

## THE ORIGIN OF YOGIC CLEANSINGS

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**ABSTRACT:** *Many purificatory practices are described in Hathayoga. The erudite author tries in this article to trace the origin of these Satkarmas.*

It is not difficult to trace the origin of the other angas of Hathayoga like Asanas, Pranayama, Dhyana etc to Smritis, Puranas, Tantras and Yoga Upanisads etc., but the same is not the case with regard to its purificatory processes – the *satkarmas*. No doubt, the word *satkarmas* occurs in the Tantric texts like Yoginitantra, but it is purely indicative of Tantric practices such as *santi*, *vasikarana*, *stambhana*<sup>1</sup> etc., having the least link with *yogic kriyas*. Great wonder, the sole authority on Rajayoga, Patanjali (and even his prominent commentators) nowhere refers to *satkarmas*. Considering *vyadhi*<sup>2</sup> (disease) as the first and the foremost psychological disturbance (*cittaviksepa*), *patanjalayogadarsana* (PYD) recommends a purely spiritual-cum-psychological aid, i.e the *isvara pranidhana*<sup>3</sup>. The scrupulous cleanliness (*sauca*)<sup>4</sup>, the strict yogic observance have no connection with *satkarmas*, albeit later commentators on PYD like Narayana Tirtha<sup>5</sup> have willfully and intentionally endeavoured to prove otherwise, which effort is farfetched and imposed indeed.

One wonders why even the works attributed to the father of Hathayoga Goraksanatha miss these significant *kriyas*, which in fact are the part and parcel of Hathayoga. Similarly an important treatise on Bhagavadgita, the Jnanesvari, and even the main Yoga Upanisads are silent about

*sathkriyas*. Yet it is true that these practices have been quite old. For instance, the technique of *ghrtaneti* as existing these days appears to be as old as the Budhistic era, for a famous physician of that age, Jivaka employed some practice of that kind to cure the wife of a renowned merchant of the fatal nasal-cum-head disease<sup>6</sup>. At a place in Sivasamhita<sup>7</sup>(SiS), there is a slight passing reference to *dhautipraksalana*, though in the derogatory sense. In Siddhasiddhantapaddhati<sup>8</sup> (SSP), we find a casual mention of *sankhapraksalana* but again in a reproaching style. In Yogayajnavalkya<sup>9</sup> an act somewhat similar to *trataka* has been enlisted. Hatharatnavali and Hathasamhita as quoted in Vacaspatyam<sup>10</sup> also refer to *satkarmas*. For the first time in the Hathayogic history, it is only in the Gherandasamhita<sup>11</sup> (GhS) and Hathayogasamhita<sup>12</sup> (HYS) that *satkarmas* find their due and rightful place, i.e as the first aid to yoga. Hathapradipika<sup>13</sup> though recognizes the value of *satkarmas* yet it refrains from assigning them any independent status.

### YOGIC CLEANSINGS : THE SATKARMAS

Hatharatnavali and Satkarmasangraha describe good many purificatory exercises<sup>14</sup> but the works themselves are not much old.

Now as seen before, these practices find mention only in Hathayogapradipika (HYP), GhS., HYS and HR and are not recorded prior to these texts anywhere. May these be being directly transmittable only in the most secret oral teacher-taught tradition, or because of not being absolutely obligatory, these remain unrecorded in the old texts. Nonetheless, in order to solve this historical riddle, we should not confine ourselves merely to the yogic studies but must have a peep into the Ayurvedic works as well. Ayurveda has certainly influenced and consequently contributed a good deal to the Hathayoga school. For instance, in case of physical imbalances and diseases, Hathayoga has fully accepted the Ayurvedic theory of tridosa in principle and practice. While enumerating the benefits of *dhautikarma*, HP<sup>15</sup> (and similarly HR and SKS) guarantees that this practice cures twenty kapha diseases. However, it does not name or elaborate those diseases, for which naturally one has to look back to the Ayurvedic texts<sup>16</sup>. Similar is the case with other ailments, described at random.

So far the original source of satkarmas is concerned, it would be genuine to admit that Hathayoga has picked them from the pancakarma of Ayurveda, since both the systems employ them for cleansing and purification of internal organs, especially the alimentary canal. The Ayurvedic *pancakarmas* namely *vamana* (vomiting), *virecama* (purgative), *vasti* (enema) and *nasyam*<sup>17</sup> (nasal therapy) have a good many parallels in Hathayoga such as *vamana*<sup>18</sup> (dhauti), *varisara*<sup>19</sup>, *vasti*<sup>20</sup> and *netikriya*<sup>21</sup>. But this similarity cannot be carried too far for the systems vary a great deal otherwise. Further to that, while yogis use only pure water and air for such irrigations, the *pancakarmas* prescribe medicated solutions

instead<sup>22</sup>. Moreover the yogis practice them daily for hygienic and preventive purposes, whereas Ayurvedic *pancakarmas* are resorted to only as therapeutically measures when necessary<sup>23</sup>. *Satkarmas* help in the thorough and perfect cleansing of the internal organs, thereby increasing their tenacity and activity, and once learnt from an expert, can be resorted to with ease sans any fear.

*Satkarmas* in line with other Hathayogic *angas*, everywhere have the spiritual end in view<sup>24</sup> – for example *neti* though destroys *kaphadosas* is said to bestow clairvoyance<sup>25</sup> (*divyadrsti*) and to facilitate *khecari*, which on perfection would lead a higher end (*unmani*) equated with *rajayoga* or advaita or *shajavastha*; *karnadhauti*<sup>26</sup>, as physical practice for cleansing the ears, enables the practicant to hear the mystical sounds (*nadas*) which are produced in the *susumna* after *nadisuddhi* and ultimately culminates in *manolaya*, leading to emancipation.

*Trataka*<sup>27</sup>, the eliminator of all eye diseases, induces *divyadrsti* and helps towards attaining *sambhavi mudra*, which on perfection makes the *sadhaka* identical with *Brahaman*; *varisara*<sup>28</sup> is said to transform the body into divine form; whereas *vasti*<sup>29</sup> not only cleanses the rectum but invigorates the sense organs as well; thereby bringing serenity of mind. The same is true of other yogic practices. Ayurvedic *pancakarmas*, on the other hand, do not help in spiritual elevation. Even then, we have to conclude the Hathayogic *satkarmas* have their original rooting in Ayurvedic *pancakarmas* and not the vice-versa. As already seen above this conclusion becomes more authentic when we observe the yogic purificatory practices from historical angle.

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HP. 2.25, also Cf. HR. 1.26. SKS V. 58.
16. *Slesnavikarmsca vimsatimata urdhvam vyakhyasyamah; tadyathatrptisca tandra ca, nidradhikyam ca, staimityam ca, gurugatrata ca, alasyam ca...svetamutranetravarcaśvam ca; iti vimsatih slesmavikarah.* Carakasamhita of Agnivesha ed. by Ganga Sahaya Pandeya Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi 1961; 1.20. 17, also cf. *Sarangadhrasamhita*, Pandita Pustakalaya Kashi, 1950; 1.7 119-122.
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26. GhS 1.33 ; HYS, p.9, V:23; for *nada* also ef, HP, 4.68.
27. GhS. 1.54; HYS, p.13, V:44; for *sambhavi* also GhS. 3.67
28. Ghs. 1.18; HYS, p.5, V:7.
29. HP, 2.29.