

ARDHA—ŚALABHĀSANA OR THE HALF LOCUST POSE

THE NAME:

The name is not taken from any of the original Yogic texts. It is coined by ourselves to express an adaptation of Śalabhāsana, described as follows.

THE TECHNIQUE:

As in the Locust Pose so here the student lies prone on his seat. To begin with all his muscles are kept in a relaxed condition and throughout the exercise breath is allowed to have its normal flow. The practice starts by raising backward one of the legs, of course, after contracting the necessary set of muscles (*vide* Figs. 52 and 53). This raising of one leg the student does so slowly and steadily that little pressure is experienced except on the parts that are actually working. All the while the trunk and the other leg are kept close to the seat. When the leg that is being lifted backward has described the greatest possible angle, it is slowly lowered down to its original position. Then the other leg is raised and taken through the same movements. Thus the two legs go on working alternately till the desired amount of exercise is done. Control of breath and stiffening of muscles may be introduced as the practice advances, care being taken to see that no strain is put upon the system on that account. After one feels strong enough to tackle the full Locust Pose, that should be substituted for the Half Locust Pose.

CULTURAL & THERAPEUTICAL ADVANTAGES:

Ardha-Śalabhāsana gives the same advantage as Śalabhāsana, but only on a humbler scale.

DHANURĀSANA OR THE BOW POSE

THE NAME:

The pose is called Dhanurāsana because in this posture the body resembles a bow with its string attached to it. The trunk and the thighs

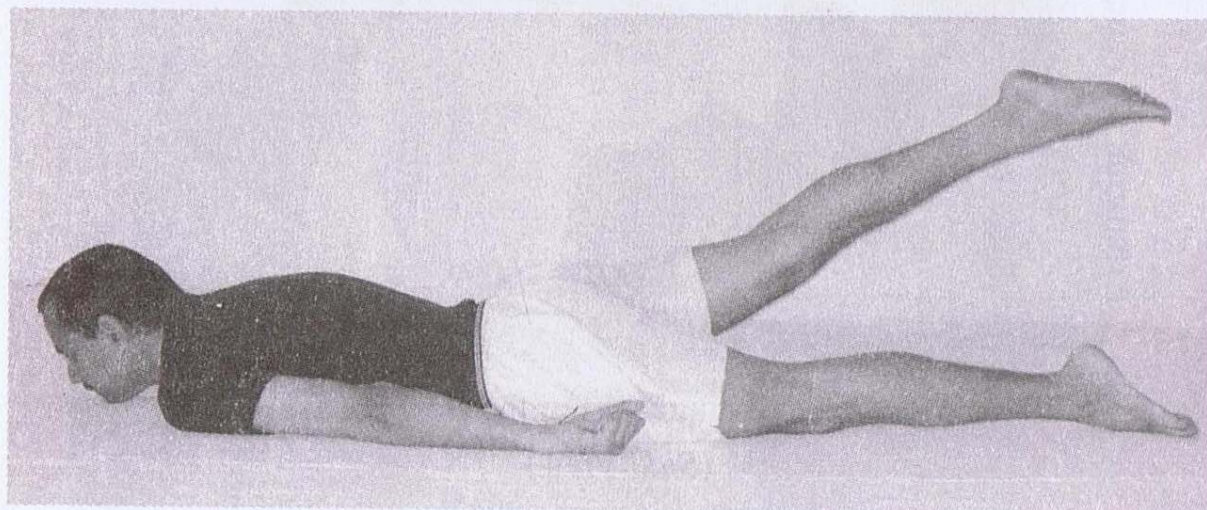


Fig. 52 : Ardha-Śalabhāsana or the Half Locust Pose
(*The Right Leg Raised*)

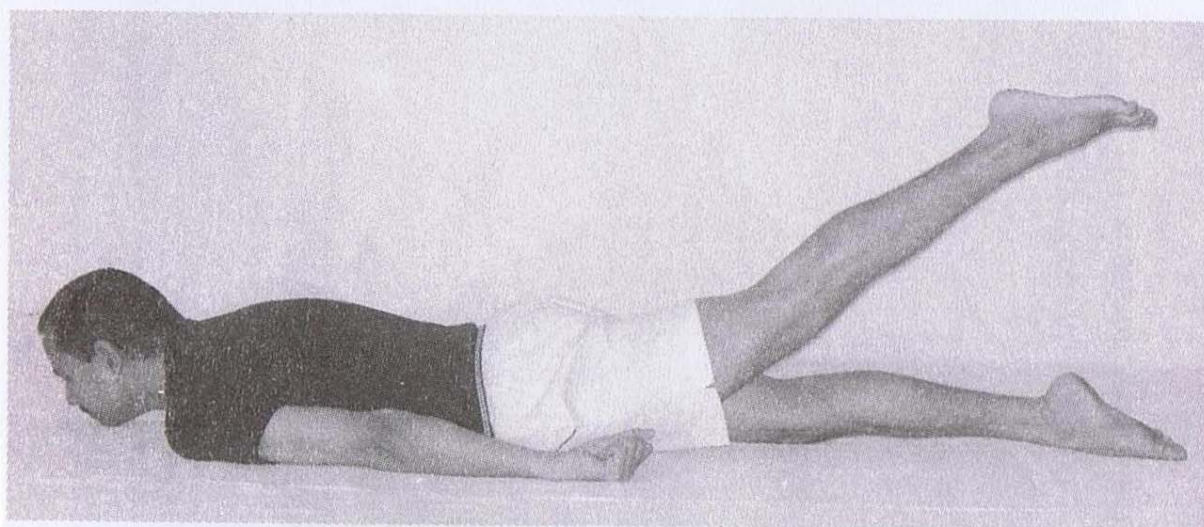


Fig. 53 : Ardha-Śalabhāsana (*The Left Leg Raised*)

represent the bow proper, whereas the hands and legs take the place of a string. Dhanus, in Saṅskṛita, means a *bow*.

THE TECHNIQUE:

As in the last two or three poses, the student lies prone on his seat with his chin resting thereon. He bends his legs in the knee-joint, till they are well folded upon the thighs; and are available to the hands that try to grasp them in the ankles. When the hands get a good hold upon the legs, the student tries to raise his trunk as well as his knees, till his whole body stands on his seat curving upwards both ways. The whole pressure of his body is thrown upon the abdomen, and the extremities are fully stretched as shown in Fig. 54. After maintaining the pose for the desired time, the chest and the knees are lowered to the seat. The hands let go the legs which are straightened out, the hands themselves being made to lie on the two sides of the trunk.

This exercise requires rather a brisk movement of the body. Hence care should be taken not to sprain any joint. The Āsana may be maintained for something like five seconds to begin with. The period being afterwards increased to three minutes or more, according to one's capacity. During the practice breath may be allowed to flow as usual, or it may be controlled, if this could be done without any damage to the lungs. It is desirable for a novice to keep his knees apart because thereby, he would be able to secure a greater curve for his body during this exercise. As the muscles become more and more elastic, the knees should be drawn closer, till at last they should be made to stand together, carrying the intra-abdominal pressure to its highest limit. In Fig. 54 the knees are shown close to each other. Fig. 55 gives the back view of the posture.

CULTURAL ADVANTAGES:

It will be readily seen that this posture is a combination of the two exercises, Bhujāṅgāsana and Śalabhāsana. Naturally it claims the advantages of both, though on a humbler scale. The intra-abdominal pressure here is not as great as in the Locust Pose, because even with full inspiration, the diaphragm does not press upon the abdominal viscera as tightly in this practice as in Śalabhāsana. The deep muscles of the back are exercised much better in Bhujāṅgāsana than

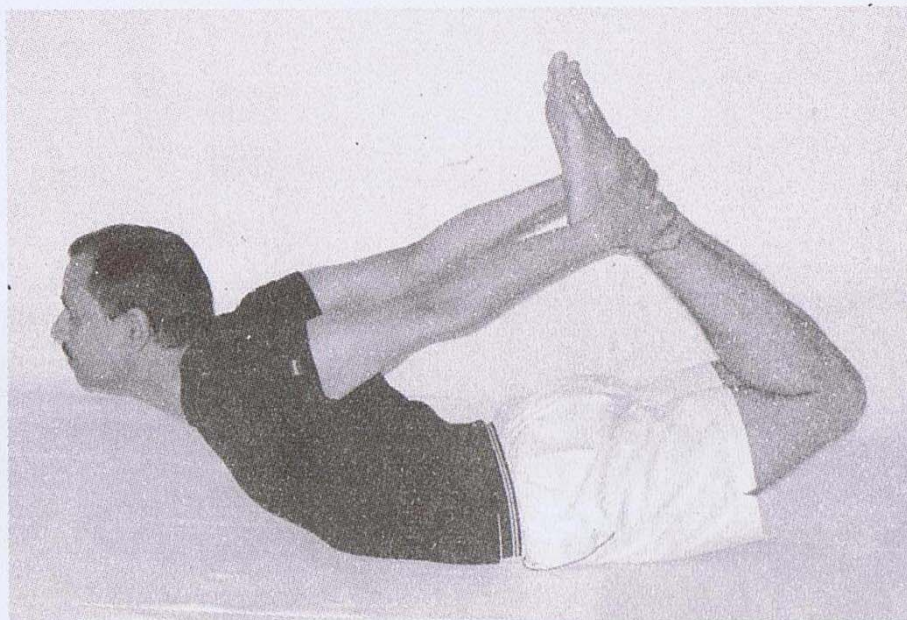


Fig. 54 : Dhanurāsana or the Bow Pose
(Side View)

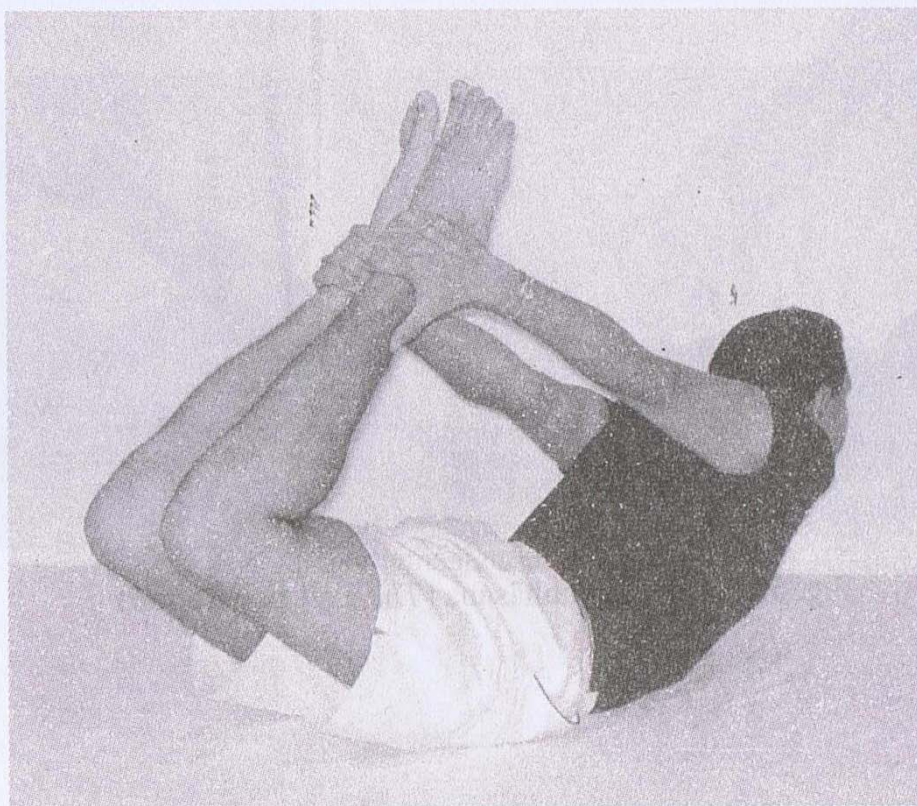


Fig. 55 : Dhanurāsana (Back View)

in this pose; because there they are *mainly* responsible for the backward curve of the trunk, whereas in this pose their work is largely done by the hands and legs tugging at each other. Again the wave of contraction and relaxation travelling up and down the spinal column, and which forms the principal feature of Bhujāṅgāsana, is missed here. This pose has, however, a special advantage which cannot be derived from the two preceding Āsanas that are combined in it. The two recti as well as the other muscles of the abdomen that flex the hip-joints, are more fully stretched in this pose, than in the other two. This is due to raising backward simultaneously both the trunk and the thighs.

THERAPEUTICAL ADVANTAGES:

For therapeutical advantages read what is said in this regard under Bhujāṅgāsana.

ARDHA—MATSYENDRĀSANA OR THE HALF MATSYENDRA POSE

THE NAME:

The pose is called Ardha-Matsyendrāsana because it does not require the entire technique of the full Matsyendra Pose. The full posture was invented by Bhagavān Matsyendra, one of the pioneers of Yogic culture. Although of high spiritual value, the original pose is somewhat difficult to practise. Hence it has been omitted from this handbook. The Half Matsyendra Pose is easy to practise and has many physiological advantages too.

THE TECHNIQUE:

To start with, the student sits on his seat with his legs fully stretched out and placed close to each other. (*vide* Fig. 37). He then bends in the knee one of his legs, say the right, and folding it upon the thigh, sets its heel tight on the perineum which indicates the region between the anus and the scrotum in the male, and between the anus and the vulva in the female. If we feel this part of the body with our fingers, we find two hard bones on the two sides with a soft part between. It is against this soft part that the heel is to be set. Care must be taken not to allow any portion of the scrotum to slip between the heel and

the perineum. This can be done by lifting the whole scrotum with the left hand while the right hand is engaged in arranging the right heel. Sometimes an attempt is made to sit on the heel, but this is a wrong procedure and should be studiously avoided. When properly adjusted the right sole will closely touch the left thigh. (*vide* Fig. 56). Then the student withdraws his left leg and bending it in the knee, arranges it in such a way that the left foot rests on the right side of the right thigh. (*vide* Fig. 57).

The main feature of the pose consists in twisting the spinal column. The steps taken up to now are only a preparation for securing this twist with mechanical advantage derived from particular arrangements of the extremities. The erect knee, here the left, is now to be used as a fulcrum upon which the right shoulder-joint is to rest its back. (*vide* Figs. 58 and 59). This is done by passing the right hand round the left knee and rotating the whole trunk to the left, till the right shoulder and the left knee stand pressing against each other. With a view to obtain a full rotation of the trunk and to prevent the knee slipping off the shoulder, the right hand is fully stretched out and made to grasp the left foot or its toe which is now available on the wrong side. Care should be taken not to strain the elbow-joint, as such a strain is likely to result in a fracture. The danger is completely avoided by firmly setting the shoulder against the knee.

In order to obtain additional mechanical advantage for securing the spinal twist, the student now employs the left hand. He swings it back and tries to have a hold upon the right thigh just below the groin. Fig. 59 shows the left hand swung back and Fig. 58 represents the fingers clutching the thigh. Thus there are two forces operating upon the two upper corners of the trunk twisting it to the left, and these two together are competent to effect the fullest possible twist. The contrivance, however, does not affect the cervical vertebrae. In order that these might co-operate with the remaining, the head is swung to the extreme left till the chin finds itself almost in a line with the left shoulder. Figs. 58 and 59 represent the full *Ardha-Matsyendrāsana*, the first picture giving the front and the second giving the back view of the same. Throughout the practice, the student takes care to see that his chest stands erect and does not droop down. The same pose is to be tried using the left extremities instead of the right and *vice versa* so that the two opposite twists would move

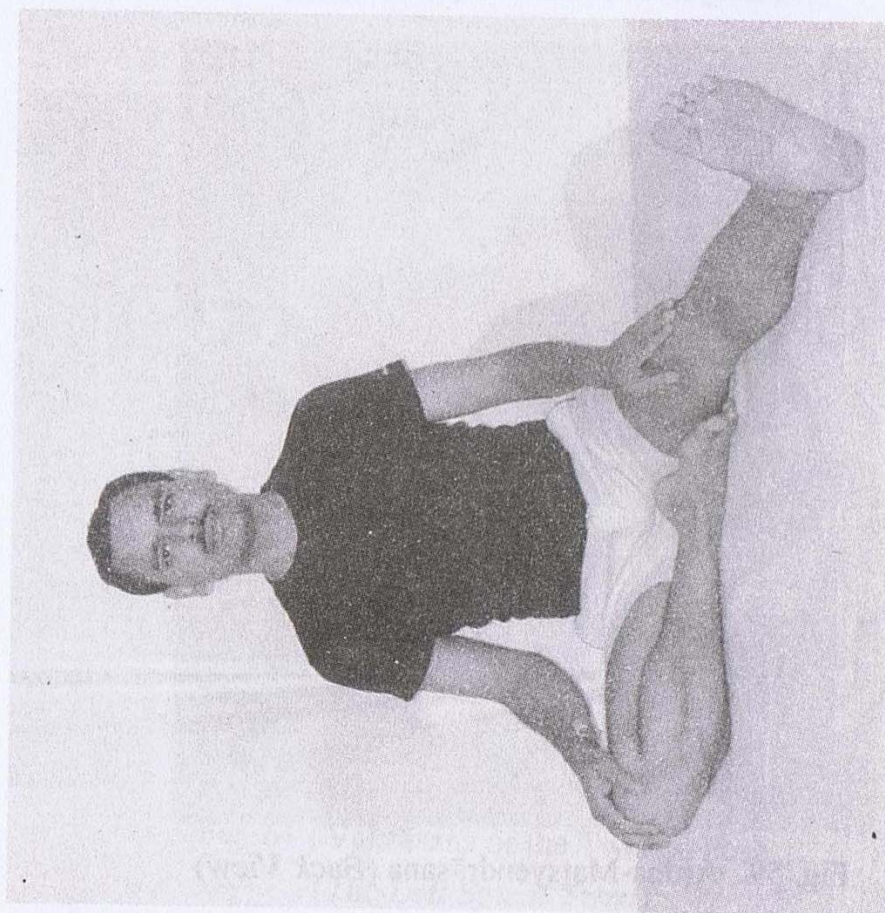


Fig. 56 : Setting the Heel on the Perineum for
Ardha-Matsyendrasana

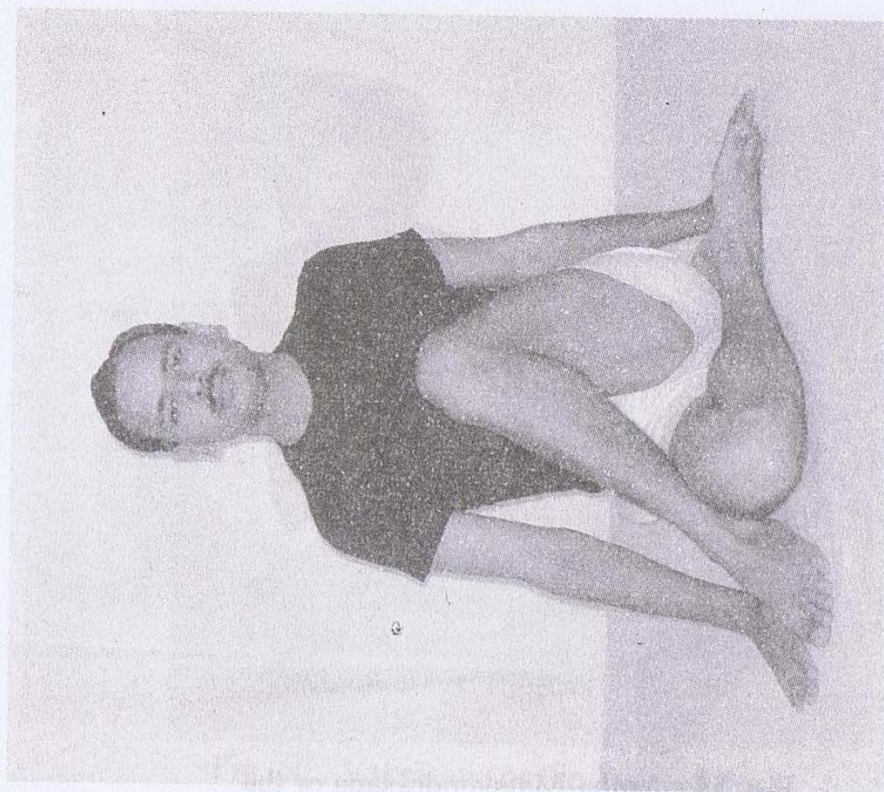


Fig. 57 : Ardha-Matsyendrasana
(Adjusting the Other Leg)

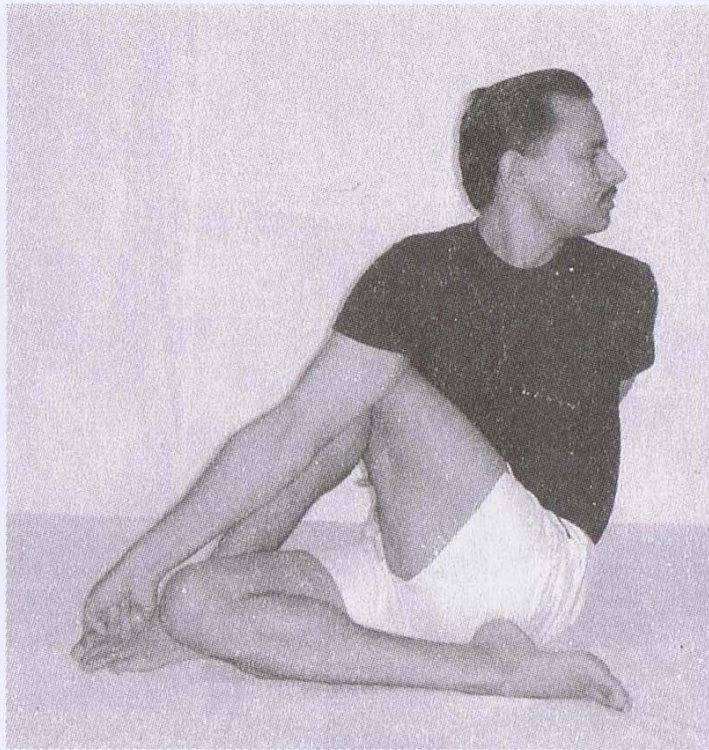


Fig. 58 : Ardha-Matsyendrāsana or the Matsyendrāsana Pose (*Front View*)

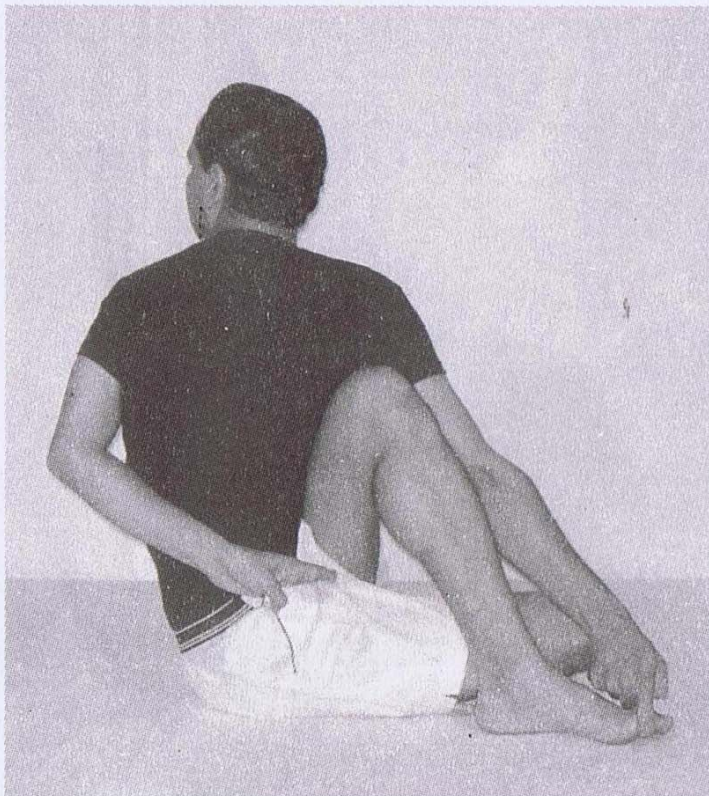


Fig. 59 : Ardha-Matsyendrāsana (*Back View*)

between them the different vertebrae through all the rotating space available.

The pose may be practised only for some seconds to start with, the maximum period to be devoted to each side being not more than a minute. For a student of general physical culture one twist each side is sufficient; but for curative purposes these twists may be repeated according to individual strength.

CULTURAL ADVANTAGES:

If the spinal column is to be maintained in the best of health, it must be trained to execute all the movements through which it is capable of going. The natural movements of the spine may be of six varieties; forward and backward bents, side bents to the right and left, the left twist and the right twist. In doing Sarvāṅgāsana, Halāsana, Paśchimatāna and Yoga-Mudrā we educate the spine in forward bents. The training of backward bents is given to the vertebral column in Matsyāsana Bhujāṅgāsana, Śalabhāsana and Dhanurāsana. Ardha-Matsyendrāsana in one pose gives the two side twists with the greatest efficacy and as such has a very great cultural value. This pose also secures the side bents for the spine, although not on a large scale. Hence every scheme for the culture of the spine must find a prominent place for Ardha-Matsyendrāsana and must co-ordinate it with the backward and forward movements of the spinal column.

THERAPEUTICAL ADVANTAGES:

As a curative measure Ardha-Matsyendrāsana can be effectively prescribed against constipation and dyspepsia. Against enlarged and congested liver and spleen and inactive kidneys, it could be practised with advantage. In order to reap the highest therapeutical benefit, this pose should be combined with other exercises that may be indicated by the condition of the patient.

VAKRASANA OR THE TWISTED POSE

THE NAME:

The pose is called Vakrāsana because in taking it, the spinal column

is twisted. In Saṁskṛita Vakra means *twisted*. Vakraśana is only a simplification of Ardha-Matsyendrāśana and has been introduced in Yogic culture by Śrīmat Kuvalayānanda as an easier exercise preparatory to that pose.

THE TECHNIQUE:

To begin with the student takes his seat stretching out his legs so as to keep them close together. Then he raises one of his knees, say the right, and withdraws his foot till it rests by the side of his left knee. Next he places his right hand behind his back without much twisting his trunk. Thereafter the left arm is passed round the right knee from outside and the left palm is placed on the ground. In doing this the student pushes the right knee as far to the left as possible, all the while trying to twist his trunk to the right as best as he can. The knee is, however, kept firmly in its position, offering good resistance to the opposite arm. The last part of the technique is gone through when the student turns his face to the right, till his chin finds itself coming exactly over the right shoulder. This secures a complete twist to the right for the spinal column. Fig. 60 illustrates the right spinal twist.

Instead of starting with the right knee the student can start with the left and obtain the left vertebral twist. Fig. 61 illustrates the left spinal twist.

The right and left twists put together should not take more than three minutes as the maximum time devoted to them.

CULTURAL & THERAPEUTICAL ADVANTAGES:

Vakraśana is Ardha-Matsyendrāśana simplified. As such it claims all the advantages of the latter pose, although they are available in this Asana on a moderate scale.

SIMHĀSANA OR THE LION POSE

THE NAME:

The pose is called Simhāśana because in it the student imitates the lion with his jaws thrown wide apart and his tongue fully stretched out. Simha means a *lion* in Saṁskṛita.



Fig. 60 : Vagrāsana or the Twisted Pose
(*The Right Spinal Twist*)



Fig. 61 : Vagrāsana or the Twisted Pose
(*The Left Spinal Twist*)

THE TECHNIQUE:

To start with the student fully stretches out his legs on his seat. Then he bends one of his legs, say the right, in the knee, and folds it on the thigh. Now the right foot is to be inserted below the left buttock, so that the student can sit upon the right heel without any discomfort. For this purpose, the sole of the right foot is turned upwards with the hands, and with the left knee raised the right foot is placed under the left buttock, all the while the student resting himself on the right buttock only. When the right foot is satisfactorily arranged below the left buttock the student lifts up the right buttock from the ground, and puts his whole weight upon the right heel. In this position the upturned sole of the right foot will show itself partially from behind and the toes will be seen spreading a little beyond the thigh. The sole and the toes as arranged here, can be seen in Fig. 63 which illustrates the back view of the Lion Pose. When the student feels secure on his right heel, he bends his left leg, and anteriorly crossing the right leg from below, sets the foot under the right buttock, so as to enable him to sit on the left heel. The left toes spread out beyond the right thigh. When this is done the student finds himself sitting evenly on both the heels.

In order to secure the necessary ease and comfort which must characterize every Yogic pose, the student hereafter puts his whole weight on the thighs and especially on the knees which are made to rest on the ground. This gives a little forward inclination to the whole trunk, the buttocks being lifted up from behind.

The muscles of the arms and forearms are stiffened, the elbow-joints are fully extended and the palms are made to cover their corresponding knees, the fingers being spread out to imitate the broad paws of the lion.

The trunk along with the spine is held erect, the chest is thrown out, and the braced up shoulders are made to exert a gentle pressure on the knees through the upper extremities.

Then begins the execution of the most important part of Simhāsana. The jaws are thrown wide open and the tongue is stretched out to its utmost limit¹. The eyes are fixed either between the

¹ This arrangement of the jaws and the tongue constitutes what is known as Simha-Mudrā in Yoga.

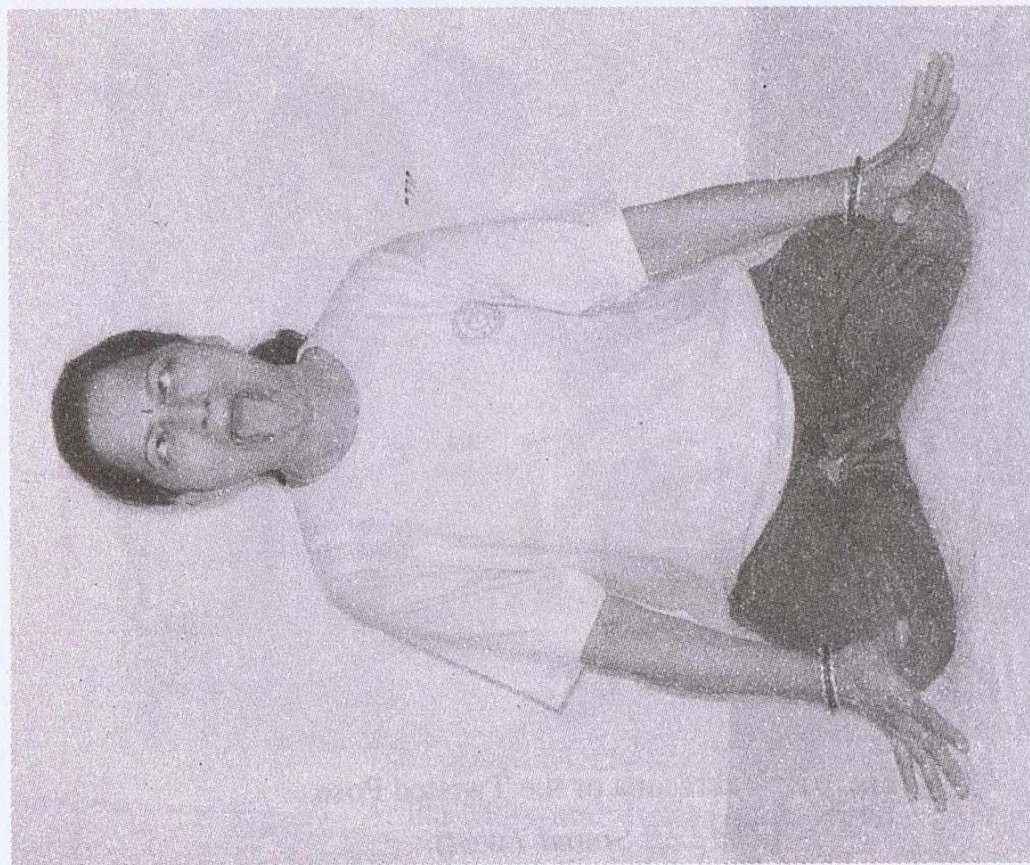


Fig. 62 : Simāsana or the Lion Pose
(Front View)



Fig. 63 : Simāsana (Back View)

eyebrows as in the Frontal Gaze, or on the tip of the nose as in the Nasal¹. Simihāsana, as it is photographed here, is with the Frontal Gaze. Generally, though not necessarily, the chin is pressed against the chest so as to adjust it in the jugular notch in order to form Jālandhara-Bandha². Fig. 62 shows this pose with the Chin-Lock.

Instead of the right leg being taken up first and the left made anteriorly to cross it from below, the left leg may be taken first and the right may be passed underneath it.

During the pose breathing becomes mainly oral, most of the air from the lungs being expelled through the mouth in exhalation and most of the air being drawn into the lungs the same way in inhalation. The nasal passage is very sparingly used for the incoming and outgoing breath.

Yogic physical culturists will do well to take this exercise in the end of their daily programme. Maximum time to be devoted to it should not exceed three minutes.

CULTURAL ADVANTAGES:

The pose by itself has not got much physical value, nor has it got any spiritual value also. So it need not be maintained for any considerable time. A maximum of three minutes has already been prescribed above. Its great physical and therapeutical importance when practised with the Tongue-Lock in rapid succession, has been discussed under jihvā-Bandha in the next chapter.

It is to be remembered, however, that the Āsana is a very valuable exercise as a preparation for the three Bandhas, Uḍḍiyāna, Mūla and Jālandhara, even when by itself it is not of much consequence either physically or spiritually. The mere widely throwing open of the jaws and the drawing out of the tongue make the muscles of the neck elastic, thus facilitating the formation of the Chin-Lock. The attempt at Jālandhara Bandha, the pressure on the knees exerted through the hands, the bracing up of the spine and the throwing out of the chest, all put together, give a sort of control over the abdominal recti, thus

1. *Vide Chapter III*

2. *ibid.*

preparing the student for Uḍḍiyāna. Again, lifting up the buttocks with a view to hold the spine erect and sit lightly on the heels, tends to the contraction of such pelvic muscles as facilitate the practise of Mūla Bandha. Thus it will be seen that the Lion Pose is a fine exercise preparatory to the three Bandhas

THERAPEUTICAL ADVANTAGES:

For these advantages read Jihvā-Bandha in Chapter V.

VAJRĀSANA OR THE PELVIC POSE

THE NAME:

The pose is called Vajrāsana because it affects the pelvis. The effect of Vajrāsana on the pelvis will be made clearer when the supine variety of this Āsana is studied. (*vide* Supta Vajrāsana). Vajra in Yogic literature does not mean the pelvis, but it means the *penis*. So it will be seen that the name Pelvic Pose is only a free rendering of the original name Vajrāsana. It is to be, however, noted that the pose does affect the whole of the pelvis as much as the penis itself.

THE TECHNIQUE:

As in the case of the previous practice, the student fully stretches out his legs on his seat to start with. Then he bends one of his legs, say the left, in the knee and folds it on the thigh. But he does not keep the knee resting on the ground as in the last Āsana, but raises it to its full height while bending it for further action. Thus the foot is made to rest on the ground in front of the left buttock, and the knee stands high up against the left half of the chest. (*vide* Fig. 64). After this the student raises his left buttock reclining his trunk slightly to the right which is made to rest on the right hand placed by the side of the right thigh. Then with his left hand he catches hold of his left foot, as shown in Fig. 64, and drawing it to the left of the left thigh, gets it fully extended so as to turn the sole upwards. While doing this the knee is lowered to the ground, the toes are arranged behind the slightly raised left buttock, pointing to the right, and the heel is made to lie to the left, clear of the body. Thus the foot and the leg form a sort of a circular curve which is made to surround the left buttock. The right thigh, leg and foot are carried through a similar procedure and are arranged on the right side, the foot again going round the buttock. In this final arrangement of the feet, each heel is kept by the side of the corresponding hip-joint, the upper surface