

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

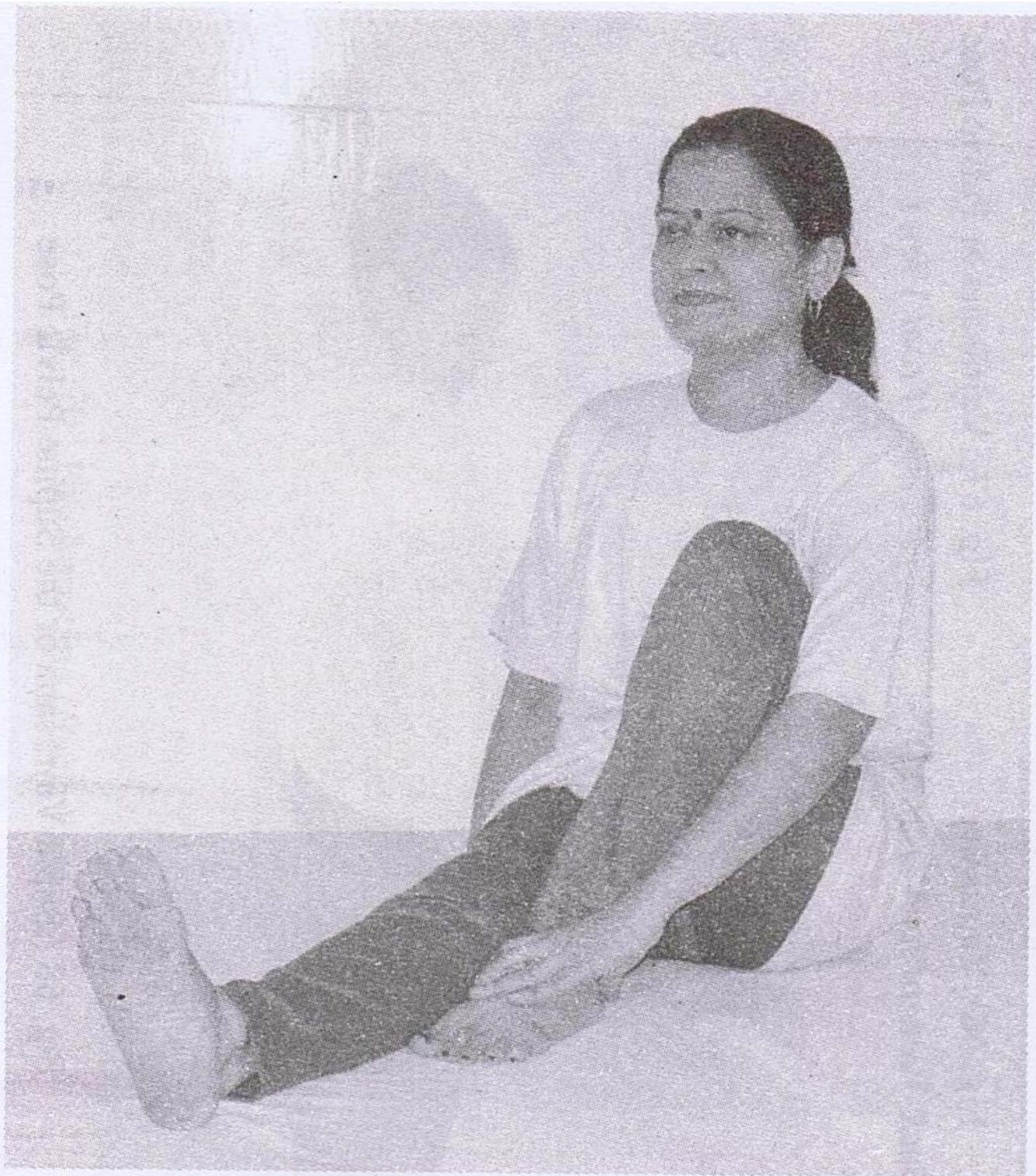


Fig. 64 : Preparation of Vajrāsana

of the feet touch the seat, the soles are turned upwards, and the two sets of the toes lie pointing to each other with some space left between them. (*vide* Fig. 65).

There is another way of arranging the legs and the feet in this pose. Instead of keeping them clear of the thighs and the buttocks, they are placed underneath the latter, so that the student sits on his ankles. Naturally the two sets of toes are not now held apart but they cross on another behind the coccyx. (*vide* Fig. 66).

With the lower extremities thus arranged and with the knees made to lie close together almost touching each other, the student sits erect on his buttocks, holding the spine straight. With the palms covering the knees and the eyes closed in concentration, the technique of the pose is completed. (*vide* Fig. 67).

This Asana is generally practised for spiritual purposes. When so used its time limit would depend upon the duration of the spiritual exercise.

NOTE:

The name Vajrāsana is often used for Siddhāsana or the Accomplished Pose. When we remember the meaning of the word Vajra in Yogic literature and also take into consideration that in Siddhāsana one of the heels is set at the root of the penis, we can at once understand why the Accomplished Pose is also called Vajrāsana. The significance of the name in the case of the present Asana has already been explained.

CAUTION:

Those people whose joints are stiff and do not admit of easy movements, should practise this pose with caution. No strain should be allowed. First the joints should be accustomed to be flexed to a greater and greater degree. And when they admit of the necessary bent, the full pose should be attempted.

CULTURAL & THERAPEUTICAL ADVANTAGES:

Vajrāsana is principally a meditative pose. Its physical advantages are not considerable.



Fig. 65 : Vajrāsana (*Back View*)



Fig. 66 : Vajrāsana
(Back View of its Variation)



Fig. 67 : Vajrāsana or Pelvic Pose
(Front View)

SUPTA—VAJRĀSANA OR THE SUPINE PELVIC POSE

THE NAME:

The pose is called Supta-Vajrāsana because the student lies supine in the Āsana instead of sitting erect as in the original Vajrāsana. In Saṁskṛta Supta means *asleep*. Fig. 68 illustrates the full pose.

THE TECHNIQUE:

As the practice is only a further development of Vajrāsana, the student arranges his lower extremities as required for practising the last Āsana. It is needless to say that both the varieties of the Vajrāsana arrangement are available for this development. After the student has assumed Vajrāsana, he tries to lie on his back. This is done step by step. First he reclines backward resting the burden of his trunk upon his hands which are made to serve as props from behind. Then one of the hands is relieved and the burden of the body on that side is thrown upon the elbow which is now made to rest on the seat. The same is done in the case of the other hand. Afterwards even these elbow props are removed and the trunk is made to rest on the shoulder-blades, that is, the large flat bones of the upper part of the back. In the beginning, in this position, the student finds that his spine makes a curve and does not lie in contact with the seat. However, as the practice advances, this curve is gradually but considerably effaced and the vertebral column is made to lie along the ground as far as possible. Then comes the turn of the upper extremities to be adjusted. For this work the student slightly lifts up his head, because he has to get his arms and forearms to serve as cushions underneath it. One of the hands is then passed below the head and made to grasp the shoulder-joint on the opposite side. The other hand does a similar thing, the two elbows projecting a little beyond the head on the seat. The eyes may be closed to render significant the word Supta occurring in the name of the Āsana.

As Supta-Vajrāsana is a further development of Vajrāsana, the practice of the former should not be started without completely mastering the latter. Special care is to be taken of the ankle-joints which are far more strained in this development than in the original pose. In getting out of the pose, the student first lets go his hands, then



Fig. 68 : Supta Vajrāsana or the Supine Pelvic Pose

raises his trunk and finally relieves his legs. Any attempt to take off the legs first is likely to injure the ankle-joint. The maximum time to be devoted to this pose should not exceed three minutes for ordinary purposes.

CULTURAL ADVANTAGES:

The abdominal recti are fully stretched and the bowels and other abdominal viscera are considerably stimulated, the effects on the pelvic organs being greatly pronounced.

THERAPEUTICAL ADVANTAGES:

Supta-Vajrāsana is a very good remedy for constipation.

- PAŚCHIMATĀNA OR THE POSTERIOR-STRETCHING POSE

THE NAME:

The posture is called Paśchimatāna because it stretches the posterior muscles of almost the whole body. In Saṁskṛita Paśchima means the *posterior* and the root Tān means *to stretch*; and thus Paśchimatānā means *stretching the posterior*. Text-books on Yoga give also a spiritual interpretation of the name. The pose is capable of rousing spiritual forces that are felt travelling upward through the spine. It is to connote this capacity of the Āsana that it is called Paśchimatāna.

THE TECHNIQUE:

The student begins by fully stretching out his legs on his seat, and keeping them close to each other (*vide* Fig. 37). He then bends forward a little, makes hooks of his forefingers, and catches hold of his great toes, the right toe with the right finger and the left with the left. A pull on the great toes with the fingers, secures not only a full relaxation but a complete stretching of the posterior muscles of the legs. The student then further bends forward in the lumbosacral region, and stretching his trunk along his thighs, rests his face on his knees, This entirely doubles his body through the hip-joints. The distance between the shoulders and the toes is much shorter than the hands

in this pose. Hence the upper extremities are bent in the elbows, and if possible are made to rest on the ground as shown in Fig. 69. Care is taken not to allow the knees to bend, straight knees being essential for maintaining a full stretch of the lumbosacral region. Fig. 69 gives a side view of the Āsana and Fig. 70 represents a back view of the same.

In the case of nearly every beginner, the hamstring muscles—muscles which when contracted enable us to bend our knee and which are situated at the back of it—do not possess the elasticity necessary for this Āsana. The result is that the knees are raised when one tries to bend over one's thighs. By a little practice, however, young and well-built persons can soon make the hamstring muscles sufficiently supple, so that there is little trouble in securing the desirable bent even without raising the knees.

But people who are advanced in age, or are prematurely old, or have stiffened their muscles by over-exercise stand on a different footing. They experience an amount of difficulty in bending their trunk effectively while maintaining a straight knee. Their spine is so stiff that they cannot even reach their toes with their fingers. Nay, in some cases their toes remain far beyond the reach of their fingers! However, there is absolutely no reason for these people to become impatient over the matter. They should proceed into the practice of this Āsana slowly and steadily. Instead of trying to catch hold of their great toes they should seize their legs, either in the ankle or even higher up nearer the knee. Without experiencing much discomfort, the trunk should be bent forward as far as possible, but the knee should always be kept stiff. This little bent maintained for a time, will invariably make further flexing possible. As usual jerks, either violent or mild, should be studiously avoided. In a few days the spine will begin to show signs of improved elasticity and the hamstring muscles will be better able to bear the necessary strain. When the toes are reached they should be hooked by the fingers and the whole system of posterior muscles stretched by degrees. Suppleness will develop day by day ultimately making the full pose not only possible but even comfortable. Patience and perseverance must overcome every difficulty. Regularity is, indeed, essential; but we also advise punctuality. These two will enable almost every Yogic culturist to perform any Āsana within a reasonably short period.

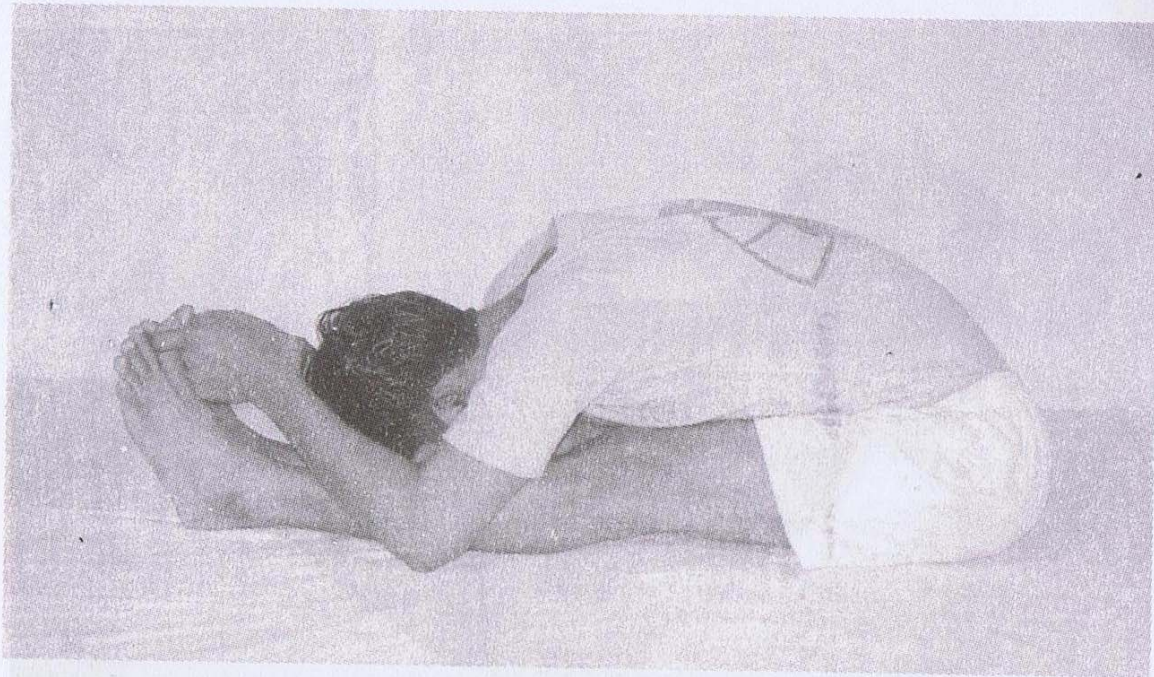


Fig. 69 : Paśchimatāna or the Posterior-Stretching Pose
(*Side View*)

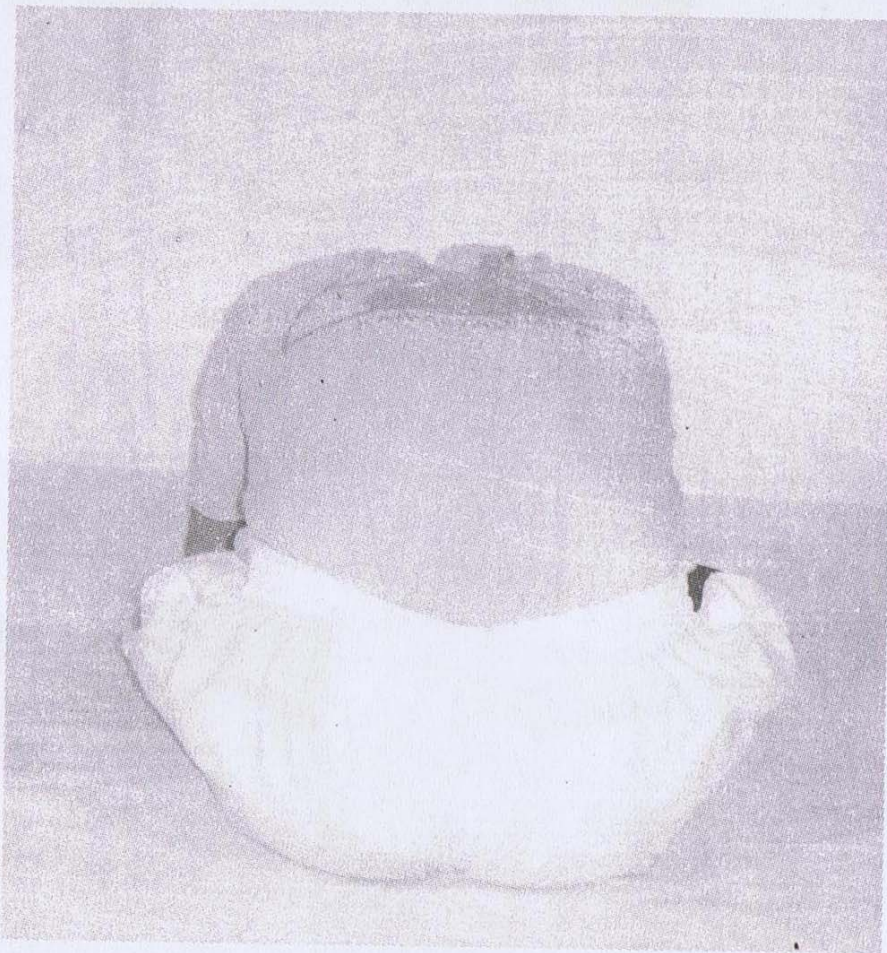


Fig. 70 : Paśchimatāna (*Back View*)

For the purpose of physical culture, not more than three minutes will be the maximum time to be devoted to this pose. As regards the minimum, if a Yogic culturist is able, just in the beginning, to secure the complete bent required for the full *Asana*, he may maintain the pose only for fifteen seconds to start with and slowly develop it to one minute only. But if, on account of the stiffness of muscles, only a partial bent becomes possible at the outset, the Yogic culturist should repeat the pose two or three times over and make up a total of one minute. As the spine becomes more and more elastic the three attempts may be fused into one, covering a period of one continuous minute. Three turns of one minute each would make up the maximum of three minutes.

Those who practise the *Short Course* should maintain the pose for five seconds at a time and should repeat it according to their own measure.

CULTURAL ADVANTAGES:

Paśchimatāna is a fine stretching exercise. Nearly all the posterior muscles of the body and particularly the hamstring muscles at the back of the knees are relaxed and fully stretched. The pose is also of great importance in the culture of the abdomen. The front abdominal muscles are vigorously contracted which ensures better health and functioning for them. Nerves supplying the pelvic organs and arising from the lumbosacral region are toned up because of the exercise of the lumbosacral part of the spine and the consequent richer blood supply brought to this part.

Paśchimatāna is known to have considerable spiritual significance. It has been found to enable a student of spiritual culture to listen to *Anāhata Dhvani* or the *subtle sound*. It is also understood to rouse the spiritual force called *Kundalinî*. For spiritual purposes, however, the *Asana* has to be practised daily for upwards of hour according to the needs and the capacity of the individual practising it.

THERAPEUTICAL ADVANTAGES:

Paśchimatāna builds a powerful abdomen and is found to be a good remedy against constipation and dyspepsia. It may be prescribed with advantage against seminal weakness and also against the possibility of a recurrence of sciatica.

The measure of Paśchimatāna has to be judiciously adjusted. When maintained for a long time, it promotes constipation instead of relieving it. So if the Āsana must be practised across a good length of time either for physical or spiritual advantages, it should always be accompanied by Uḍḍiyāna which can be repeated several times while Paśchimatāna is being maintained. Habitually constipated people should avoid practising Paśchimatāna for anything more than three minutes a day.

MAYŪRĀSANA OR THE PEACOCK POSE

THE NAME:

The pose is called Mayūrāsana because it imitates the deportment of a peacock with his heavy plumage stretching behind him. Mayūra means a *peacock* in Sanskrit.

THE TECHNIQUE:-

To start with the student kneels on his seat and brings together his forearms down up to the wrists. The elbow-joints are put in close contact with each other, so that they provide a suitable fulcrum to support the horizontal body, during the full display of the pose. The palms and fingers are made to take the place of the feet and the claws of the peacock. The position of the claws, however, is reversed, the palms being given a backward direction. (*vide* Fig. 71). It is needless to say that the fingers, when thus arranged, afford a very good contrivance for adjusting the balance of the whole body. (*vide* Fig. 72).

On the fulcrum thus prepared the body is stretched out in a straight line parallel to the seat. The elbows are placed on the abdomen just below the umbilicus. The forearms do not stand exactly at right angles to the ground, but are a little inclined to the front. The head is raised and the chin thrown out in order to counterbalance the heavy legs. The whole body is held like a horizontal bar resting on a fulcrum. (*vide* Fig. 72).

A beginner should hold his breath so long as the pose lasts. Quite an amount of muscular energy is required for this exercise, especially in the beginning; and this energy can best be had with controlled breath. But as the practice advances and the muscles get into the habit

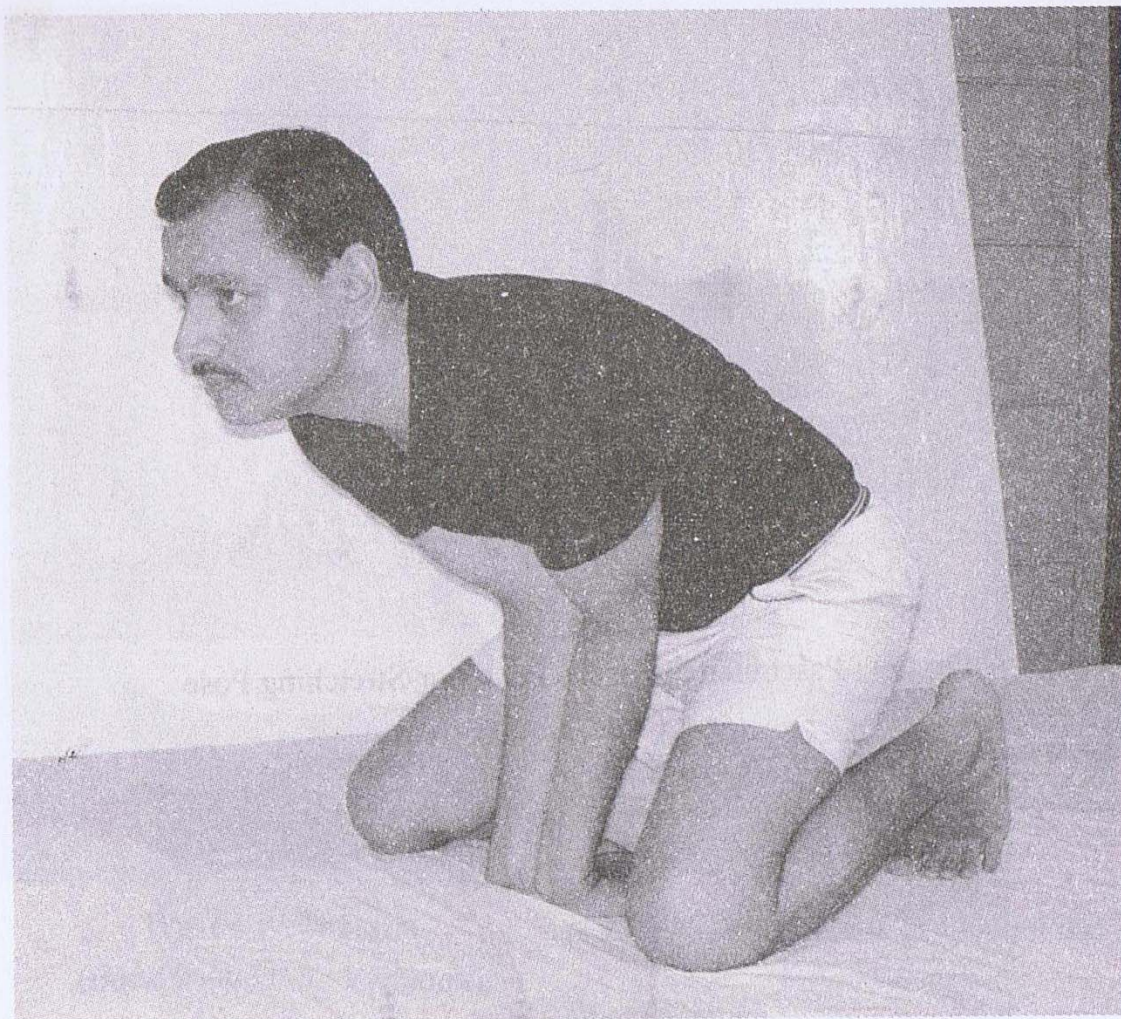


Fig. 71 : Preparation for Mayurāsana

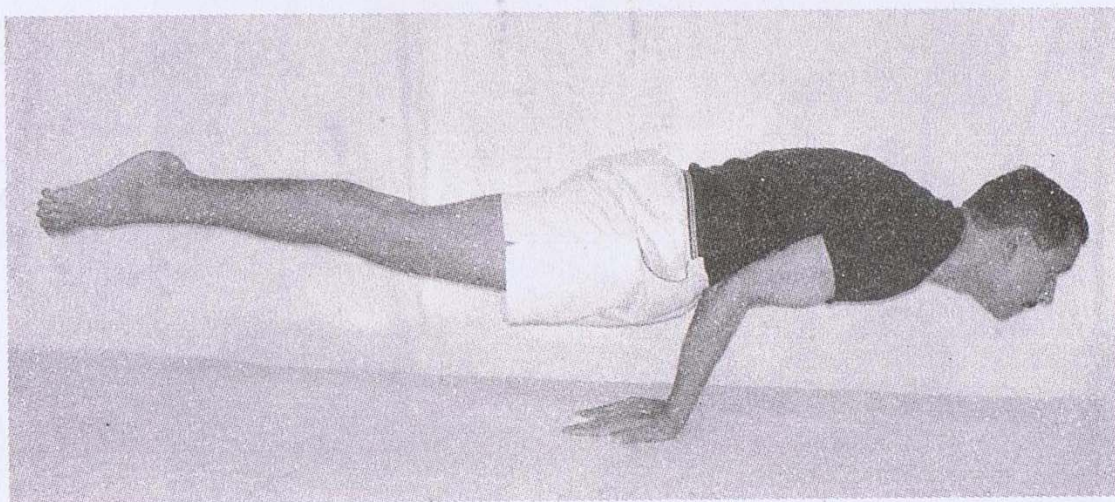


Fig. 72 : Mayurāsana or the Peacock Pose

of doing this type of work, less energy is needed; and then the breath may be allowed to flow as usual even while the pose is being maintained.

Mayūrāsana is taken advantage of in ejecting the small quantities of water that may be lingering in the colon after practising Basti—Yogic bowel wash. In this connection, however, the pose requires a change in its technique. The legs, instead of being held together and parallel to the ground, are to be spread out and raised imitating a proud display of the peacock's plumage.

The change is a physiological necessity. Parallel and horizontal legs require the anal sphincters to be fully contracted. This is quite desirable when the pose is to be practised for itself, because it helps to increase the intra-abdominal pressure which is one of the advantages sought in Mayūrāsana. But when the exercise is done as a sequel to colon flushing, its aim is to drive out the lingering liquid from the large bowel. This requires the anal sphincters to be in a relaxed condition. In order to make this relaxation possible the legs must be spread out. It is to be remembered that the muscles of the buttocks remain contracted even in this condition. This contraction, however, does not prevent the ejection of the colon liquid, if the anal sphincters are completely relaxed. The partial contraction of the muscles of the buttocks with a simultaneous relaxation of the anal sphincters, requires some practice in muscle control. In traditional Yogic schools the students are not allowed to practise Basti unless they master this essential technique.

CULTURAL ADVANTAGES:

Mayūrāsana partially checks the flow of the abdominal aorta and thus diverts a liberal blood supply to the digestive organs, rendering them more healthy. These organs are further toned up by the increase in the intra-abdominal pressure which Mayūrāsana causes in its practice.

THERAPEUTICAL ADVANTAGES:

Mayūrāsana is a very good measure against ptosis of the abdominal organs and against dyspepsia. Its usefulness, however, is limited, because in advanced cases of dyspepsia the patient becomes too weak to undergo the strain which this Āsana necessarily involves.

SAVĀSANA OR THE DEAD POSE

THE NAME:

The pose is called Śavāsana, because it requires complete relaxation of the muscles as in the case of a dead person, whose position the Yogic student is made to imitate in the practice of this posture. Śava means a *dead body* in Sanskrit.

THE TECHNIQUE:

The technique of Śavāsana is simple to understand, but somewhat difficult to practice. It is as follows. The student is to lie on his back, as shown in Fig. 73; and fully relax his muscles. It is to be noted here that our muscles remain slightly contracted even when we lie down for rest in a waking condition. Even this slight contraction is to be avoided in the Dead Pose. This requires an effort of will and concentration a little. The student should take a particular part of the body and thoroughly relax its muscles. Then he should concentrate upon that part and imagine that every muscle tissue in that part is further relaxing and is, as it were, collapsing. Constant practice of this procedure will enable the student to bring about full relaxation of different muscles.

Ordinarily he should start with relaxing the thorax. The abdomen should be taken up next. The lower and upper extremities should follow the abdomen, and the brain should come up last. This sequence need not necessarily be followed. However, every student should make his own choice. Many people find it easier to start with the extremities. They take up the trunk later on and finish with the brain. The eyes are to be kept closed. Those who can concentrate themselves even without shutting their eyes, although this is an extremely difficult job, may keep them open, however.

While trying to relax the different parts of his body, the student should attempt relaxation of more than one part conjointly, so that he can ultimately succeed in relaxing all the parts of his body at one and the same time. Complete relaxation of the whole frame is the final aim of Śavāsana.

When the student succeeds in simultaneously relaxing every tissue of his body, he should continue concentrating upon the relaxed

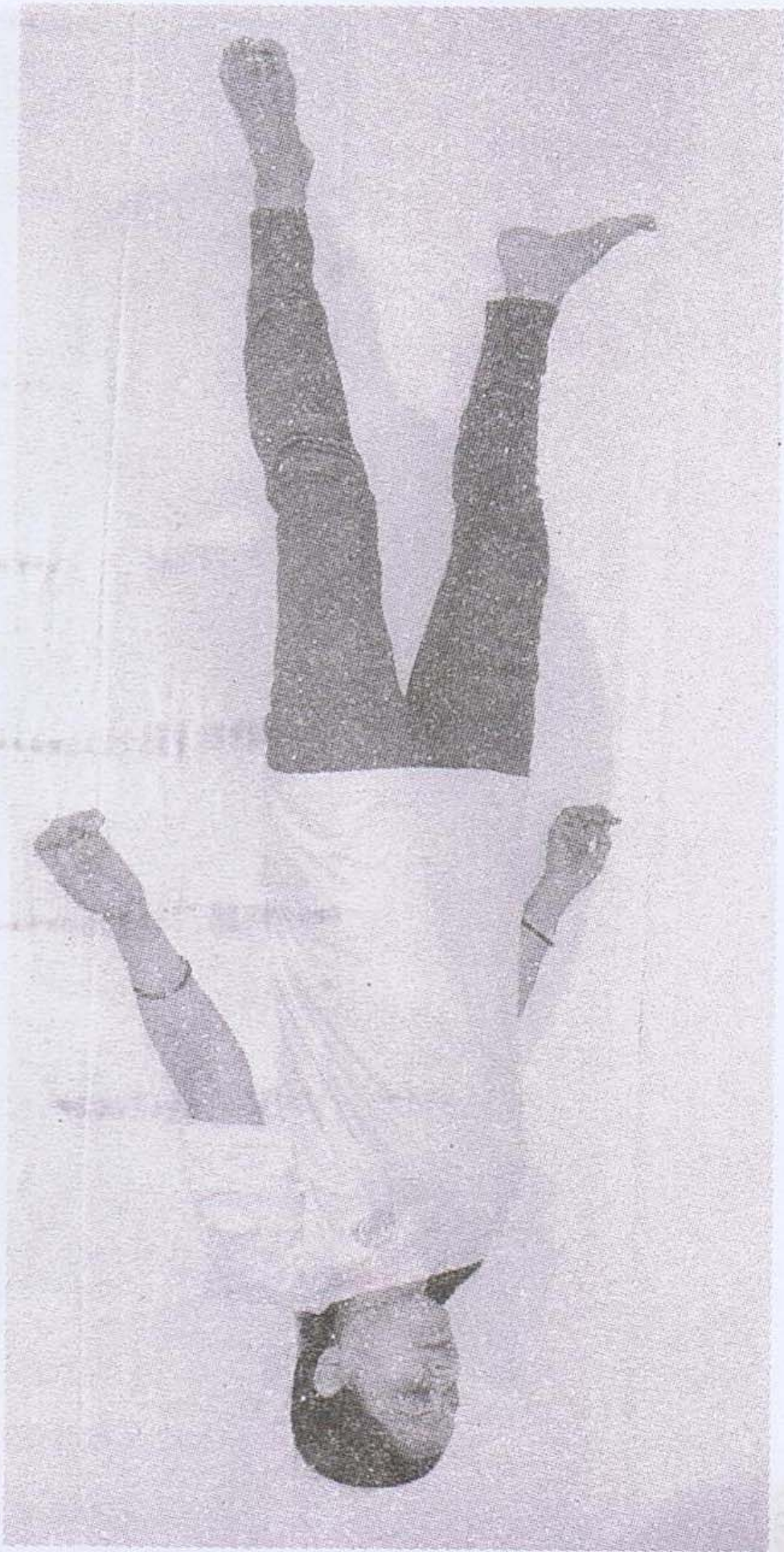


Fig. 73 : Savāsana or the Dead Pose

tissues for some time. This completes the first part of the technique of Śavāsana.

In the second part while maintaining the bodily relaxation already secured, exclusive attention is to be paid to the regulation of breath. Śavāsana aims at introducing rhythm in the flow of breath. This rhythm can best be introduced through the following stages.

First Stage:—This stage consists in observing one's breath as it flows in and flows out. No attempt is to be made to control it either in volume or in length of time. Breathing should be allowed to have its own way. This practice of observation is to be slowly developed. To begin with only two or three minutes may be given to it. Afterwards the time should increase to ten minutes. During this as well as during the next two stages, the mind will always have a tendency to wander. This tendency is not only to be checked, but is to be completely overcome. Wholehearted perseverance in practice across a good length of time is the only path that surely leads to success in concentration.

Second Stage:—In about a fortnight's time, the student will find that the breath as it ordinarily flows, is irregular. Not only the inhalation and exhalation are unequal, but each is not very uniform in itself. This uneven and irregular breathing is often responsible for ill-health and needs improvement. So the outgoing and incoming breath should be made to occupy the same length of time. This is best done by lengthening the shorter and shortening the longer one. No effort should be made to increase the volume of each respiration, however. A rhythmical flow is all that is wanted at this stage. The second stage may be practised for nearly quarter of an hour every day. In the beginning a sense of suffocation may be experienced but it will soon disappear.

Third Stage:—In a month or so the student will feel very comfortable at the rhythmical breathing. He should then try to increase the volume of his inhalation and exhalation by drawing slightly deeper breaths and letting off air proportionately. No violence is to be practised. Breathing is to be as smooth and slow as before, only the breaths are to be very slightly deeper. All the while the mind is to be concentrated upon the moving breath.

The practice of rhythmical breathing is not as easy as it looks to be at the first sight. The most difficult part of it is concentration.

Patient work, however, must enable a student to achieve success. There should be no hurry in going through the successive stages. The second stage should not be begun unless and until one has mastered the first. The same is true about the third and second stages.

Rhythmical breathing should be developed very cautiously. At least in the beginning it involves an amount of mental strain. Under no circumstances is this strain desirable. Everything should be comfortable and pleasing. Even after some practice, not more than ten minutes at a time are allowed for patients with weak nerves, although healthy persons may devote as much time to it as they please. The practice may be repeated twice or even thrice a day.

A physical culturist can satisfy himself with the first part of Śavāsana, that is, with the relaxation of his muscles. He need not go in to the rhythmical breathing necessarily, although even to him this second part of the Dead Pose will be of great value in improving his nerves. For a spiritual culturist the second part is of utmost importance. It prepares him for his Prāṇāyāmic exercises which come after Āsanas.

Śavāsana if rightly done is so soothing to the nerves that there is always a tendency to fall asleep during its practice. This tendency is to be checked very studiously, especially by a spiritual culturist who should never get into the habit of lapsing into sleep while he is concentrating his mind.

CULTURAL ADVANTAGES:

- (i) Muscles work more efficiently because of their relaxation.
- (ii) Venous blood circulation is promoted throughout the body and thus fatigue is relieved.
- (iii) The whole nervous system is toned up and mental energy is considerably increased.

THERAPEUTICAL ADVANTAGES:

- (i) Śavāsana is helpful in reducing high blood pressure.
- (ii) It can effectively overcome neurasthenia.