



Comparative study of Shatkarma between Hatha Yoga Pradipika and Gheranda Samhita

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ABSTRACT

Mental stress, unhealthy life style choices, excessive eating and poor physical activity leads to many Decease. while yoga is the holistic Approach to purify the body as well as mind. hath yoga is also known as science of purification. according to Hatha Yoga Pradipika.4 ha and Tha is mixture of two Bija mantra.4 it has been written in hatha yoga that ha indicate Prana ,The vital forces and Tha indicate mind, the Meantal energy.so hatha yoga means the union of the Pranic and mental Forces.4 saga Greranda has Visulized yoga in form of energy though which life is shortcomings can be eradicated because through its force the whole Personality ,the body ,mind ,intellect, thoughts ,emotions and behaviour ,can be brought under control, Modrate and balanced possibly there no other science in the world which works for the development of the body, mind and consciousness in such integrated manner. among the various components yoga used the most popular are Shatkarma, Asanas, Pranayama etc.

Shatkarma

Shatkarma is a set of 6 cleansing techniques of Hatha Yoga to flush out impurities of the internal body. These cleansing techniques are also known as 6 yoga kriyas or shat kriyas.

Indeed, shatkarmas are more like preparatory exercises in yoga. They are generally practised before any asana, pranayama, mudra or advanced meditation techniques. Why? Because the purpose of these kriyas is to make the body and mind strong enough (not just externally but internally as well) to withstand any advanced practice.

Benefits of Shatkarma

- As Shatkarma purifies the internal body, our external organs system also started working well. Thus, it balances the internal & external organ systems.
- The series of these kriyas helps to balance the Tri Doshas of a human being. There are Three Doshas in every human being, if there is any kind of imbalance in any of these Doshas then the body will not function properly. So Shat Kriya helps the Doshas to be in a perfect ratio.
- Shatkarma is helpful to channelize the flow of Prana in Nadis. It helps to clean the blockages of Nadis and thus Prana move without any obstacle inside the body.
- The kriyas are helpful for the connectivity of the mind, soul, and body. As all the channels are cleansed by these kriyas then all the pathways are open and then all those yogic activities connect your mind boy ad soul.
- Shatkarma is helpful in the development of the immune system. If our Immune system is strong and healthy then it helps fight many diseases. So when a being is cleansed from its core that means its base has been cleansed as well. Hence in this manner, the immune system is cleansed as well.
- Physical aging and Biological aging are two different aspects. When our body isn't clean then it brings physical aging that is pretty earlier from the Biological aging. Shatkriya helps to retarded Physical aging and helps to maintain biological aging.
- 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.

6 Yoga Kriyas

The 6 kriyas of yoga are complete detoxification exercises that cleanse our whole alimentary canal starting from the mouth to the anus. Combinedly these yoga kriyas are called Shatkarma.

Here the terms kriya and karma are synonymously used to define “specific actions” for achieving some “specific results”. Therefore shatkarma is also mentioned as “shat kriyas” in many yoga and pranayama books.

The 6 kriyas described in Hatha Yoga are:

- Dhauti kriya
- Basti kriya
- Neti kriya
- Nauli kriya
- Trataka kriya

- Kapalbhathi kriya

Each of these yoga kriyas is meant for the purification of a specific organ system in the alimentary canal.

- Starting with the mouth, dhauti kriya focuses on cleansing the mouth and food pipe.
- Basti Kriya cleanses the colon or lower abdomen (large intestine).
- Neti kriya focus on cleansing of nasal passages.
- Nauli kriyas massages stomach organs.
- Trataka is for cleansing of eyes.
- And Kapalbhathi cleanses frontal lobe (front part of the brain).

1. Dhauti kriya – Cleansing of Digestive Tract

Dhauti kriya is the first Shatkarma we practice in yoga. In Sanskrit, Dhauti means ‘washing’ or ‘cleansing’.

In this process, water is drunk to full capacity which let impurities flush out from the food pipe by vomiting.

Dhauti kriya is generally of four types. Some common types of Dhauti are:

- Vamana Dhauti – Drinking a large quantity of lukewarm water and then vomit it out to removes extra mucus from the food pipe. It’s also called Kunjal kriya.
- Vastra Dhauti – In this dhauti kriya, a clean muslin cloth drowned in tepid water is swallowed and held in the stomach for a few minutes. Then it’s pulled out from mouth end that brings out impurities intestinal tract.

Some other simples techniques to perform Dhauti are Danta dhauti (teeth washing), Jihva Dhauti (tongue washing) and Karna Dhauti (ear cleansing).

Dhauti kriya helps the internal organ system to work efficiently and remove excess mucus from the stomach. Moreover, consistent practice of dhauti kriya balances the Kapha, Pitta & Vata dosha in our body.

2. Basti kriya – Cleansing of Large Intestine

Basti is the second shat kriya which is said to cure almost 50% of abdominal diseases.

Basti kriya is of two types based on the procedure of practices: Sthala Basti and Jala Basti. In both techniques, water is drawn in through the anus in the large intestine and then abdominal muscles are churned while holding water inside. After churning, water is expelled out through the anus.

It directly works on the purification of the central organ of the body called the colon (large intestine). Colon nourishes almost all tissues of the body.

Unlike enema which cleans only the lower 8 to 10 inches of the colon, Basti purifies the whole colon system to the rectum (attached to the anus). The colon is a long tube-like organ in the lower belly that removes water from digested food and is mostly disturbed by solid waste (faeces).

3. Neti kriya – Cleansing of Nasal Passages

Neti is the third shat kriya that deals with purifying nasal cavities from accumulated impurities. it's very important to clear the nasal cavities as it's the pathway to Prana we take through breathing.

Breathing works like fuel to charge up the human body. If the fuel (breathing) is dirty by any reason, it can make us sick. unclean nostrils are could be one of the main reasons for irregular breathing.

Neti kriya is the exercise intended for purification of nostrils by the various techniques. Neti is basically of 2 types, based on their procedure.

- Jala Neti – In this neti, Jala (water) is used as a cleaning tool to remove the impurities of nostrils. Using the neti pot, water is poured in through one nostril & then under the effect of gravity, it's expelled out another nostril. Water that comes out from other nostril removes impurities from nasal pathways.
- Sutra Neti – In this neti, a rubber thread (sutra) is used to massage the nasal pathways in such a manner that it opens any blockages present in nostrils.

4. Trataka kriya – Cleansing of Eyes

Trataka kriya is one of the best eye exercises that involve steady and continuous gazing at any reference point. The reference point in the trataka practice could be any external object. The most common object used in Trataka for reference point is an Illuminated Candle.

Among 6 shat kriyas, trataka is known for its simplest procedure. Consistent and correct practice of trataka increases concentration power and purifies the mind from fluctuated thought patterns.

Base on the reference thing to gaze upon, whether you take an external object or internal point, trataka can be classified into 2 categories.

- Internal Tratak is when the focus is kept on the trikuti or Third eye (a place between eyebrows) inward or upward. Internal trataka helps to awaken the third eye or Ajna chakra.
- External Tratak is the practice of gazing on some external objects continuously. External objects could be anything literally which gives you pleasure hence easy to forcefully

5. Nauli kriya – Cleansing of Abdominal Organs

In Nauli kriya, the movement of the lower abdominal muscle is ensured that stimulate the digestive fire.

It is a necessary yoga kriya that maintains movement in all muscles of the body. Like flowing water is a sign of its purity, in the same way, Nauli practice purifies the liver, spleen, urinary bladder, pancreas, gall bladder, and the intestines by its massaging effect. When all these internal organs regularly movements, the practitioner's digestion system and appetite improve.

In Nauli kriya, rectus abdominis or abs muscles are isolated either left or right or at middle of the linea alba (anterior wall in the abdomen).

On taking linea alba as a middle reference, the isolation of abs muscles on either side of it classifies Nauli into 3 types.

- Madhya Nauli – When left and right both sides abs muscles concentrated at the center wall or linea alba
- Vama Nauli – When both abs muscles are aligned left side from center wall.
- Dakshina Nauli – When both abs muscles are aligned right side from the center wall.

6. Kapalbhathi – Cleansing of Frontal Lobes

Kapalbhathi is the last Shatkarma that works on improving the functioning of the brain. Because kapalbhathi practised by yoga practitioners as a breathing technique so it's also known as Kapalabhathi pranayama. In kapalbhathi, the abdominal wall rapidly draws in and out in conjunction with the breathing.

Here, in Kapalbhathi pranayama, the breathing is quite different from normal breathing. In normal breathing,

- Inhale is active (more focused) while the exhale is passive (less focused).

In Kapalbhathi breathing,

- Exhale is active (more focused) while the inhale is passive (less focused).

By emphasizing more on exhaling as compare to inhaling, kapalbhathi expels more impurities out in the form of CO₂ gas.

Precautions to take for shatkarma practice

1. Practice Under Supervision of an expert

Practising any of 6 Shatkarma needs expertise in that particular kriya, so it's mandatory to have theoretical as well as practical knowledge. Hence, it's advised to a beginner to do these kriyas under the supervision of an expert guide.

2. Don't practice it everyday

Most people aren't aware of the fact that Shatkarma is never advised by ancient yogis to perform daily like asana, pranayama and other disciplines of yoga.

Shat Kriyas should be practised once a week only when you feel that your inner body needs cleansing. Although in beginning it may be practised continuously for some time as a beginner practitioner needs more purification than an advanced yogi.

3. Use clean and sterile equipment

While doing Shatkriya make sure neti pot, water, rubber thread, cotton cloth & other equipment are clean and sterile. The purpose of these yogic activities is to clean your body from its core level so the material you are using should also be clean.

4. Pregnant women shouldn't practice shat kriyas

At the time of pregnancy, it is better to avoid doing Shatkriya. If one really wants to do shat kriyas, then Jalneti and Trataka can be practised in moderation. Other kriyas may affect the health of the fetus as they are connected with the movement or cleansing of the stomach.

5. Lighten up your diet

6 Shatkarmas are really vigorous practices for your internal organs system. Until you lighten up your diet, don't practice Shatkarma as it'll overwork your organ system and can lead to strain in it.

6. Keep calm while practicing

Usually, in the learning phase, beginner gets over-excited about how master yogis are able to do such weird shat kriyas. Swallowing cloth in the mouth, piercing cotton thread in one nostril, and learning other shat kriya practices need dedication and full attention while doing.

Do shat kriyas for 3-5 minutes only, in beginning. Keep calm, and don't push yourself into the practice if you're not feeling well. In a hurry, you can injure your nasal passages in neti kriya.

Why Purify Body? Importance of Shatkarma

Consider the human body a computer system. The external body which we can touch or see is like the hardware of the computer system while the internal body works as software.

It is easy to come in contact with the external body or hardware so it is cleaned through daily routine activities like washing, bathing and brushing etc. Whereas the internal body parts come in contact with external substances regularly (through food, sight, touch, smell) and we don't have any specific regular activity to get them purified. Hence yoga kriyas (in the form of Shatkarma) are practised regularly from time to time.

1. It is important for a yoga practitioner to purify their inner body organs from time to time so as to make sure the proper working of yogic practices on the body. Shatkarma removes impurities of internal body. organs which got accumulated by regular intake of external matter through different sensory organs.
2. To make sure the proper flow of Prana (life force) Shatkarma ensures there isn't any physical/mental knot present in Nadis – energy channels of the body. Shatkarma, especially Kapalbhati and Nauli balances Prana flow within two important Nadis i.e. Ida & Pingala.
3. Usually, our mind is cluttered from many unwanted thoughts which in the yogic language are called Vrittis. By the practice of Shatkarma (more especially trataka), we can bring a state of steadiness in mind.

There are mainly 2 traditional texts “Hatha Yoga Pradipika” and “Gheranda Samhita” that have described Shatkarma in a detailed manner. Whereas both texts belong to the teachings of Hatha Yoga, their idea of performing Shatkarma is completely different.

Shatkarma In Hatha Yoga Pradipika (HYP)

Swami Swatmarama, Author of Hatha Yoga Pradipika has prescribed the practice of Shatkarma only for this type of person:

1. Who has excessive fat or mucus accumulation in the body.
2. Who is experiencing imbalance of 3 doshas.

Swami Swatmarama clearly stated in Hatha Yoga Pradipika (HYP) that if 3 doshas are in a correct proportion and no extra fat has accumulated in the body, Yoga Sadhak (practitioner) has no need to practice Shatkarma. However, learning 6 Shatkarma is necessary so one can practice them when needed.

Apart from this, the sequence of individual practice of Shatkarma in HYP is mentioned in this verse:

Dhautirbastistathā netistrātakam naulikam tathā Kapālabhātīśchaitāni shatkarmāni prachakshate – HYP 2.23

Meaning – Dhauti, Basti, Neti, Trataka, Nauli and Kapalabhati are called shatkarma.

Shatkarma In Gheranda Samhita

Sage Gheranda is another foremost author of Hath Yoga texts.

According to Sage Gheranda, a practitioner should do shatkarma at the very first stage of yoga before anything.

The Yoga Sage Gheranda propagated is also called Ghatashta Yoga which has 7 limbs, in contrast to eight limbs yoga that came from Patanjali's Yoga Sutra. 7 Limbs mentioned in Gheranda Samhita are:

- 1st limb – Shatkarma – for purification of body
- 2nd limb – Asana – Strengthens the body
- 3rd limb – Mudra – Bring Steadiness in body
- 4th limb – Pratayahara – Withdrawal of senses from the outer world
- 5th limb – Pranayama – Bring lightness in the body
- 6th limb – Dhyana – for inner perception
- 7th limb – Samadhi – the ultimate goal of yoga

According to Sage Gheranda, our body and mind are like a vessel (Ghata) that carry our soul and characteristics Gunas as the water inside a vessel.

Ghatastha Yoga firstly aims to purify the body or vessel that carries a soul, through the 6 purification techniques of Shatkarma. This purification (shatkarma) has called Ghata Shuddhi in Gheranda Samhita.

Thus, the practice of Shatkarma is important for every person who has just begin the journey of yoga as per Gheranda Samhita.

The sequence of 6 practices of Shatkarma according to Sage Gheranda is also a little different from the HYP sequence. Here shatkarma sequence is: Dhauti, Basti, Neti, Nauli, Trataka and Kapalbhathi

Conclusion

The practice of shatkriya or shatkarma is recommended in the Hathayoga tradition. Studies exploring the effects of four out of six cleansing procedures were found in physiological as well as clinical settings. No studies were available on basti and nauli which could be due to the difficult nature of the practice. The practice of dhauti was found to enhance respiratory functions and was useful in digestive disorders. Nasal cleansing, neti was particularly found beneficial in managing the rhinosinusitis in age groups ranging from children to adults. Although trataka practice was found to enhance cognition and bring a state of relaxation, but there was no evidence supporting its role in eye disorders. Kapalabhati was the most studies among the Shatkriya practices. The ranges of studies on kapalabhati included assessing the neurocognitive assessments, autonomic, and metabolic activity. The practice appears to have a beneficial role in the activation of sympathetic nervous system, enhances cognition, and improves overall metabolism. It was also found to enhance the respiratory functions in patients with asthma. Single case reports (one each) were also found for practices of dhauti, neti and kapalabhati and it was attributed to pushing the body to the physiological extreme.

This literature review was limited to online free databases only and due to the keywords chosen. Although we tried, including a variety of key-words related to shatkriya, there may have been studies that were missed in the current review because of exclusion through the keywords and databases.

The beneficial role of shatkriyas narrated in both traditional texts and evident from the small

body of empirical work warrants further rigorous scientific exploration. From the available literature, we found the practice of yogic cleansing technique safe, when practiced under the guidance of a trained teacher and has a potential role in health and disease.

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