



# The Concept of Shatkarma in Hatha Yoga Pradipika and Its Effect on Holistic Health

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## Abstract

Hatha Yoga Pradipika describes Shatkarma as an essential system of yogic purification practices intended to cleanse the body, mind, and consciousness and prepare the practitioner for higher stages of yoga. The present research paper analyze six cleansing techniques and their impact on physical, mental, and spiritual health. According to Hatha Yoga Pradipika, the accumulation of impurities, toxins, excess mucus, and bodily disorders obstructs yogic practices and disturbs the balance of the body and mind. The study reveals that Dhauti, Basti, and Nauli strengthen the digestive system, stimulate digestive fire, and help in the management of constipation, indigestion, and abdominal disorders. Neti and Kapalabhati purify the respiratory system and are beneficial in conditions such as sinusitis, allergies, mucus disorders, and other respiratory problems. Trataka enhances concentration, memory, mental clarity, and emotional stability.

The study further highlights that Shatkarma is not limited to physical purification alone but also contributes significantly to mental well-being by reducing stress, anxiety, restlessness, and mental distractions. These practices help in the purification of nadis and regulation of pranic flow, thereby preparing the practitioner for meditation, concentration, and higher spiritual experiences. In the Hatha Yogic tradition, purification of the body and mind is regarded as the foundation of spiritual development and self-realization. In the context of modern lifestyle disorders caused by stress, pollution, unhealthy dietary habits, sedentary living, and technological dependence, the relevance of Shatkarma has increased considerably. The findings of this study suggest that the Shatkarma practices described in Hatha Yoga Pradipika represent an effective and scientific yogic approach for holistic health promotion, disease prevention, mental balance, and spiritual upliftment.

**Keywords:** Hatha Yoga, Shatkarma, Physical Health, Mental Health, Spiritual Health

## 1. Introduction :

In the Indian yogic tradition, Hatha Yoga holds a highly significant place. Hatha Yoga is not merely a system limited to āsana and prāṇāyāma; rather, it is a scientific method for the purification and balance of the body, mind, and consciousness. The primary objective of Hatha Yoga is to lead the practitioner toward physical health, mental stability, and spiritual upliftment. Major Hatha Yoga texts such as Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Gheranda Samhita, and Hatha Ratnavali provide a detailed and systematic description of Śaṭkarma. In these texts, purification of the body and mind is regarded as the essential foundation of yogic practice.



The term “Śaṭkarma” is derived from two Sanskrit words: “Śaṭ,” meaning six, and “Karma,” meaning actions or practices. The six cleansing processes described in Hatha Yoga are Dhauti, Basti, Neti, Nauli, Trataka, and Kapalabhati, which are considered the principal methods of internal purification. According to Hatha Yoga scriptures, accumulated impurities, toxins, and bodily defects create obstacles in yogic practice, preventing the practitioner from attaining success in higher stages of Yoga. Therefore, the practice of Śaṭkarma is considered essential for the purification of both body and mind.

Similarly, in Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Swami Svatmarama clearly states that practitioners who possess an excess of fat and phlegm (Kapha) should practice Śaṭkarma before beginning Prāṇāyāma. Through these cleansing practices, internal purification of the body takes place, bodily obstructions are removed, and the flow of prāṇa becomes smooth and natural. According to Hatha Yogic teachers, imbalance of the three doṣas—Vāta, Pitta, and Kapha—is the principal cause of disease. Śaṭkarma helps balance these three doṣas, thereby making the body healthy and strong. In the present age, irregular lifestyle, pollution, stress, fast food consumption, mental imbalance, and technological dependency have led to a rapid increase in physical and psychological disorders. Problems such as obesity, constipation, sinusitis, allergies, insomnia, stress, and depression have become common. In such circumstances, Śaṭkarma proves highly relevant as an effective method of natural purification of the body and mind. Dhauti, Basti, and Nauli strengthen the digestive system, while Neti and Kapalabhati help purify the respiratory system. Trataka develops mental concentration and memory power. Thus, Śaṭkarma plays a significant role in maintaining physical and mental health. According to Hatha Yoga, the body and mind are deeply interconnected. When the body becomes pure and balanced, the mind naturally becomes calm and stable. Śaṭkarma not only removes physical disorders but also reduces mental stress, restlessness, and negativity. Regular practice develops concentration, self-control, mental clarity, and emotional balance. For this reason, Hatha Yoga texts also regard Śaṭkarma as preparation for meditation and higher yogic practices. According to the Hatha Yoga tradition, once the body and mind are purified, the practitioner progresses toward spiritual advancement. Śaṭkarma purifies the nāḍīs, balances the flow of prāṇa, and prepares the practitioner for dhyāna (meditation), dhāraṇā (concentration), and samādhi. Modern health science has also begun to emphasize detoxification, stress management, and holistic health. In this context, the Śaṭkarma practices described in Hatha Yoga are emerging as effective methods of preventive and holistic healthcare. Therefore, the purpose of the present research paper is to study the physical, mental, and spiritual significance of Śaṭkarma as described in Hatha Yoga texts and to analyze their relevance in modern life. This study attempts to establish that Śaṭkarma is not merely a part of ancient yogic tradition, but also a highly useful and scientific method for addressing lifestyle-related problems of the modern age.

## **2. Śaṭkarma in Hatha Yoga Pradipika :**

In the Indian yogic tradition, Hatha Yoga occupies a special place. Hatha Yoga is not confined only to postures and breathing techniques; rather, it is a holistic system for the purification of body, mind, and consciousness. Major Hatha Yoga texts such as Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Gheranda Samhita, and Hatha Ratnavali contain detailed descriptions of Śaṭkarma. The word Śaṭkarma is composed of “Śaṭ” (six) and “Karma” (actions). These six purification techniques are:

1. Dhauti
2. Basti
3. Neti
4. Nauli
5. Trataka
6. Kapalabhati

Hatha Yoga scriptures state that accumulated impurities, toxins, and defects in the body create obstacles in yogic practice. Therefore, the practice of Śaṭkarma is considered necessary for the purification of



body and mind. Due to the disordered lifestyle, stress, pollution, unhealthy diet, and mental imbalance of modern life, the relevance of Śaṭkarma has increased even further.

Swami Svātmarāma, while emphasizing the importance of Śaṭkarma in Hatha Yoga Pradīpikā, states that practitioners with excess fat and phlegm should perform Śaṭkarma before practicing Prāṇāyāma. When internal purification takes place through Śaṭkarma, bodily obstructions are removed and the circulation of prāṇa flows naturally throughout the body. Furthermore, bodily impurities do not spread into healthy organs through the effects of Prāṇāyāma.

According to the principles of Yogic therapy, proper use of Śaṭkarma is considered essential for the elimination of bodily waste. These Hatha Yogic purification practices do not involve medicines or complex instruments; therefore, regular practice helps a person remain healthy and long-lived. The practice of Śaṭkarma is beneficial when performed according to an individual's capacity, enabling one to gradually develop proficiency in each practice.

These cleansing practices help maintain equilibrium among the three doṣas—Vāta, Pitta, and Kapha—thereby keeping the body free from disease. They establish harmony between Idā and Piṅgalā, the two principal channels of prāṇic flow, resulting in physical and mental purification. This balance further helps remove obstacles on the spiritual path. According to Yogic philosophy, body and mind are interconnected, and their relationship also influences the inner consciousness. Thus, proper therapeutic application of Śaṭkarma helps healthy individuals maintain well-being because physical purification also leads to mental purification. When body and mind become pure and free from defects, spiritual benefits also arise. Once physical, mental, and spiritual purification are attained, the fear of diseases related to these levels gradually disappears, and the individual aspires to live a healthy, happy, and long life.

It is rightly said that “the first happiness is a healthy body. A healthy person performs all tasks efficiently and also thinks for the welfare of others. When a person is free from bodily suffering and experiences mental happiness while remaining away from negative thoughts, that condition is considered true happiness. The definition of health given by the World Health Organization resembles the definition provided by Maharshi Sūruta, according to which health does not merely mean physical well-being, but also mental fitness and balance. When body and mind are healthy, negativity naturally diminishes, and a person gradually moves toward spirituality with faith in divine power. Such a person also becomes socially strong by thinking about the welfare and progress of others. Hatha Yogic Śaṭkarma and Ayurvedic Pañcakarma can play an important role in developing the fourfold dimensions of human personality. Through their proper practice, impurities are removed from the gross body, imbalance among Vāta, Pitta, and Kapha is corrected, and the possibility of disease is greatly reduced.

#### 1. Dhauti Kriya

Chaturangula-vistaram hasta-panchadashayatam

Gurupadishtamargena siktam vastram shanair graset.

Punah pratyaharec caitad uditam dhauti karma tat.

Hatha Yoga Pradīpikā 2/24

Meaning : A soft cloth four fingers wide and fifteen hands long should be moistened with water and slowly swallowed according to the instructions of the Guru, and then withdrawn. This practice is known as Dhauti Karma.

Benefits of Dhauti :

Kasa-shvasa-plihakushtham kapha-rogaś cha vimśatih

Dhauti-karma-prabhavena prayantyeva na samśayah.

Hatha Yoga Pradīpikā 2/25

Meaning : Through the effects of Dhauti, cough, asthma, spleen disorders, skin diseases, and twenty kinds of Kapha-related diseases are destroyed without doubt. Dhauti cleanses the stomach and food



pipe. It purifies the upper digestive tract, thereby helping relieve respiratory disorders. It is also beneficial for intestinal worms and liver-related disorders.

## 2. Basti Kriya

Nabhidaghna-jale payum nyastvotkatasana-sthitah |

Akunchanam prasaranam jala-bastim samacharet ||

Hatha Yoga Pradipika 2/26

Meaning : Sitting in water up to the navel in Utkatasana posture, one should contract and expand the anal region to draw water inward. This is called Jala Basti.

Benefits of Basti :

Gulma-plihodaram chapi vata-pitta-kaphodbhavah

Basti-karma-prabhavena kshiyante sakalamayah.

Hatha Yoga Pradipika 2/27

Meaning : Through Basti, abdominal tumors, spleen disorders, abdominal diseases, and all diseases arising from Vāta, Pitta, and Kapha are destroyed.

Dhatu-indriya-antahkarana-prasadam |

Dadac cha kantim dahanapradiptim ||

Ashesha-doshopachayam nihanyad |

Abhyasa-yogac cha jala-basti-karma ||

Hatha Yoga Pradipika 2/28

Meaning : Regular practice of Jala Basti purifies the bodily tissues, sense organs, and inner consciousness. It enhances bodily radiance, stimulates digestive fire, and destroys all accumulated defects. Basti cleanses the rectum, colon, and large intestine, thereby helping relieve constipation, abdominal disorders, and Vāta-related diseases. It is highly beneficial for digestive disorders such as indigestion, gas, acidity, and Kapha imbalance.

## 3. Neti Kriya :

Sutram vitasti-su-snigdham nasanalé praveshayet

Mukhan nirgamayet pashchat prochyate neti-karma tat.

Hatha Yoga Pradipika 2/29

Meaning : A smooth and soft thread about one hand in length should be inserted through the nostril and brought out through the mouth. This is called Neti Karma.

Benefits of Neti :

Kapalashodhini chaiva divya-drishti-pradayini |

Jatru-urdhva-jata-rogaugham netir ashu nihanti cha||

Hatha Yoga Pradipika 2/30

Meaning : Neti purifies the skull region and bestows divine vision. It quickly destroys all diseases occurring above the throat. Neti is highly effective in eliminating diseases of the head region. It purifies the nasal passages, eyes, and subtle channels. It is beneficial in sinusitis, cold, respiratory disorders, and nasal growths.

## 4. Nauli :

Amandavarta-vegena tundam savyapasavyatah

Natamso bhramayad esha naulih siddhaih prachakshyate.

Hatha Yoga Pradipika 2/33

Meaning : With the hands placed on the thighs and the body slightly bent forward, the abdominal muscles should be rotated rapidly from left to right. Siddhas call this practice Nauli.

Benefits of Nauli :

Mandagni-sandipan-pachanadi

Sandhapika-ananda-kari sadaiva

Ashesha-doshamaya-shoshani cha



Hatha-kriya-maulir iyam cha naulih.

Hatha Yoga Pradipika 2/34

Meaning : Nauli stimulates weak digestive fire, improves digestion, creates joy, and destroys all bodily defects and diseases. It is considered the crown jewel of Hatha Yogic practices. Nauli is regarded by Hatha Yogic masters as a life-restoring practice. It massages and strengthens all abdominal organs and improves digestion, thereby helping remove digestive disorders naturally.

5. Kapalabhati :

Bhastraval lohakarasya rechapurau sasambhramau |

Kapalabhati-vikhyata kapha-dosha-vishoshani ||

Hatha Yoga Pradipika 2/35

Meaning : Rapid inhalation and exhalation resembling the movement of a blacksmith's bellows is known as Kapalabhati. It destroys disorders caused by Kapha.

Benefits of Kapalabhati : Swami Svatmarama describes Kapalabhati as a cleansing practice particularly effective for removing Kapha disorders. In Hatha Yoga, it is given an important place among the Śaṭkarma practices because it purifies the respiratory system, activates the brain, and balances vital energy. Kapalabhati helps remove cold, cough, and other Kapha-related disorders. It enhances bodily radiance, reduces wrinkles, delays aging, and supports a healthy and energetic life even in old age.

6. Trataka :

Nirikshen nishchala-drisha sukshma-lakshyam samahitah |

Ashru-sampata-paryantam acharyais tratakam smritam ||

Hatha Yoga Pradipika 2/31

Meaning : With steady gaze and concentrated mind, one should look at a subtle object without blinking until tears begin to flow. This practice is called Trataka.

Benefits of Trataka :

Mochanam netra-roganam tandradinam kapataka |

Yatnatas tratakam gopyam yatha hataka-petakam ||

Hatha Yoga Pradipika 2/32

Meaning : Trataka destroys eye diseases and removes laziness and drowsiness. It should be carefully preserved like a treasure chest of gold.

Thus, it may be concluded that Hatha Yogic Śaṭkarma purifies the body internally, making it healthy, energetic, disease-free, and radiant, while also producing mental peace and vitality. According to Maharshi Gheranda, bodily impurities also arise from impure dietary habits,

### **3. Effect on Holistic Health :**

#### **3.1 Importance of Śaṭkarma at the Physical Level :**

The human body is the medium through which all actions are performed; therefore, it is said, “Shariram adyam khalu dharma sadhanam” — the body is indeed the primary means for accomplishing all duties. According to Hatha Yogic philosophy, imbalance of the three doṣas causes disease. Śaṭkarma has a direct effect on the body by purifying and balancing various organs and systems.

##### **1. Purification and Improvement of the Digestive System**

Dhauti, Basti, and Nauli strengthen the digestive system. Modern lifestyle disorders such as indigestion, acidity, constipation, obesity, and gas have become common. Dhauti purifies the stomach, Basti cleanses the large intestine, and Nauli activates abdominal muscles while stimulating digestive fire. Modern studies indicate that yogic cleansing practices improve metabolism and digestive health.

##### **2. Purification of the Respiratory System**

Neti and Kapalabhati are extremely beneficial for respiratory health. Jal Neti cleanses the nasal passages and helps relieve sinusitis, allergies, common cold, and asthma. Kapalabhati improves lung capacity



and oxygen supply. In the modern era of pollution and smoking-related illnesses, these practices are highly relevant.

### 3. Effect on the Nervous and Endocrine Systems

Kapalabhati and Trataka positively influence the brain and nervous system. Trataka improves concentration, memory, and mental stability, while Kapalabhati enhances cerebral circulation and mental clarity. Modern neurophysiological studies suggest that yogic breathing and cleansing practices help regulate the autonomic nervous system.

### 4. Enhancement of Immunity

Ṣaṭkarma removes toxins from the body and enhances immunity. Due to stress and pollution, the immune system often becomes weak in modern life. Kapalabhati and Neti are especially beneficial in preventing respiratory infections.

## 3.2 Importance of Ṣaṭkarma at the Mental Level :

Mental stress, anxiety, depression, and insomnia have become global problems. Ṣaṭkarma plays an important role in preserving mental health.

### 1. Reduction of Stress and Anxiety

Kapalabhati and Trataka help reduce mental stress. Trataka calms mental restlessness and develops meditative awareness. Regular practice reduces excessive sympathetic nervous system activity and activates the parasympathetic nervous system, thereby promoting mental peace.

### 2. Improvement in Concentration and Memory

Trataka is regarded as one of the best techniques for mental concentration. In the age of digital distraction, Trataka is especially beneficial for students and researchers.

### 3. Emotional Balance

Yogic cleansing practices promote psychological balance. Regular practice reduces anger, fear, stress, and irritability, making the individual calmer, more disciplined, and more positive. Several yogic studies have also shown that these practices help reduce cortisol levels.

## 3.3 Importance of Ṣaṭkarma at the Spiritual Level :

The ultimate goal of Hatha Yoga is not merely physical health but the elevation of consciousness and self-realization.

### 1. Purification of Nāḍīs and Balance of Prāṇa

According to Hatha Yoga, prāṇa flows through subtle channels called nāḍīs. When these channels are impure, the flow of prāṇa becomes obstructed. Ṣaṭkarma purifies these channels and facilitates balanced prāṇic flow.

### 2. Preparation for Meditation

Trataka stabilizes and concentrates the mind, making it an ideal preparation for meditation. Kapalabhati activates the brain, while Neti promotes mental clarity. These practices prepare the practitioner for dhāraṇā, dhyāna, and samādhi.

### 3. Self-Realization and Development of Consciousness

Hatha Yoga considers the body a means of spiritual practice. When body and mind become purified, the practitioner becomes ready for higher spiritual experiences. Regular practice of Ṣaṭkarma develops introspection, self-discipline, and awareness.

Faith in divine power strengthens the spiritual dimension of human life. According to Sāṅkhya philosophy, physical suffering and mental disturbance are forms of spiritual suffering. Spiritual distress leads individuals toward negativity and loss of inner strength, whereas Yogic purification restores balance and self-awareness.

## Conclusion :

According to Hatha Yoga, purification of the body through Ṣaṭkarma also leads to purification of the mind and inner consciousness. Positive qualities emerge, ego diminishes, and self-control develops.



When self-purification is attained, an individual remains unaffected by negativity and continuously engages in righteous actions. A healthy person becomes spiritually strong as well. Just as a paper flower without fragrance lacks value, similarly, a body without inner purity is considered incomplete. The soul is compared to the fragrance of a rose, which gives true value to the flower. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna explains that the movement and control of life are governed by the Supreme Soul and the individual soul. Through understanding inner and outer powers, a person can realize hidden abilities and capacities. Thus, it may be concluded that through Śaṭkarma and Pañcakarma, physical purification leads to spiritual purification. Human thoughts shape intellect and behavior. According to Sāṅkhya philosophy, the mind is regarded as the chief sense faculty governing all other senses. Positive actions and disciplined living help regulate body, mind, and thoughts. By adopting the Hatha Yogic system of Śaṭkarma, individuals can overcome many physical, mental, and spiritual disorders and attain a healthy, balanced, and long life.

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