of *Kapalbhati* causes excess removal of carbon dioxide and builds up oxygen in the peripheral tissue of the brain, more supply of oxygen causes optimum metabolism in the forebrain.

Sustaining the state of calmness

The toxins in the body which cross the blood brain barrier, irritate the brain tissues that disturb regular cognitive activities. This result in emotional disturbance. *Shatkriyas* like *sahankhaprakshalana, basti*, etc. wash out large intestine completely, thus avoid the bad effect of toxins on the brain.

Importance of shatkarma

- *Shatkriya* detoxifies various body systems. Clean systems helps to improve the performance and effectiveness of father yogic practices like *Asana, Pranayama, and Mudra* etc.
- It helps to improve the alertness. The blood supply is more towards nervous system after finishing the cleansing successfully. Thus, subtle practices like meditation are more effective after *shatkriya*.
- *Shatkriya* prevent and manage the disease. Thus it improves the immune system.
- These *Shatkriya*, which effect the purification of the body, they have manifold, wondrous, result and are held in high esteem by eminent Yogis.
- By *shatkriya* one is freed from excesses of the *Doshas*. Then *Pranayama* s practices and success is achieved without strain.
- It helps to increase awareness of a human being at different levels, at the physical level, psychological level, emotional level, spiritual level, and intellectual level.

Precautions

- These powerful techniques should never be learned from books or taught by the inexperienced people. According to the tradition only those instructed by the Guru may teach others.
- There is some risk of harm to the learner if something goes wrong.
- It is essential to be personally instructed as to how and when to perform them according to individual need.

Discussion

Shatkriyas are NOT simply physical cleaning exercises; rather they utilise specific body mechanics in order to remove emotional and mental blockages and hindrances. They affect the physical body, energy body, mental/emotional body, the creative thought processes and pathways of embodiment in a positive way. They are rather preparatory activates intended to be integrated with the other practices such as *Yama/Niyama, Asana, Dhyana, Pranayama* and rest of the *Yoga* practices.

Conclusion

These *Kriyas* create space in the human temple for living spirit they detoxify the body, the blood stream, the nervous system, brain, Nadis, Mind, Thought patters, and negative tendencies. By opening up these pathways, less distracting energetics are present and more positive, healing and creative energy is able to flow. The effect of *Shatkarma* can be summed up in one word – *purification or Detoxification*. The *Shatkriya* thus serve as power synergists in the purification of body-mind, its activation and integration.

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