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Classification of Asanas with Special Reference to Physical Education and Sports

Asanas have become so popular in the world that people consider yoga as Asanas and asanas mean yoga. Different people suffering from different ailments and diseases take to asanas, school going children consider asanas as drill or frill. Even adults think that asanas mean physical exercises. When a youngman or a women goes to the public park early in the morning for doing asanas, you ask him or her "Where are you going"? "I am going to do yoga" will be his or her reply.

Yoga is not yogasana though yoga asana is an important limb of yoga. Yogasana is more than physical exercise. People have many wrong notions about asanas. Asanas are not gymnastic exercises or body building techniques. If gymnastic exercise constitute yogasanas then every circus clown and acrobat would call himself a "Yogi". There is tremendous difference between yogasanas and the games like hockey, cricket and football. There is an externalisation of energy in ordinary games whert as there is internalisation of energy in yoga asanas. One gets exhausted after physical exercises result in heavy breathing perspiration and rapid heart beat. But nothing of the kind happens in the practice of yogasanas. In asanas breath is cooled down, and there is no exhaustion or fatigue. Apart from this walking, games physical exercises, jogging, develop our muscles but asanas tone up out arteries, veins and all the systems of the body. Moreover asanas have a spirituality connotation.

Yogasanas may not have any connection with spirituality, but in truth, everything connected with yoga is related to the spirit finally.

The word asana means a seat, a posture performed steadily and with ease. It means a posture in which one can remain steady calm and comfortable, physically and mentally for a certain time whether seated or otherwise. Asana is the third step in the ladder of Hatha yoga. In yoga the word asana is used in a comprehensive manner. It connotes a larger variety of different postures which aim at integral living. Including the whole man—material, mental, and ethical. The ultimate aim of these postures is the attainment of wholesome health and happiness. Great sage patanjali defines asana as "Srthiram sukham Asanam" (That position which is comfortable and steady). He has reduced the number of asana from 84000 (believed to have been demonstrated by Lord Shiva) to 84 which are practised by yogis in India and abroad. There is something in these postures for everybody. Patanjali states in "Yoga sutra". "It is for children, adults and the aged, for the well and the ill, for the poor and the rich". The definition of asana given by patanjali is psychological rather than physical whatever is comfortable can be regarded as a suitable yoga posture. But patanjali's "Comfortable posture" has been misunderstood by some people who regard sleeping posture as most comfortable. But this comfort that is permitted by patanjali is only in so far it is in consonance with the requirement of yoga and sleep cannot be regarded as one of the requirements.

People generally take to asanas at random without caring for concentration, breathing and sequence. These are very important. In the science of yoga, concentration our efforts will not bear fruit. During each asana. The sadhak must know where to concentrate. The mode and centre for concentration varies from asan to asan and from the beginner to the expert. The beginner should concentrate upon the correct technique of an asan until

he is able to practise, that asan with automatic ease. This can be achieved within a few days or weeks depending upon the technique of the asan. After the technique comes the actual performance of the asan. When a petitioner becomes adept in doing certain asanas, minimum number of muscles is used and least amount of energy and concentration are involved. Once the adept is able to do a certain asan in a relaxed and automatic ease, then the must concentrate on breathing, whether he is breathing smoothly and normally without any strain. Normal breathing must continue naturally and rhythmically. Asanas practised in correct slow and smooth manner lead automatically to concentration. Since different muscles are involved in different asanas, the concentration is maintained between the mind the movement. Finally the adept should concentrate on the asanas strategic points of action. Each asan produce assessed effects upon some parts of the body. For example the thyroid region is affected by sarvangasana, and the solar plexus by Dhanurasana. This is the point on which the adept will concentrate. The positive effect of an asan is diluted when there is lack of proper concentration at the proper part of the body. In doing certain asanas evil thoughts and diffused concentration can produce negative effects. In order to get good effects from asanas it is essential to know why how and where to concentrate.

With a view to get maximum benefits from asanas it is necessary to perform them properly at the proper place and time. Some practitioners of asanas complain that they have been doing asanas regularly but they have not found any change in their health. It is partly due to the fact that most of the people do not observe the required rules and partly most of the people do not care about breathing and sequence while doing asanas. Asanas performed wrongly or immediately after meals can do better harm than good to the practitioner. Following basic rules must be observed before doing asanas:-

- (1) All Asanas should be done invariably in the morning and not in the evening. The reason being that in the evening one feels tired of a day work and one will not have the feelings of exhilaration and freshness which one would otherwise feel in the morning. The best time for doing asana is 5 AM in summer and 6 AM in winter.
- (2) A soft folded carpet or blanket should be used for doing asanas. The room or place selected for doing asanas should be airy well-ventilated free from mosquitoes, flies, ants. A good smooth lawn or garden or open surrounding is preferable.
- (3) Before doing asanas the bladder and intestines should be empty if the practitioner has problem of constipation he or she should drink two or three glasses of slightly salted water and then practice Tadaasana, Katichakraasana. These asanas can relieve his or her constipation.
- (4) While doing asanas the practitioner attention and concentration should be on his breath and on the particular organ or part of the body which is affected by a particular asan.
- (5) Yogasana is a non-violent activity. One should never do asanas if the practitioner is under worry, stress, strain tension, or sorrowful mood.
- (6) While doing asanas, breathing should be done through nostrils, keeping the mouth and eyes shut. In simhasana alone breathing is done through mouth. Generally while doing asanas, people do not take care of breath control.
- (7) Asanas should be done after pranayama and shavasana should be done last of all.
- (8) Relaxation during and after asanas session is essential. Shavasana is an excellent asan for

complete relaxation. This asana must be done during and after the asanas.

- (9) During asanas, it is better to wear minimum loose, light and comfortable clothes according to season. Ornaments, wrist watch, neck lace, rings, spectacles should be removed before doing asanas.
- (10) Proper attention should be paid to food which gives energy vitality, and vigour. It is better to take yogic diet which is simple vegetarian light nutritious and easily digestible.
- (11) Bathing makes the body light and fresh and increases its elasticity. Asanas should be done preferably after taking a bath (cold water or lukewarm water) in accordance with the season. Asanas can be done in the evening also but the stomach should be empty.
- (12) The sequence of asanas should be such that a particular asanas if followed by counterpose. The counterpose of psychimotasan is konasana and of sarvangasana is masyasan.
- (13) All asanas should not be done at the start. Asanas should be done according to ones capacity.
- (14) Previously it was held that asanas should be done empty stomach but the latest research says that the stomach should not be empty a small cup of tea, milk must be taken before doing asanas.
- (15) Warm-Up Exercises must be done before Asanas.

A Word of Caution

Persons suffering from Heart diseases, Nervous diseases Hypertension, and low Blood pressure, ulceration, and Hyperacidity, fractured bones, Inflammation in the intestines, should not do the following asanas:- Shirasana, Garbhasana, Hanuman asana,

Sarvangasana, Halasana, Dhanurasana, Mayurasana, Kakutasana, Konasana, and Psychimotasan. Moreover women during the period of menstruation and pregnancy (after the third month) should not do any asan.

Benefits of Asanas

- (1) Yogasanas help in mental physical and spiritual development. There is no age or sex bar in doing asanas.
- (2) The regular practice of yogasanas improve to main system namely digestive system, circulatory system, respiratory system, and Nervous system. With the advancement of age the vertebrae and joints become stiff or rigid. Yogasanas keep the spinal cord supple and flexible.
- (3) Asanas are highly beneficial for the purification of veins and nerves and promotion of sound mind and sound body. Asanas are of three types. Those which are associated with concentration and meditation, such as sukhasana, siddhasana, swastikasana padamasana. The second type of asanas are meant for the healthy growth of internal and external organs of the body such as sarvangasan, Bhujangasana, Chakrasana, Shalabasana, Garbhasana, Ushtra asana, Guarudasana, Mayurasana, and paschimotasana. The third type of asanas are meant for rest and relaxation such as shavasana, Advasan, Jeytikasana and Makarasana. The asanas should be learnt from a Guru or a person who has through knowledge of the subject. The proper technique is very essential. The body is a kind of horse to take you to destination. This horse is to be properly fed, regularly exercised and well looked after. We remember the moral story how the soldier lost the battle, because the horse of the soldier fell, the horse

fell because his shoe fell, the shoe fell because the nail of the shoe fell. This is how for want of the care of the smaller part of our body the whole body can be affected.

- (4) The waste matter accumulated in our body is eliminated by yoga asanas. As the age of a person increases several organs of the body are weakened or even damaged. The consequent accumulation of chalk-like cholesterol or other impurities in the muscles, the veins, arteries harden and narrow thus making the circulation of blood slow and irregular. Yogasanas increase the resistance power of the body and keep it free from disease.
- (5) Asanas help in purifying the blood in different blood vessels.
- (6) Asanas tone up and rejuvenate the different glands of the body. These healthy glands produce required secretion which help proper growth of the body, making it neither too fat nor too lean.
- (7) Physical ailments and diseases like arthritis, abdominal disorders diabetes, respiratory troubles, migraine, high blood pressure can be prevented and cured by asanas.
- (8) Asanas help to awaken the psychic faculties. Asanas are considered as forms of meditation and psychic purification.
- (9) People doing mental work can increase their stamina and thinking power by doing certain specific asanas namely padmasana, sarvangasana, paschimotanasana, metsyasana, Advaasana and shavasana.
- (10) The spinal cord is termed as tree of life. The branches and leaves are the ramifications or the nervous system which spread to the near and distant parts of the body. The functioning of the

nervous system depends upon the spinal cord. With the advancement of age, the vertebrae and the joints become stiff and rigid, particularly when no exercise is done. Yogasanas keep the spinal cord supple and flexible.

The word Asana originates from the Sanskrit word Aas which actually means Existence and the condition of existence is referred to as Asana or position or yoga postures Asana is considered as the first step in Hatha Yoga and the third step in Patanjali yoga or Ashtanga Yoga. Asanas are gentle stretches that are designed to balance the body and mind. The postures are designed so as to rejuvenate the spine, glands, brain and other internal organs, increase blood circulation and supply oxygen (prana) to all parts with a mild squeezing action. In addition to this, the asanas when performed regularly increases stamina, efficiency, body immunity, calmness of mind and improves outlook.

Asanas are performed in three main steps; firstly assuming the position, second being the position itself and finally relaxing from the position. As Asana is defined as a comfortable and steady position, the movements performed should also be slow and steady. Sudden and speedy movements are strictly forbidden. Most Asanas benefit more than one body part simultaneously. For instance there are certain yogic asanas that benefit the adrenals, kidneys, pancreas and spine in a single stretch.

Based on their application, asanas can be classified as follows:

- **Meditative Asana** Padmasana (Lotus pose), Swastikasana (Auspicious pose), Siddhasana (perfect pose), Samanasana (Balance pose), Vajrasana (Thunderbolt pose) etc., are grouped into this category. These asanas help in stabilizing the body for meditative practices and Pranayama.

- For better health **Matsyendrasana (Spinal twist pose)** improves digestion and production of insulin, while the Sarvangasana (Shoulder stand pose) benefits the thyroid and endocrine glands. Similarly various asanas have positive impact on more than one part of the body.

- For Relaxation **Makarasana (Crocodile pose)**, Shavasana (Corpse pose) etc., provide complete relaxation to mind and body.

- Based on positions, the Asanas can be classified as :

- **Supine posture** Halasana (plough pose), Chakrasana (wheel pose) and Sarvangasana (shoulder stand pose).

- **Prone posture** Bhujangasana (Cobra pose), Dhanurasana (bow pose), Shalabhasana (locust pose) and Naukasana (boat pose).

- **Sitting posture** – Paschimottasana (forward bend pose), Matsyendrasana (spinal twist pose), vajrasana (thunderbolt pose) and Padmasana (lotus pose).

- **Standing posture** Vrikshasana (tree pose), Veerasana (warrior pose) etc. There are various other ways to classify the Asanas, these are only a few of such Asanas..