

SARVĀṄGASANA OR THE PAN-PHYSICAL POSE

THE NAME:

The pose is called Sarvāṅgāsana because it influences the thyroid and through it the whole body and its functions. In Saṁskṛita, Sarva means the *whole* and Aṅga means the *body*.

THE TECHNIQUE:

The student first lies supine on his seat with all muscles completely relaxed as shown in Fig. 32. Then he slowly raises his legs through the hip-joint till they make an angle of 30° with the ground. Here the legs are kept steady for a few seconds, and then raised through another 30°. Again they are kept steady here and again raised so as to complete a right angle. This is maintained for a few seconds again.¹

Up to now the student does not bring into action his arms and elbows which play only a passive part. But here he raises his whole body with his legs thrown up; and resting his weight on his arms, assumes the position shown in Figs. 33 and 34. At this point the student must see that his chest presses against his chin forming what has already been described as the Chin-Lock. (*vide* pp. 38-39). Further, in order to render the Chin-Lock perfect, he bends his forearms through the elbows and with his hands presses his trunk against the chin, till it is well set in the jugular notch. Fig. 35 represents the full pose, and Fig. 36 gives the back view of it. In this practice the posterior part of the neck lies close along the ground, the trunk and the legs are in a straight line and the mind is fixed on the thyroid. Only under exceptional circumstances attention is directed to the toes as shown in Fig. 35.

According to some traditions Savāṅgāsana is completed by raising the trunk while the hands remain extended, as illustrated in Figs. 33 and 34.

1. These stages have not been prescribed in the Yogic texts, nor are they required by different Yogic traditions. They are included here as they can be easily developed while raising the legs through a right angle, and as they possess cultural and curative values.

This may be looked upon as a mere variation of Sarvāṅgāsana as we have described it above; and may be called Sarvāṅgāsana with Hands Extended.

If Sarvāṅgāsana is to be practised by itself, the maximum time to be devoted to it should be twenty-four minutes, out of which four minutes may be given to the variation noticed in the last paragraph. Six minutes should be sufficient for the practice of Sarvāṅgāsana when it forms only a part of the daily exercises. In this case the variation may be safely omitted.

CULTURAL ADVANTAGES:

The principal cultural advantage of Sarvāṅgāsana lies in the maintenance of a healthy thyroid. As is well-known this gland is responsible for the general health of an individual. By taking care of the thyroid, Sarvāṅgāsana is able to maintain the whole human organism in a healthy condition.

The difference between Śīrshāsana and Sarvāṅgāsana lies in the position of the head. In both the poses the remaining part of the body stands vertical to the ground. Hence the cultural advantages that accrue from Śīrshāsana due to the vertical position of the body, are also secured in Sarvāṅgāsana. The Pan-Physical Pose very beneficially influences the sex glands both in males and females.

THERAPEUTICAL ADVANTAGES:

Symptoms of old age due to the faulty functioning of the thyroid are counteracted by means of Sarvāṅgāsana. Seminal weakness arising from the degeneration of the testes in the case of males and sexual disorders arising from the degeneration of the ovaries in the females can be extensively controlled by the practice of Sarvāṅgāsana. Dyspepsia, constipation, hernia, visceroptosis can be treated by Sarvāṅgāsana as well as by Śīrshāsana.

MATSYĀSANA OR THE FISH POSE

THE NAME:

The pose is called Matsyāsana because in swimming a person can

float on water, like the fish, for a considerable time, if he steadily lies there in this posture. In Saṁskṛita Matsya means the *fish*.

THE TECHNIQUE:

The student first takes his seat with his legs fully stretched out as shown in Fig. 37. He then bends one of his legs, preferably the right, in the knee-joint; and folding it upon itself, sets the same in the opposite hip-joint, so as to allow the foot to lie stretching at the root of the thigh with its sole turned upward. The other leg is similarly folded and set in the opposite hip-joint. Both the heels he adjusts in such a way that each of them presses on the adjacent portion of the abdomen. This forms the foot-lock shown in Figs. 38 and 39. Fig. 38 represents this foot-lock folded on the abdomen at right angles as is done in sitting posture. Fig. 39 shows the same unfolded and held in a straight line with the abdomen. After forming the foot-lock the student lies supine on his seat. Then resting his weight in the elbows, he raises his trunk and head; and throwing the latter backward with an arched spine, makes a bridge on his seat. (*vide* Fig. 40). Subsequently he makes hooks of his forefingers and with these takes hold of the opposite toes which are now available on their wrong sides. Fig. 41 gives the front view of the pose. Very often the hands instead of being given the position described above, are folded round the head.

The practice of Matsyāsana cannot be neglected if one wants to reap the full benefits of Sarvāṅgāsana, as the former pose forms a necessary complement of the latter. When thus undertaken Matsyāsana should be given only 3/10 of the time devoted to the main pose.

CULTURAL & THERAPEUTICAL ADVANTAGES:

This pose is to be practised as complementary to Sarvāṅgāsana. It greatly helps an individual to ensure the benefits he would get from the practice of Sarvāṅgāsana, so far as the thyroid is concerned.

HALĀSANA OR THE PLOUGH POSE

THE NAME:

The pose is called Halāsana because in its practice the body is

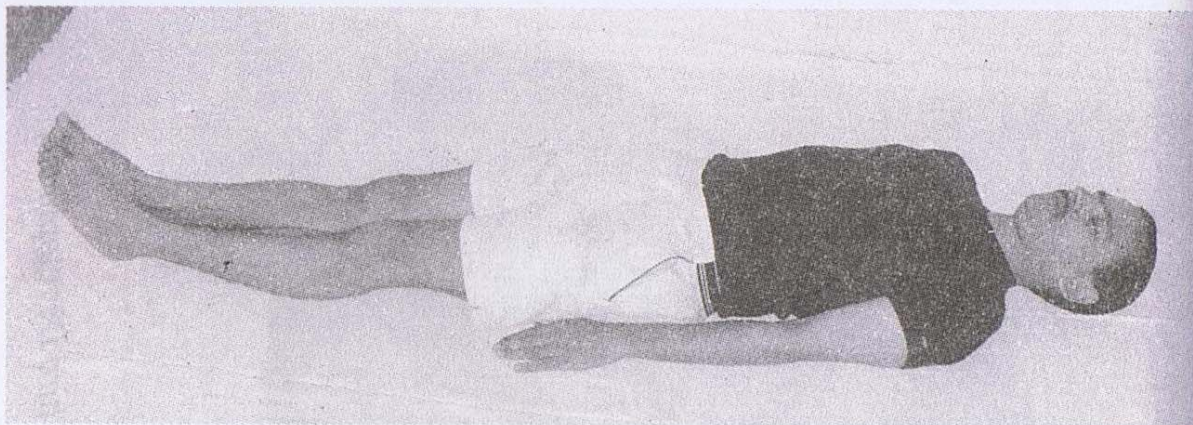


Fig. 32 : Lying Supine for Sarvāṅgāsana

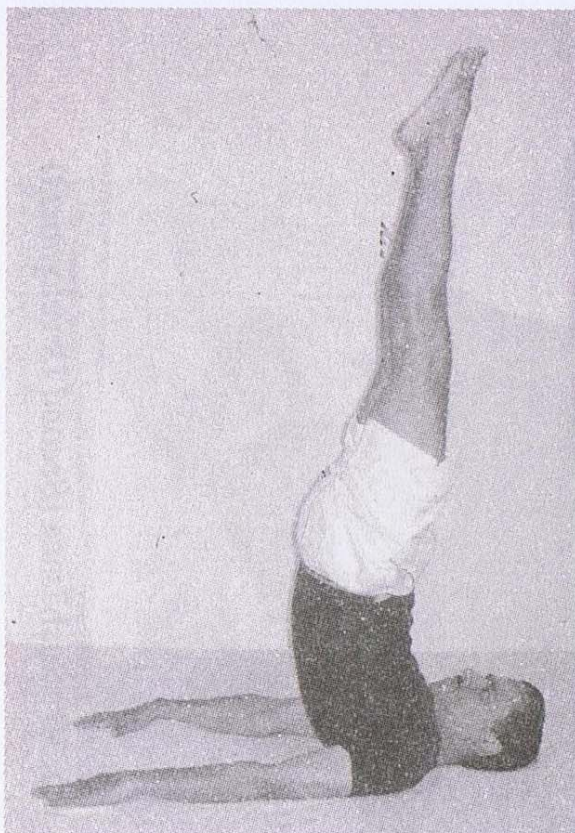


Fig. 33 : Sarvāṅgāsana (*With Hands Extended*) (*Side View*)

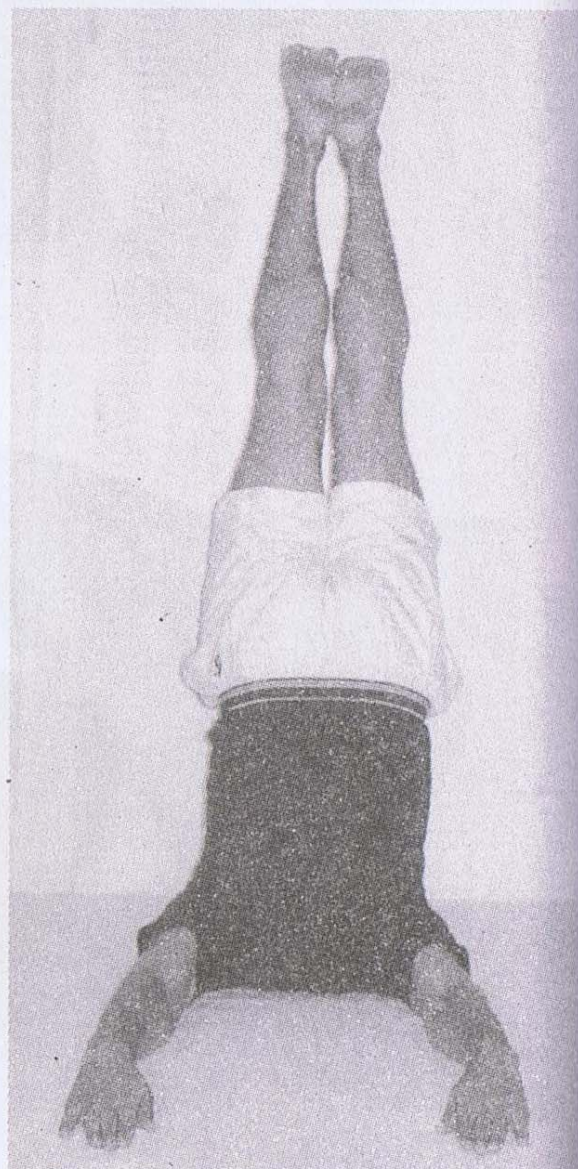


Fig. 34 : Sarvāṅgāsana (*With Hands Extended*) (*Back View*)

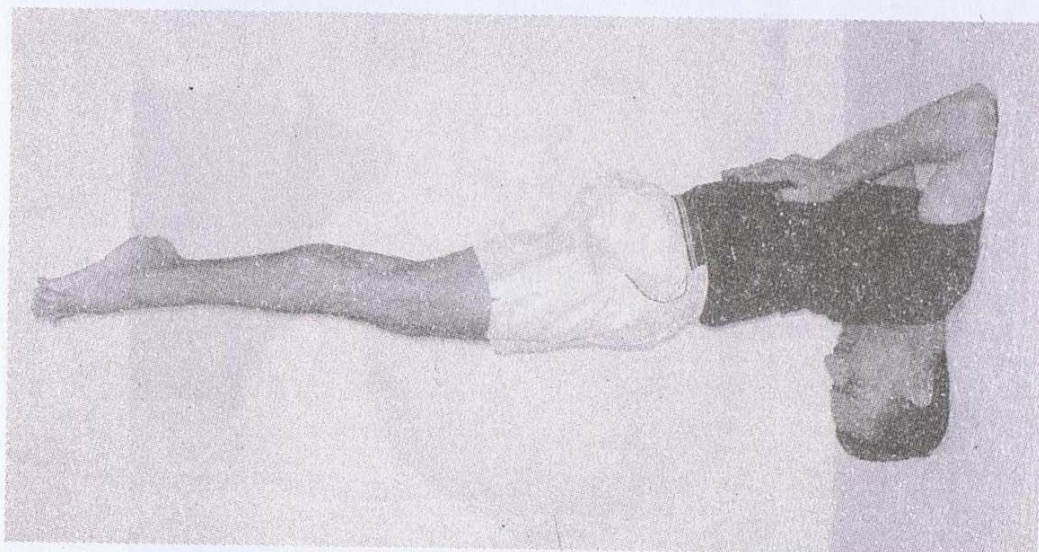


Fig. 35 : Sarvāṅgāsana or the Pan-Physical Pose
(Side View)

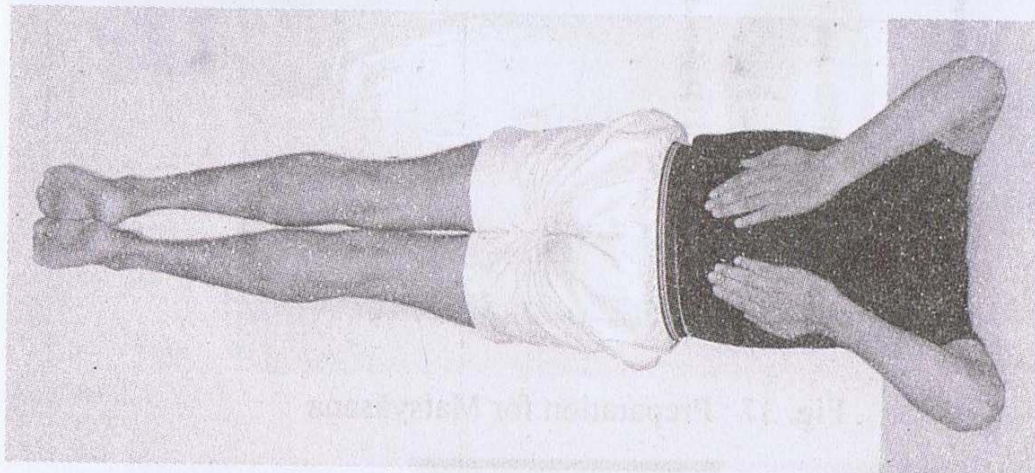


Fig. 36 : Sarvāṅgāsana
(Back View)

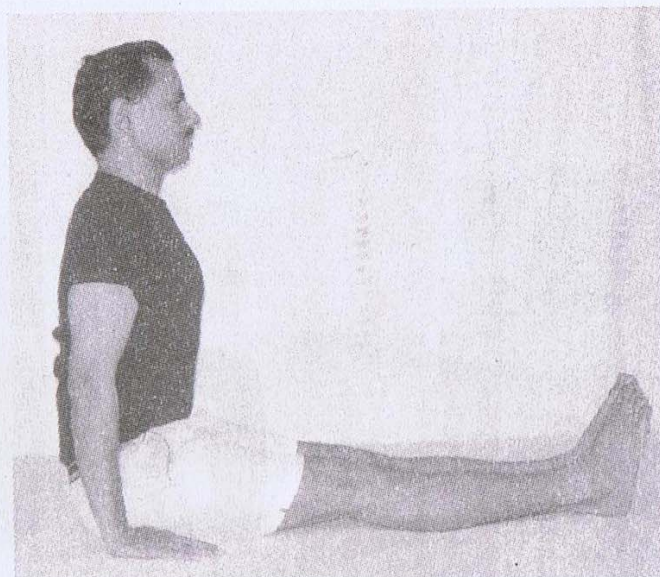
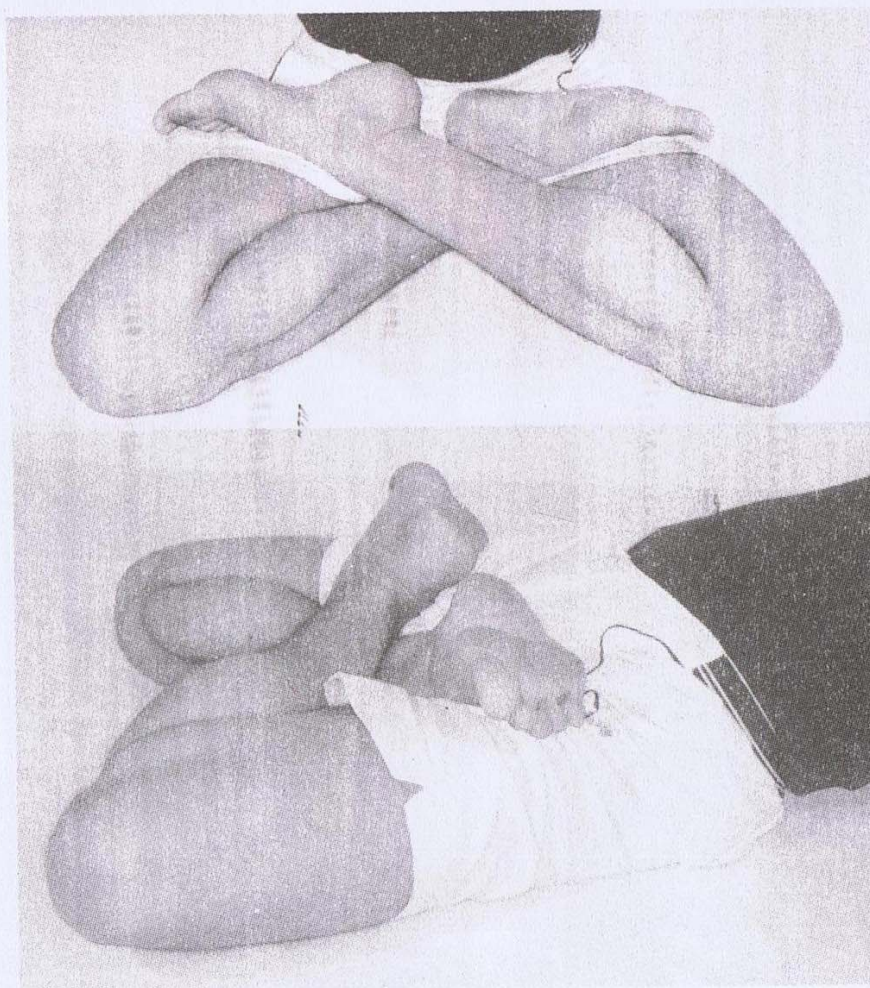


Fig. 37 : Preparation for Matsyāsana



Figs. 38 & 39 : Foot Lock for Matsyāsana
(Folded & Unfolded)

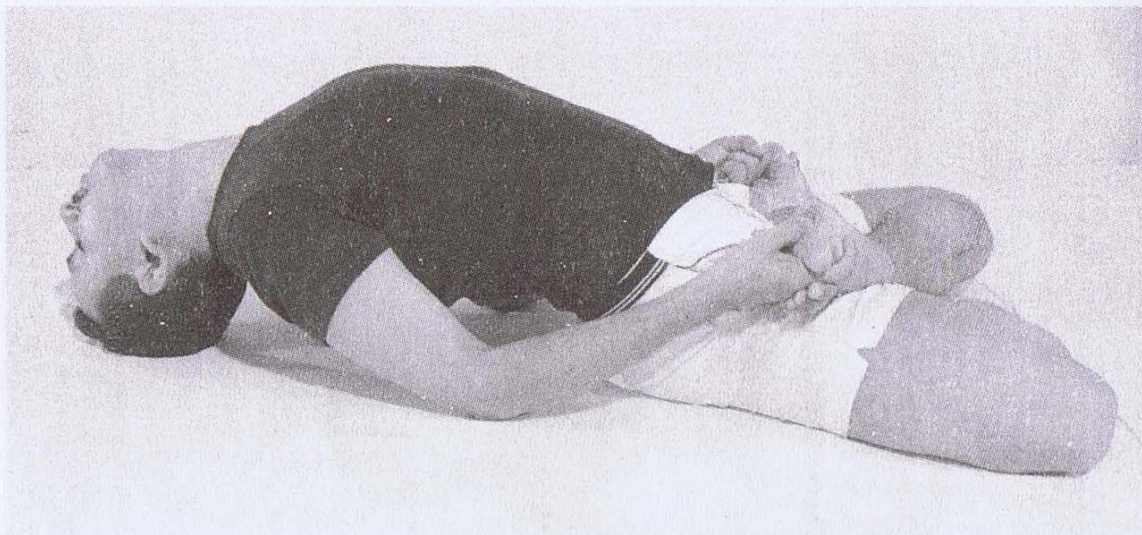


Fig. 40 : Matsyāsana or the Fish Pose (*Side View*)



Fig. 41 : Matsyāsana (*Front View*)

made to imitate the shape of the Indian plough. Hala means a *plough* in Sanskrit.

THE TECHNIQUE:

To start with the student lies supine on his seat as in the case of Sarvāṅgāsana. (*vide* Fig. 32). Then he slowly raises his legs through the hip-joint till they make an angle of 30° with the ground. Here the legs are kept steady for a few seconds; and then raised through another 30° . Again they are kept steady here and again raised so as to complete a right angle. This is maintained for a few seconds again. This part of the Plough Pose may be called Ardha-Halāsana¹.

After this the student keeps his trunk, as far as possible, close to the ground; and only bends his legs further, raising his hips and the lower part of his back only as much as is needed for securing the first stage of the pose as illustrated in Fig. 42. This is done as follows: The legs that were carried through an angle of 90° , are lowered on the side of the head, so much so that the toes are made to touch the ground beyond the head. They are, however, kept nearest to the head; and the whole pressure of the hips and the thighs is thrown on the lumbosacral region of the spine. During this as well as the next two stages, the hands are not allowed to change their extended and passive position. As usual the leg movements are accomplished smoothly and steadily. If the full curve necessary for reaching the first stage in Halāsana cannot be secured at the very first attempt, it should be attained bit by bit every day. Fig. 42 gives the side view of this first stage of Halāsana.

When this stage has been maintained for a few seconds, the toes are pushed farther from the head, till the pressure is felt at the lower dorsal region of the spinal curve. This constitutes the second stage, and is represented in Fig. 43.

After a few seconds pause here, the toes are again slid further away, till at last the farthest point is reached, and the burden is thrown on the upper dorsal part of the spinal curve. This is shown in Fig. 44, and constitutes the third stage of Halāsana.

1. These stages have not been prescribed in the Yogic texts, nor are they required by different Yogic traditions. They are included here as they can be easily developed while raising the legs through a right angle; and are helpful in developing abdominal muscles and in relieving constipation.

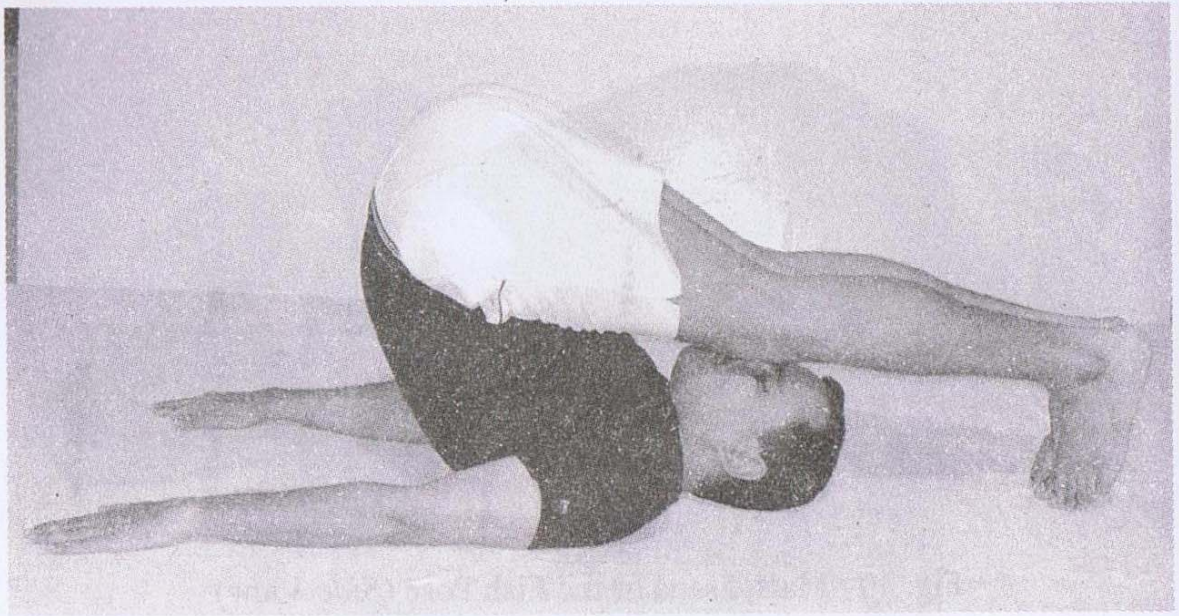


Fig. 42 : Halāsana (*First Stage*)

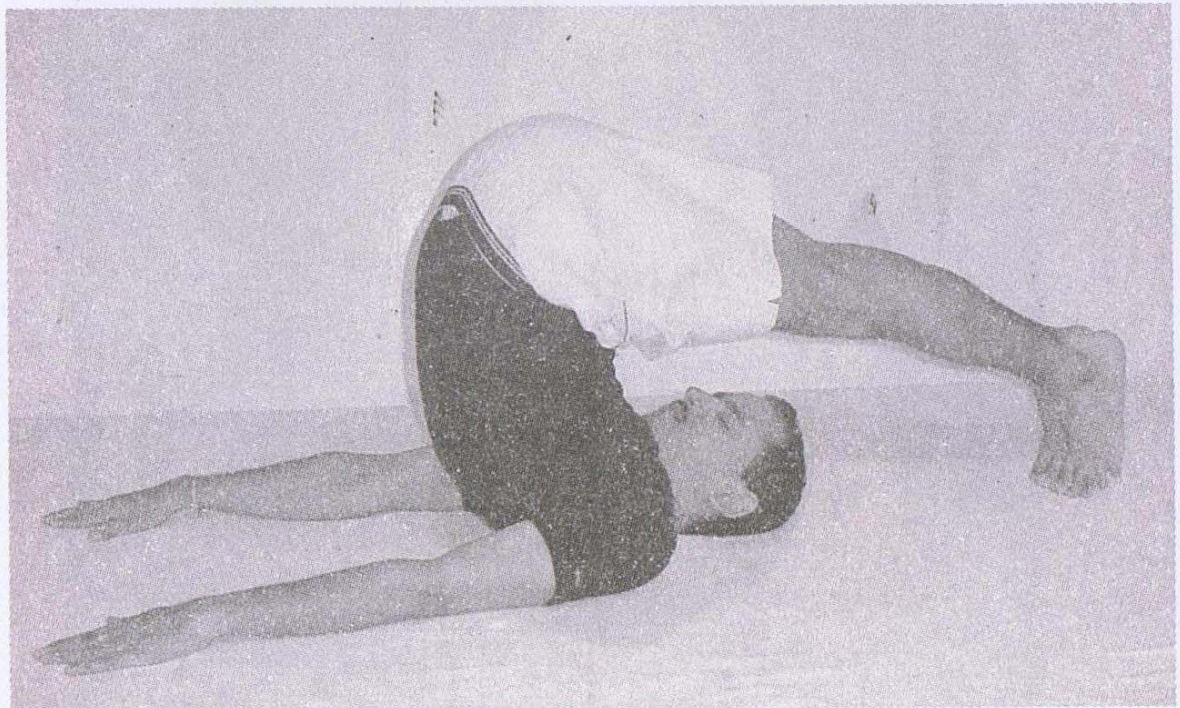


Fig. 43 : Halāsana (*Second Stage*)

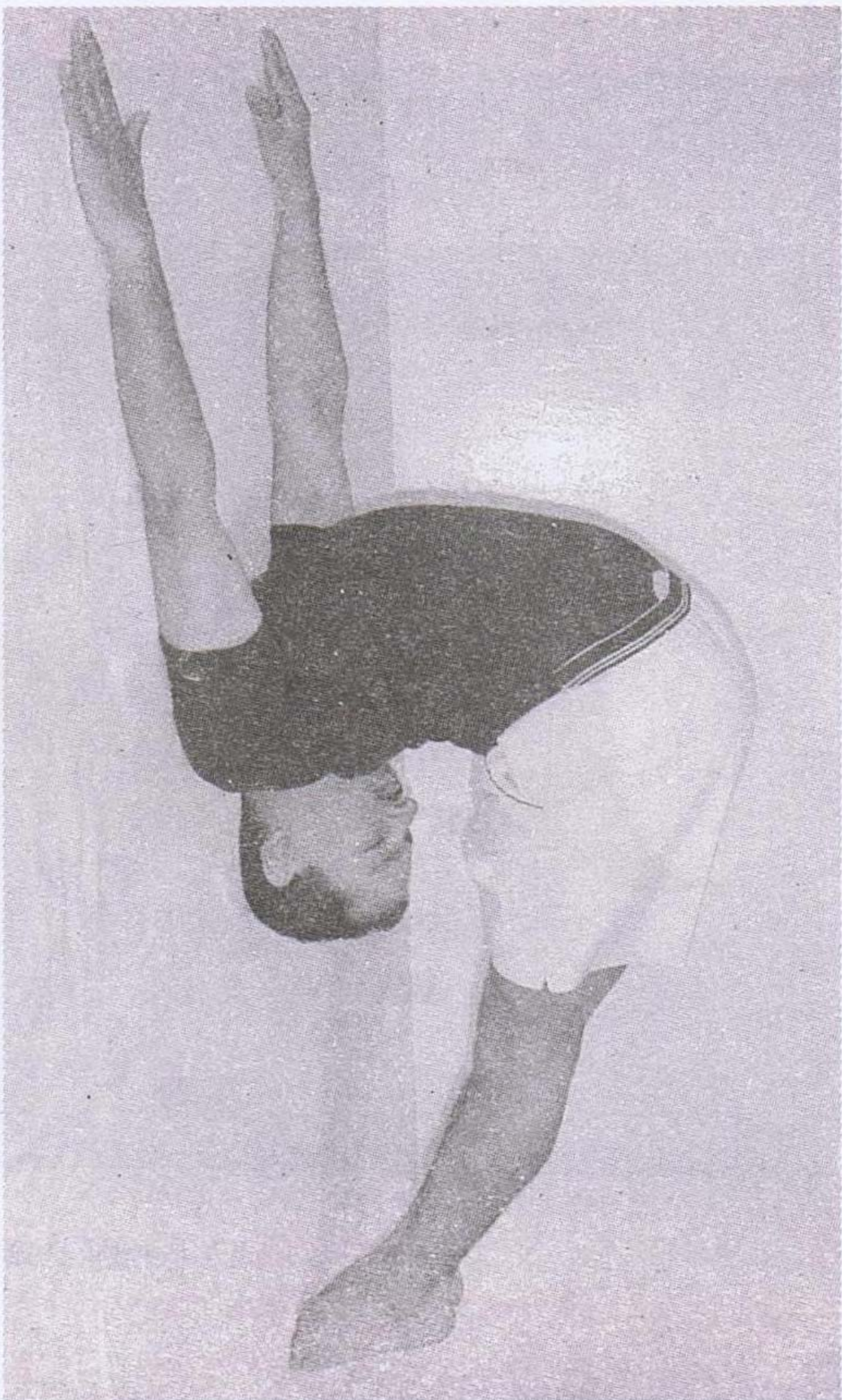


Fig. 44 : Halāsana (*Third Stage*)

A few seconds in the third stage, and the student prepares himself for the final stage in Halāsana. The hands which up to now played only a passive part, are withdrawn from their places; and after being taken beyond the head, are there made to form a finger lock¹. This finger-lock is placed just near the head and the toes are pushed back again, till the pressure is experienced at the cervical part of the spinal curve. This arrangement of the body presses the chest so tightly upon the chin that a perfect Chin-Lock is effected. (*vide* Fig. 45). Here the technique of Halāsana is completed.

With a view to contrast the different stages of this Āsana they have all been grouped together in Fig. 46. Fig. 47 gives the back view of the same.

In recovering the original position the following method is to be followed.

First the fingers are unlocked and the hands are restored to their original extended position. After this the toes are drawn nearer the head and all the steps that were previously taken are gone through in the reverse order, till at last, the student lies supine on his seat as he originally did.

NOTE—

For the purposes of physical culture it is desirable to repeat the practice rather than to maintain the different stages of the pose for a long time in one and the same attempt. This does not apply to spiritual culture, which requires the first stage to be kept up for a considerably long time. It is to be remembered that for spiritual culture the other three stages are of little use.

Halāsana when it is being practised as a part of the *Short Course*, should be devoted two seconds in each of the stages through which either the legs are carried or the spine is curved. But when the pose is being practised as a part of the *Full Course*, each stage should be given three seconds except the final, which may be given half a minute

1. The technique of this lock has been explained under Śīrshā sāna.

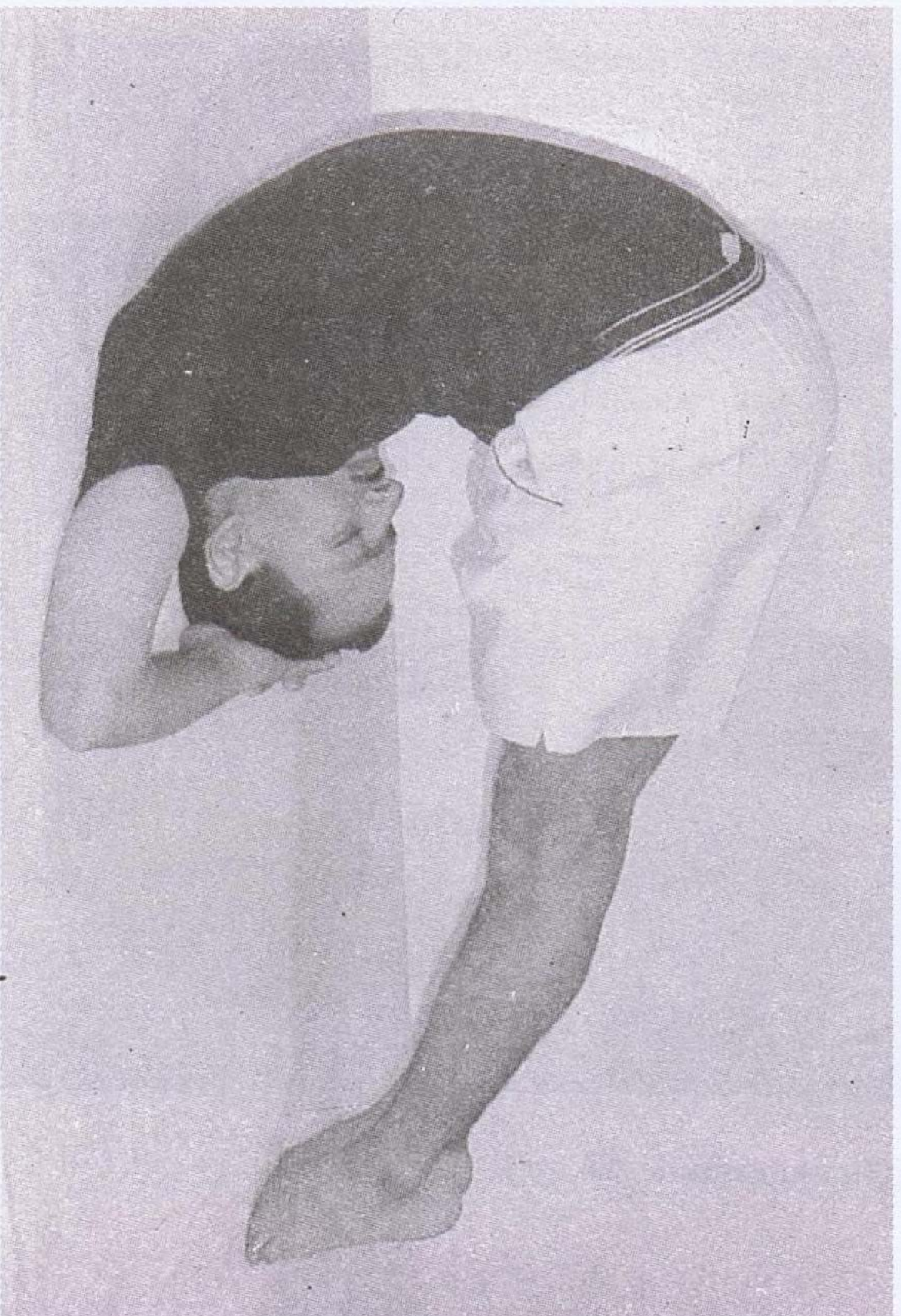


Fig. 45 : Halāsana or the Plough Pose (*First Stage*)

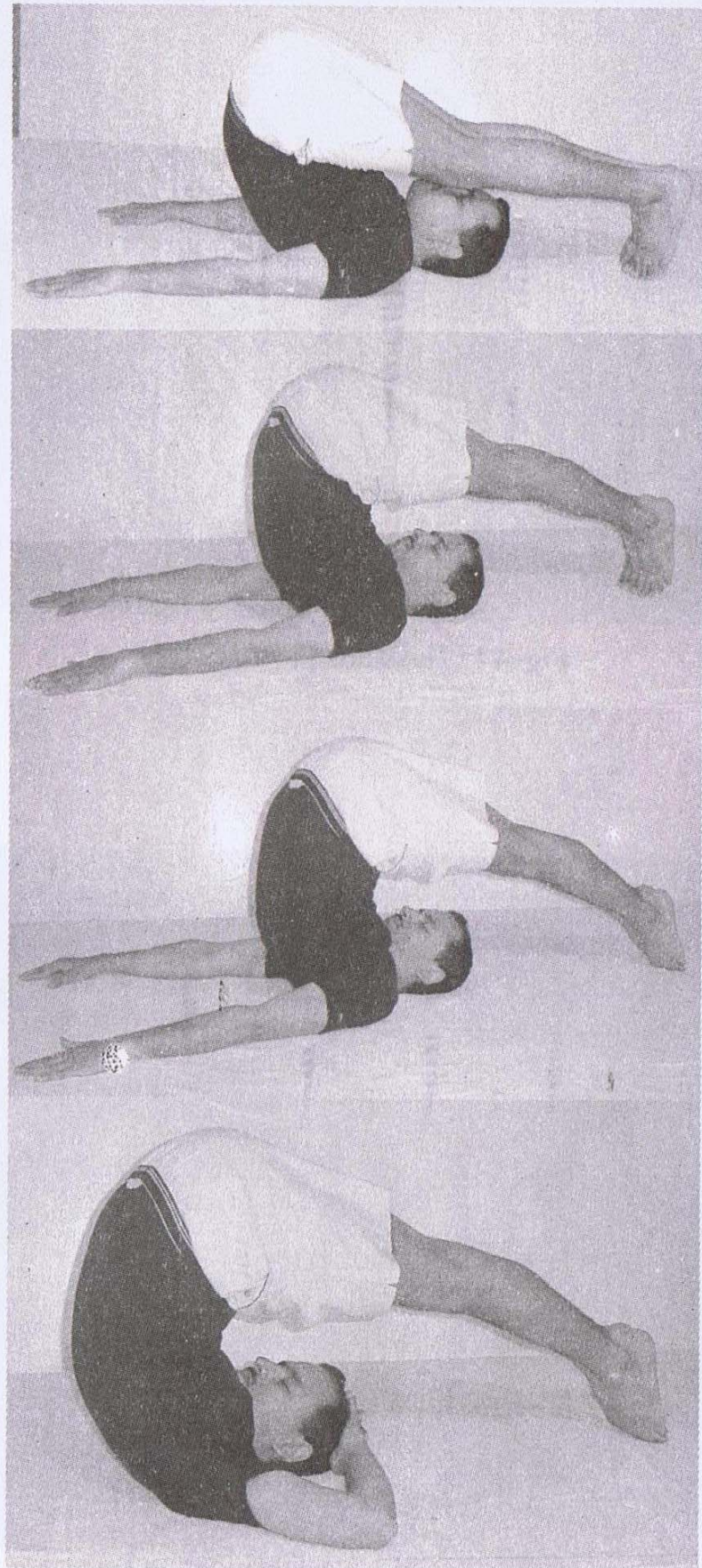


Fig. 46 : Halāsana in Different Stages (*Side View*)



Fig. 47 : Halāsana in Different Stages (*Back View*)



Fig. 47 : Halāsana in Different Stages (*Back View*)

to itself. It will take six turns of Halāsana to cover to the four minutes' maximum prescribed for this pose.

As an item of the *Easy Course* only Ardha-Halāsana is available and is to be developed as shown in *Appendix III*.

CAUTION:

Halāsana keeps the spinal column fully elastic. But people who find their spine stiffened, should start this exercise slowly. No jerks should be given. Jerks may injure the rigid muscles. What little bent is possible should first be secured and maintained for some time. After a while a bigger curve will become possible. In this way, with a daily practice, the spine will slowly be restored to its original state of elasticity.

This caution also applies to the practice of Bhujāṅgāsana, Dhanurāsana, Paśchimātāna and Yoga-Mudrā in particular and to any exercise that involves the bending of the spine in general.

CULTURAL ADVANTAGES:

Halāsana is one of the finest exercises for keeping the spine elastic and the spinal nerves healthy. When we remember that real youth is invariably characterized by an elastic spine and old age always renders the spine rigid, we can at once understand the cultural value of this exercise. Halāsana is also very helpful in developing strong abdominal muscles. In maintaining a healthy thyroid the effect of this Āsana is inferior only to that of Sarvāṅgāsana.

THERAPEUTICAL ADVANTAGES:

Halāsana is useful in combating dyspepsia and constipation, especially when they are due to the degeneration of the abdominal muscles or the nervous mechanism of digestion. The pose is available also for reducing the enlarged liver and spleen, provided that enlargement is not excessive. In particular types of diabetes, this Āsana may be practised with advantage. Also read therapeutical advantages of Bhujāṅgāsana.

BHUJAŅGĀSANA OR THE COBRA POSE

THE NAME:

The pose is called Bhujaṅgāsana because the full display of it gives one the appearance of a hooded snake under irritation with its neck dilated like a hood. (*vide* Fig. 48). Bhujaṅga means a *cobra* in Saṁskṛita.

THE TECHNIQUE:

The student first lies prone on his seat with his muscles thoroughly relaxed as shown in Fig. 50. This picture, however, represents the student preparing himself for Śalabhāsana and not for the Cobra Pose which requires a somewhat different arrangement of the hands and forehead. While getting ready for the Cobra Pose the student touches the ground with his forehead; and keeps his hands, one on each side of the chest, bending them in the elbows. The soles are made to look upward.

The student then raises his head and bends the neck backward as far as possible, completely throwing out his chin. During this attempt his chest is kept close to the ground, the trunk, so to say, taking no part in the movement. When the head is fully swung backward, the student begins to work the deep muscles of his back. By their contraction he slowly raises his chest. When the student is only a beginner, he supports his rising thorax with his hands, gradually increasing the angle between his arm and forearm. But as he becomes accustomed to this practice, he tries to depend upon the muscles of the back alone for raising his chest; and though the hands are allowed to work as previously, comparatively little burden is now put upon them. In practising Bhujaṅgāsana the student does not give a full backward curve to his spine all at once; but tries to raise his vertebrae one by one, and marks that the pressure on the spinal curve is travelling down the column step by step, till the thoracic part gets a good backward bent. Here he begins to use his hands more actively; and partly with their help and partly with the help of the deep muscles of the back, starts working the lumbar region. Lastly even the lumbar vertebrae are thrown backward in a curve and the whole pressure is felt at the sacrum. When the Āsana is completed, and the whole spinal column describes a deep curve as seen in Fig. 49. Fig. 48

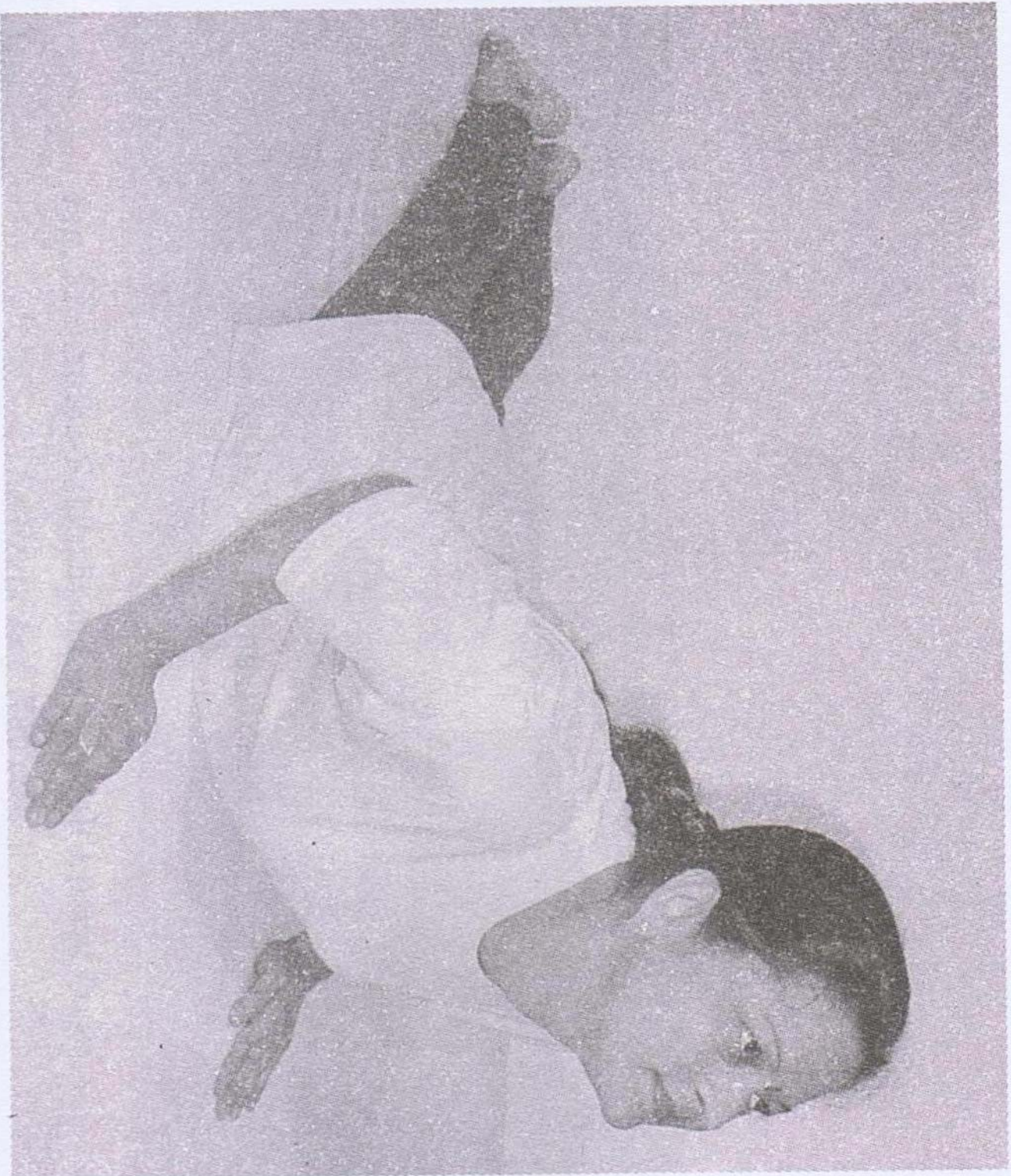


Fig. 48 : Bhujangāsana or the Cobra Pose (*Side View*)



Fig. 50 : Preparation for Śalabhāsana

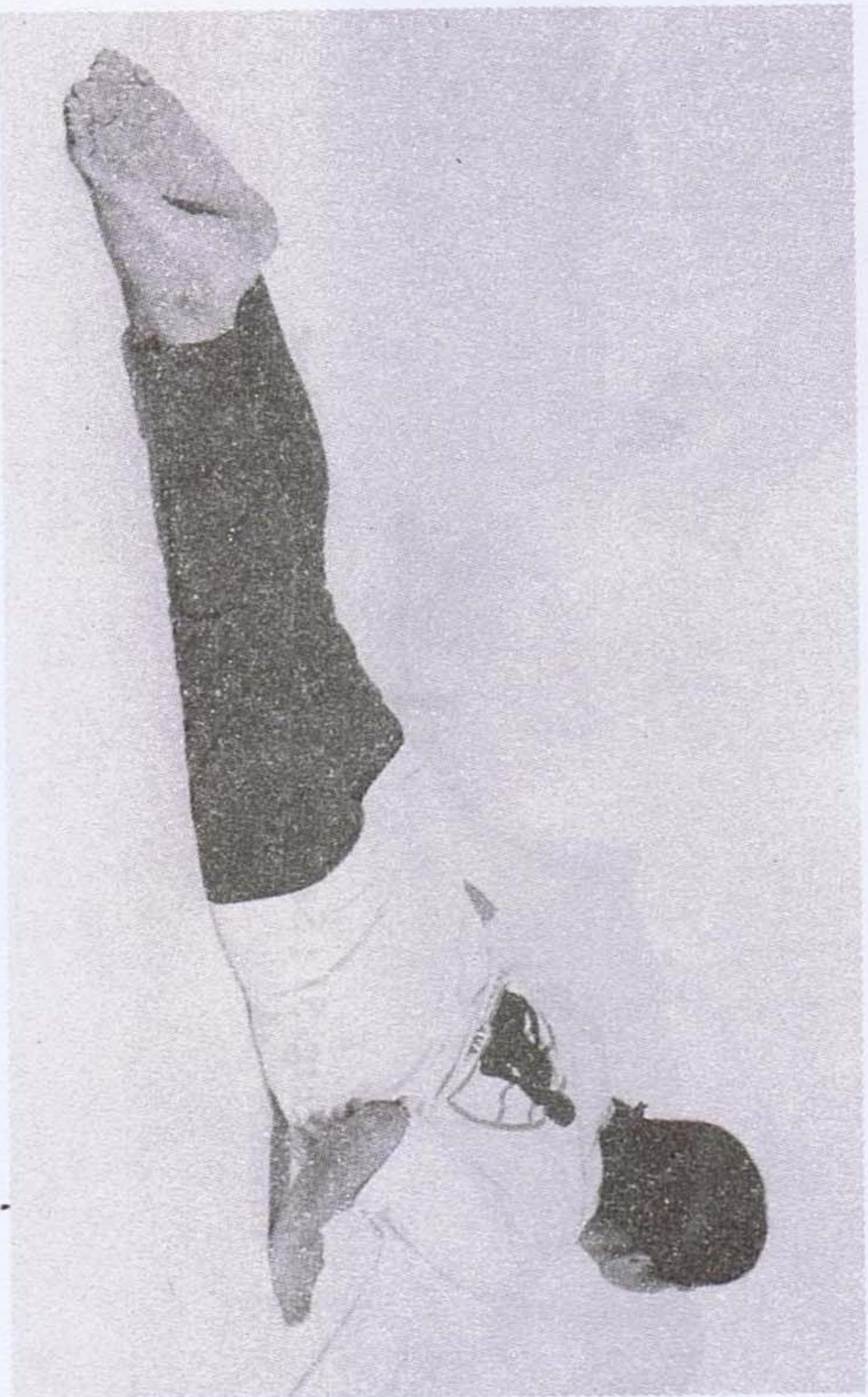


Fig. 49 : Bhujangāsana (*Back View*)

represents the side view of the full pose. It is to be noted here that the backward bent of the neck has not been shown in the accompanying illustrations, but is not to be neglected in practice.

While the full pose is being maintained the abdominal muscles and especially the two recti are stretched, and the intra-abdominal pressure is greatly increased. If just at this time, an attempt is made to contract these muscles, it largely helps to add to this pressure.

After maintaining the pose for the prescribed time, the student begins to efface the spinal curve and bring down his chest. Here too, he proceeds gradually in his work. First the lumbar curve is obliterated, each vertebra being relieved of its pressure which now travels upwards. The thoracic and cervical curves are effaced in the same way, till the whole spine lies in a horizontal line and the forehead touches the ground as it did originally.

The student, if he is a beginner, does not trifle with his breath, during this exercise. It is allowed to flow as usual. But when he is advanced in his Yogic studies and knows how to control his breath, he may maintain full inspiration throughout the practice.

The exercise may be repeated three to seven times with advantage. In the *Full Course* the full pose is to be maintained for ten seconds, but in the *Short Course* it is to be kept up for five seconds only. So far as the *Easy Course* is concerned, it may be maintained from two to five seconds.

CAUTION:

For caution read Halāsana.

CULTURAL ADVANTAGES:

The deep muscles of the back are alternately contracted and relaxed in working out this pose both ways. The muscles thus exercised gain in health and keep the spine elastic. During their work these muscles secure a liberal blood supply by promoting blood circulation which is ordinarily somewhat slow in this part of the body.

This pose has such a good effect upon the deep muscles, that even

a single successful attempt at it, relieves an aching back, if the pain is due to overwork.

The whole spine receives a steady pull anteriorly, every vertebra and its ligaments having their share in the work. If there be any slight displacement in the spinal column, it is adjusted to the normal condition.

All the thirty-one pairs of the spinal nerves exist through the spaces left between every two adjoining vertebrae. The two gangliated chains of the sympathetic also stand imbedded in the muscles situated on the two sides of the spinal column. This exercise, by promoting the blood circulation of these parts, very favourably influences these nerves and help them in maintaining their health and activity. Bhujāṅgāsana considerably influences the development of the abdominal muscles.

THERAPEUTICAL ADVANTAGES:

Bhujāṅgāsana along with Śalabhāsana or Ardha-Śalabhāsana and Dhanurāsana may best be practised in combination with Halāsana. The combination accentuates the results expected of the Plough Pose.

People suffering from flatulence immediately after meals, should emphasize Bhujāṅgāsana; but those that feel flatulent some time after the meals, should devote more time to Śalabhāsana or Ardha-Śalabhāsana. Dhanurāsana may be useful to people of both the types. Unlike Halāsana these three or four Āsanas have no direct influence upon the thyroid.

ŚALABHĀSANA OR THE LOCUST POSE

THE NAME:

The pose is called Śalabhāsana because its full show lends one the appearance of a locust with its tail standing at an angle with the ground. (*vide* Fig. 51). Śalabha means a *locust* in Saṅskṛita.

THE TECHNIQUE:

As illustrated in Fig. 50, the student lies prone on his seat with

his soles looking upwards and his fingers clenched. He stretches his hands along his body so that his shoulders and the backs of his fists touch the ground. He either rests his chin, mouth and nose on his seat; or his chin alone, the head being thrown a little backward. Then with a full inspiration he stiffens his whole body; and tries to raise his lower extremities backwards, putting his whole weight on the chest and hands. The wrists especially feel the burden of the lifted legs. Throughout the exercise the breath is held in and the knees are kept stiff and straight. In this practice the sacrum shares the fate of the legs and is a little raised with them.

When the student finds that he can no longer hold in his breath, he slowly lowers down his legs, relaxes his muscles, and gradually proceeds to exhale. When respiration becomes normal, the student is ready for the next attempt.

The pose may be repeated three to seven times with advantage. Care should be taken not to strain the lungs by unduly prolonging the posture.

Of all the *Āsanas*, it is only *Śalabhāṣana* which requires a sudden movement of the lower extremities in its practice. But here too no violence should be done to the legs. The action though sudden should be perfectly smooth.

It may be readily seen that the trunk and the upper extremities that were put into action during the *Cobra Pose*, are kept to the seat in this posture; whereas the lower extremities that were passive in the *Cobra Pose*, are actively used in this exercise.

CULTURAL ADVANTAGES:

Śalabhāṣana is a fine exercise for the pelvis and the abdomen.

THERAPEUTICAL ADVANTAGES:

Read what has been said in this regard under *Bhujaṅgāṣana*.