

Role of Laghu Shankhprakhyalana- A Hygienic Yogic Tool to Maintain Positive Health

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ABSTRACT

Hygiene is a concept which is very much related to maintain health through cleanliness. It is related to both personal and professional practices to prevent and to reduce the incidence and spreading of diseases and maintain a holistic health. Very often we use cleanliness as a synonymous term of hygiene. But cleanliness is one of a means to achieve hygiene. The yogic scriptures describe about the personal care system to establish balance between physical and mental condition by removing mental and physical imperfections. This ancient personal care system is called Yoga. From time immemorial the tools and technique used by our seers and sages to maintain the hygiene of their body and mind. This is known as *yogic shatkriya* or *shatkarma*. Modern technique of hygiene is a practice for not spreading diseases causing organisms, but yogic way of hygiene is a practice to remove toxin from the body and mind, so that one can achieve positive health. A positive health helps to lead a positive, quality life even in old age. Laghoo Sankhprakhyalana is one of the purification techniques to improve the metabolism by removing the toxin from the body and mind. This practice on the regular basis helps to maintain a positive health. Yoga enhances strength, flexibility, immunity and helps to maintain optimum health by preventing as well as curing various diseases. Different yogic texts describe how various yogic *Shatkarma*, *Asanas* and *Pranayamas* help to maintain good health even in old age.

Aim the study: This article aims to study the effect of Laghoo Sankhprakhylana along with other *kriyas* of *Satkarma* with specific personal hygienic practice and to establish the importance of Laghoo Sankhprakhylana on positive health by the collection of its concept and advantages as mentioned in various ancient texts and research articles.

Conclusion: The traditional texts of yoga describe the hygienic effects of yoga on health of a person along with several health benefits like healthy ageing. In various research journals it is found that there are hues number of positive effect of the Laghoo Shankhprakhhalana. It has both the preventive as well as curative health benefits.

Key word: *Satkriya*, *Shatkarma*, Laghoo Sankhprakhylana, hygiene, cleanliness, positive health

Background:

Hygiene is a combination of practices performed to maintain health. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), "Hygiene refers to conditions and practices that help to maintain health and prevent the spread of diseases". Practicing good hygiene is beneficial to one's overall physical and mental health and more than just being clean. Keeping entire body clean from head to toe not only helps prevent illnesses and infections from harmful bacteria, but it can boost self-esteem. We tend to feel better when we take care of ourselves. There are many personal hygiene habits to incorporate into your everyday routine to make sure that it keeps one and the environment around you hygienic. *Shatkarma* is an important limb of hatha yoga. This is a combination of very effective purification procedures for the physical and mental bodies of a human being to achieve health.

Shatkarmas are very simple and can be easily learnt. There are many methods described in the yoga texts as well as the Yoga Upanishads. Today one needs to learn merely a few of them to stay healthy and young. The procedure of *Shatkarma* is a personal care system which is much more beneficial than modern personal hygienic system. Modern Personal hygiene is how to take care of the body. This practice includes bathing, washing your hands, brushing your teeth, and more. It is only possible by adhering certain rules and regulation like personal cleanliness, inhaling fresh air, doing proper exercise, taking balanced healthy diet in day to day basis. Yoga prescribes *Shatkarma*, *Pranayama*, *Asana*, *Mitahara* or *Sattvic* diet etc. The most important tool for maintaining hygiene is personal cleanliness, whereas the practice of *Laghu Sankhprakhylana* in yoga is most important tool to remove impurities from body and mind.

The word *shatkarma* comes from the Sanskrit word 'shat' and 'karma'. The word *shat* means six and *karma* means action. These six cleansing practices in Hatha Yoga are known as *Shatkarma* or *Shatkriya*. These techniques promote health and well-being by purifying the whole body and mind. Yogi Swatmarama in the second chapter (verse 21-22) of *Hatha Pradipika* recommends these techniques should be done prior to the practice of *Pranayama*. The *shatkarma* techniques include *dhauti* (internal and external cleansing), *basti* (yogic enema), *neti* (nasal cleansing), *trataka* (concentrated gazing), *nauli* (abdominal massaging) and *kapalbhati* (frontal sinus cleansing). The aim of performing *shatkarma* is to create harmony between the two major *pranic* flows of *ida* and *pingala*. One can obtain a balance at the physical as well as psychological aspects of our existence. These practices are also used before other yogic techniques to purify the psychic channels. *Shatkarmas* are performed to promote the health of yogis, to awaken the doormat energy or potentialities within us. These practices should never be learned from books or taught by inexperienced people. It is essential to be personally instructed as to how and when to perform the various techniques of *shatkarmas*. The personal hygiene of modern world is only meant for physical outward cleanliness which includes hand washing, taking bath, taking clean food, using clean clothes and maintaining surrounding cleanliness. In this regard yoga helps to maintain both physical as well as the mental cleanliness.

Modern science says our internal organ comprised of eleven major systems includes circulatory, respiratory, digestive, excretory, nervous, and endocrine systems, etc. To make sure the healthy and proper functioning of the body as a whole, the cleansing of organ systems is very important on a regular basis. It can be done by intervention of drugs, but the non-pharmacological intervention method prescribed by ancient yogic texts is *shatkarma*. Yogi Swatmaram has mentioned that “These are powerful practices that create harmony between mind and body resulting in the revitalization and rejuvenation of the body with good physiological effect”. (Muktibodhanada, 2012) (SK., 2017)

Types of Dhauti:

Literally *dhauti* means the cleaning of the digestive tract. It means cleansing of the head and entire alimentary canal from mouth to the anus. One can restore the natural balance of the body by cleansing the entire digestive tract and respiratory tract. There is the description of various types of *dhauti-kriya* in Gheranda Samhita by sage Gheranda. These are *Antar Dhauti* (internal cleansing), *Danta Dhauti* (teeth cleansing), *Hrid Dhauti* (cleansing of the chest) and *Mulashodhana* (cleansing of the rectum). The technique of *Antar Dhauti* or internal cleansing is of four types as follows:

1. *Vātasāra Dhauti*: Draw in air slowly through the mouth forming it like the beak of a crow, move the abdomen and slowly expel through the lower passage. It purifies the body, destroys all diseases and increases the body heat.
2. *Vārisāra Dhauti*: Drink water through the mouth to fill the stomach up to the throat. The push it by moving the abdomen and evacuate it through the lower passage. It purifies the body and make it radiant.
3. *Vahnīsāra Dhauti*: Push the navel back against the spine a hundred times. It destroys the abdominal diseases and increases the gastric fire.
4. *Bahiṣkṛta Dhauti*: Fill the stomach with air forming the Kākī-Mudrā. Retain it for one and half an hour. Then force it down along the lower passage.

Laghu Sankhaprakhyāna is a technique of *Vārisāra Dhauti*. It is a process of cleaning the whole digestive tract with water. This technique is very secret as it purifies the body and bestows a divine body upon perfection. It is commonly known as *Śankhaprakṣhālana kriyā*, which comprises two words, i.e., *śankha* and *prakṣhālana*. The word *śankha* means conch (representing the coiled and cavernous-shaped intestine) and *prakṣhālana* means to wash. This practice involves drinking lukewarm salt water in combination with five *Āsanas* eight rounds each. These are as follows:

1. *Tadasana*
2. *Tiryaka tadasana*
3. *Kati chakrasana*
4. *Tiryaka bhujangasana*
5. *Udarakarshanasana*

Technique of Laghu Shankhprakhylana:

Laghu Shankhprakhshalana should be performed on an empty stomach putting on light and comfortable clothing. Bed tea or coffee should also be avoided. One needs to prepare two litres of lukewarm added with two teaspoons of salt per litre of water. At first two glasses of warm saline water is given to drink quickly. Thereafter without wasting any time the following *Asanas* should be performed.

After the first round is over, if the practitioner feels the urge to pass the stool can do it. In the second round he has to take another two glasses of lukewarm water and all the *Asanas* are repeated in the same order and number. In case if the practitioner feels the urge to pass the stool can do it. After the third round is over it is advisable to go the toilet. After the practice of Laghu Shankhprakhshalana, it is better to relax, preferably in *Shavasana*, or sit quietly for at least half an hour before taking any food or drink. During this period, sleep should be avoided. At this juncture whole of the alimentary canal, from mouth to anus, is totally at rest and all the systems of the body are quite relaxed.

Diet: A light vegetarian diet is preferable for that day. Intake of *khicheri* is recommended as it is helpful in the restoration of correct digestive function. It is cooked with equal quantity of rice and mung dal. Addition of sufficient quantity of ghee (clarified butter) is necessary to coat the intestinal walls until the body produces a new lining. It is taken in about 45 minutes after whole process of Laghu Shankhprakhshalana is over. This food provides as an active lubricant in a gentler way to the bare walls of digestive tract (Saraswati, 2008).

Contra-indications: People suffering from heart problem, kidney problem, high blood pressure, should not practise Laghu Shankhprakhshalana. Those suffering from any health issue and taking medicine should take the guidance from their doctor as well as an experienced yoga teacher before attempting it. One should avoid this practice during pregnancy and mensuration.

Benefits: Laghu shankhprakhshalana alleviates digestive problems. This practice tones the liver, other digestive organs and glands. It strengthens the immune system, reduces excess mucus and purifies the blood. It recharges the whole body, removes blockages from the psychic channels of the *nadis* and stimulates the psychic centres of the *chakras*. The harmony of the five psychic energy or *pancha-pranas* takes place. The immune power increases to keep one active and energetic in every spear of life.

Research findings to prove the effect of Laghu Shankhprakhylana:

1. Shankha Prakshalana is an easy and effective technique for cleansing the gastrointestinal canal, thereby removing all the auto intoxicants present in the alimentary canal. Moreover, it is a very economical procedure which can be performed by the patients at his residence. The role of Shankha Prakshalana is very effective in overcoming the irritable bowel syndrome. Shankha Prakshalana may also be given to the patients of anxiety neurosis with satisfactory results. Its role in the treatment of renal disorder is encouraging in early cases

only. However, in the second and third degree chronic renal failure cases its role is yet to be established and needs further investigation. Similarly, in the case of thyrotoxicosis no conclusive evidence could be observed due to very limited number of cases (S. N. SINGH, January & April 1988).

2. A pilot study done by recruiting 32 patients with mild to moderate essential HTN admitted for a week long residential integrated yoga therapy program at the integrative health home in Bengaluru. Patients had a daily routine of 6 hours of integrated approach of yoga therapy (IAYT) module for HTN that included physical postures, relaxation sessions, pranayama and meditations. LSP, an additional practice, that involved drinking of luke-warm water (with or without an herbal combination, triphala) followed by a set of specific yoga postures that activates defecation reflex, was administered on 2(nd) (LSP without triphala) and 5(th) day (LSP with triphala). Assessments (sitting blood pressure and pulse rate) were done just before and after both the sessions of LSP. Secondary outcome measures such as body mass index (BMI), symptom scores, medication scores, fatigue, state and trait anxiety, general health and quality of life were assessed on 1(st) and 6(th) day of IAYT intervention (Mashyal P, 2014). The result shows that there was significant ($P < 0.001$, paired t test) reduction in blood pressure (systolic and diastolic) and pulse rate immediately after both the sessions (LSP with and without triphala). There were no adverse effects reported during or after LSP. LSP (a part of IAYT) is a safe and useful procedure for patients with essential hypertension. LSP with triphala is more useful.
3. Kiran et al. evaluated the safety and the effect of LSP on bowel health among 60 healthy subjects randomized into two groups of 30 subjects to each group. The study arm went through the procedure of LSP once a week, continuously for 4 weeks whereas the control arm received no intervention. A significant reduction in Constipation Scores (measured by Cleveland Clinic CS) from 8.73 ± 0.69 to 3.63 ± 0.49 was found in the study arm at $p < 0.001$ whereas the control group demonstrated no statistically significant difference between the group. No adverse event or effect was found during the 4 - week study duration. It can be concluded that LSP is safe and effective for patients with constipation (Kiran S, 2019).
4. Low back pain also known as Lumbago is one the very common problems involving the muscles, bones, and nerves. All of us must face once Prevalence of Chronic low back pain has been administered 19.6% worldwide in the age group of 20 - 59 year. In a cross - over randomized controlled trial by Haldavnekar et. al²⁵, the immediate effect of LSP was assessed on the patients with chronic low back pain. Forty pat of age group 25 - 70 years were randomly assigned to either group A for LSP or group B for back pain - specific asana/technique (BST) on 3rd day. Patients of Groups A and B were interchanged on the 5th day. Pain intensity by Oswestry disability index (ODI) and Eleven - point numerical rating scale, spinal mobility Leighton type goniometer, trait anxiety by Spieldberger's state and trait anxiety inventory, and spinal flexion by Straight leg raising test, were measured before and after the intervention on both the days. A significant reduction from 2.70 ± 1.54 to 1.70 ± 1.47 in ODI scores and from 5.35 ± 2.00 to 4.03 ± 1.8 in 11 points

numerical rating scale was reported at $p < 0.001$. A significant reduction in state anxiety and spinal flexibility (Haldavnekar RV, 2014)

5. Obesity greatly increases the risk for chronic diseases like CAD, Ischemic Heart disease, type 2 diabetes, low back pain, cardiovascular disease, certain cancer (Ugwuja EI, 2013).
6. There are several methods used for the preparation of a colonoscopy, as LSP is one of the unique techniques which can be used in the preparation of a colonoscopy. In a study conducted by Arya V et. Al, the aim of the study was to compare NuLytely (®) (PEG - 3350, sodium chloride, potassium chloride, and sodium bicarbonate) and yoga (LWS/yoga) as a colonoscopy in preparation. Information was gathered on the effectiveness of bowel preparation, patient security, patient acceptance, and adverse effects. The results showed that colon preparation with LWS/yoga under supervision was superior to colon preparation using Nulytely as instructed. Laghu Shankhprakashalana is an effective tool for colonoscopy preparation (Gupta S, 2016).
7. In another study, for preparation of the intestine for a colonoscopy, the effectiveness and safety of SP and PEG (Polyethylene glycol) were done. Before the colonoscopy, the SP method was performed in the morning under the guidance of a yoga instructor. In terms of a procedure for preparing for a colonoscopy with higher tolerability and fewer side effects, the traditional yoga practice known as "Shankha Prakshalana" is preferable to the usual PEG - electrolyte solution (K., 2014).
8. LSP can be a good alternative to treat bowel health as it eliminates all toxins from the stomach and cleans the whole alimentary canal. Singh et al. used shankha prakshalana on different patients of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), anxiety neurosis, chronic renal failure, thyrotoxicosis, and healthy volunteers. The study mainly revealed the qualitative analysis only. Among 27 patients of IBS, a significant relief of 85.71% in subjects with constipation, 87.37% in abdominal pain, 42.85% in irregular bowel habits, and 50.00% in diarrhea cases was reported (Singh SN, 1988 Jan;). In the same patient population, 40% of patients noticed increased appetite, 33% of them relieved from vomiting tendency and 57.14% reported reduced drug dependency. Apart from all these, 2 early cases of renal failure showed a drastic reduction in blood urea levels from 163 mg% and 215 mg% to 32 mg% and 38 mg% respectively after three weeks. However other qualitative results were also reported from healthy volunteers (12), anxiety (17 patients), and thyrotoxicosis (5 patients), which showed satisfactory result, symptomatic relief and —general feeling of well - being respectively, as an output.

Conclusion:

The Hatha Yoga tradition has emphasised on the practice of *Shatkarma*. It is a must for every practitioner to balance the *tridoshas* of *kapha*, *pitta*, and *vata*. Various researches have explored the benefits of *Shatkarmas* of *dhauti*, *basti*, *neti* *trataka*, *navli* and *kapalbhati*. The practice of *dhauti* was found to enhance respiratory functions and was useful in the management of digestive disorders. Laghu Sankhprakashalana is a technique of *varisara dhauti*. It induces steadiness of the body and calmness of the mind. On a physical level, this cleansing alleviates all kinds of ailments in the digestive tract like gas, constipation and acidity. It can also be part of a yogic approach to cure the problem of type II diabetes. The

process will also make all the sense organs more sensitive, making more consciousness about diet. It helps a person to stay healthy and manage his weight by naturally choosing the food that his body needs. A person can develop flexibility and removes the pent up emotions. The cleansing of digestive system also relieves skin problems such as rashes, eczema and pimples. The practice of Laghu Shankhaprakshalana has a potential role to build up a healthy body and mind.

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