

RESTORATIVE ĀSANAS FOR MEN

– Geeta S. Iyengar

The inversions play a great role in keeping the endocrine system of men as well as women in order. Men too need the restorative āsanas, the supine āsanas, to recover from fatigue as much as women. Women normally do selected forward extensions along with supine āsanas and perhaps supported Dwi Pāda Viparīta Daṇḍāsana and Setubandha Sarvāṅgāsana during menstruation. This particular sequence, recommended to women, is not prohibited at all for men, though men do not menstruate. It is as important for men as it is for women to maintain hormonal balance, emotional stability and to remove fatigue and check aggressiveness. In fact, men should make it a regular routine to practice inversions, forward extensions and supine āsanas, at least once a week in order to keep themselves free from high blood pressure, diabetes, hormonal and emotional disturbances as well as anger and desire. Then peace of mind follows.

Menstruation, which occurs regularly every month for women, is a kind of physiological clock. This clock regulates the periods and women get their menses every twenty-eight, thirty or even forty days. It gets disturbed only when there is a physiological or mental disturbance, or if it is withheld in pregnancy. Otherwise the clock alarm goes off in time and this causes women to adjust.

A woman has to adjust her monthly practice around the clock, since the ovulation and menstruation both keep on showing the change in her. The chemical hormonal changes keep on occurring every month regularly in women and show the changes in the physical and mental health of her body, whereas such visible indications are not found in men. Men are lucky, since the physiological clock is not within to alarm them. Yet, they cannot forget the fact that in their case the change is suddenly found at a particular age and they too get disturbed.

At puberty, a boy may show a sudden change in personality. The nature

changes, they become aggressive and the parents may find difficulty to control boys at this stage. Therefore, whether it is a girl or a boy it is very important to build up their character. They are likely to slip off from the right, moral and righteous path. At this stage boys suddenly discover their sexuality. The endocrine glands and the physiological functioning on which these factors depend have a great role to play. The practice of yoga can certainly help the youngsters during and after puberty to maintain an inner balance of the mind and to have a control over emotions.

It is essential for boys as well as elderly men to regularise their practice with inversions and forward extensions in order to recover themselves from fatigue, irritation, emotional disturbances, etc.

Often men suffer with a sudden and excessive discharge of semen which causes loss of energy once in a while; however, this is not considered a disease. It is the natural process. This is the time to concentrate on

inversions and forward extensions.

The endocrine glands help each other to maintain the balance, which is controlled by the nervous system. The inversions tone and stimulate the nervous system and endocrine system, by improving circulation. The circulatory system on the other hand, depends upon the respiratory and digestive system for its proper functioning. This is how the circuit of the system helps in order to maintain the health of the body. If men know a bit of the functioning of these systems and the correct way of doing inversions, forward extensions as well as the effects of these *āsanas* on body and mind, then it is not at all difficult for them to realise how the *āsanas* help.

Let me explain a bit about this. Take the example of *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana* – headstand, and *Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana* – shoulder stand. *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana* stimulates the pituitary and thyroid glands. *Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana* improves circulation around the thyroid glands. Both these *āsanas*, along with *Halāsana*, control the adrenals. *Haṭhayoga Pradīpikā* speaks of *Viparīta Karaṇī* where the *candrasthāna* – the region at the base of the brain – stores its energy and does not allow the *sūryasthāna* – the region at the navel – to consume all the energy. All the inversions such as *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana*, *Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana*, *Halāsana* and *Viparīta Karaṇī* come under the category of *Viparīta Karaṇī* as explained by the text, since the body goes upside down.

The pituitary is situated in the head, which is below the hypothalamus. The hypothalamus keeps constantly receiving the

nerve impulses whenever the body and senses are in immediate need of action. Secreted chemical substances are released from the hypothalamus to the pituitary. The hypothalamus stimulates the pituitary gland. *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana*, especially when done accurately on the crown of the head, lifting the shoulders high up and tucking the shoulder blades inwards, brings a very pleasant feeling in the brain. That is why often one feels like doing *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana* whenever one is fatigued; especially if one has practised *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana* very regularly. The improved circulation towards the brain refreshes the brain and stimulates the glands.

Often the doctors warn the patient of high blood pressure and advise that they refrain from doing *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana*. They do not seem to know that *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana*, done correctly, helps in regulating blood pressure. *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana* undoubtedly, has to be accompanied with *Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana* and *Halāsana*. But *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana* itself is a preventive provided it is done correctly. When one already has developed a disorder, unless one has learnt the correct and accurate method, it may increase the problem. The hypothalamus manufactures the hormone called vasopressin, which maintains blood pressure. High blood pressure is a common problem among men, especially when their profession causes tension, anxiety and mental disturbances. So as a precaution, if they do *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana* and *Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana* regularly, they can prevent this problem.

Though diabetes insipidus is found

rarely, unlike diabetes mellitus, the inversions and forward extension *āsanas* are very helpful. In diabetes insipidus the frequency of urination increases though sugar is not found in the urine. However, the body loses water. The person keeps on feeling thirsty and craves for water. Here, the pituitary fails to discharge vasopressin. In other words, the *sūrya cakra* – at the region of the navel – absorbs the nectar from *candra cakra* – at the region of the base of the brain – and burns everything. The inversions help a lot with the patients of this kind of diabetes. *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana* stimulates the hypothalamus and pituitary glands.

You have experienced alertness and you feel refreshed after doing *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana*. A dull pituitary causes lethargy, dullness, excess of sleep, heaviness, fat, etc. A healthy pituitary controls the period of sleep. Therefore, students during their examinations are asked to concentrate on *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana*, *Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana*, *Halāsana*, *Setubandha Sarvāṅgāsana* and *Viparīta Karaṇī* so that they can recover fast. They need not sleep longer to recover. The brain remains fresh.

These *āsanas* play a great role in intellectual development and formation of moral character in a healthy practitioner. They sharpen the mental power.

Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana controls the pituitary and thyroid glands. *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana* stimulates these glands and *Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana* checks the stimulation from its over-activity. People suffering with hyperthyroid enjoy *Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana*, though it has to do with support whereas those who have hypothyroid

feel lively with *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana*. A healthy thyroid situated in the throat shows the “will to live” tendency. A person lives actively and positively with the capacity of higher thinking and higher consciousness. A well-balanced and healthy spiritual evolution is possible with a healthy and controlled thyroid. Unhealthy thyroid shows depression, dejection and suicidal tendency. A person becomes negative.

At the same time, one cannot forget the relationship of these glands with sexual activity. The dull pituitary gland causes sexual impotency whereas the sex glands influence the thyroid gland with sexual excitement. On the other hand, the adrenal glands situated above the kidneys accelerate the sex glands.

The problems common to men, are the enlargement of prostate glands, swelling of testicles, prostate malfunctioning, inflammation or blockage of seminal vesicles and so on and so forth.

Sperm is produced in the testicles and prostate glands secrete semen. The prostate adds semen to sperm, which travels through the seminal vesicle. Dryness and swelling of the prostate glands irritates men with a localised ache. *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana* and *Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana* both protect them from enlarged prostates, which cause blockage or difficulty in urination. *Baddha Koṅāsana*, *Upaviṣṭha Koṅāsana* in *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana* and *Supta Koṅāsana* in *Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana*, are preventive as well as curative *āsanas* for such problems. As menstruation causes a fall of calcium and needs to be balanced with *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana* and *Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana*, so also, in men, the testicles control the calcium

level and inversions maintain this level.

While describing the effects of *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana*, *Guruji* says in *Light on Yoga*, “One becomes balanced and self-reliant in pain and pleasure, loss and gain, shame and fame, and defeat and victory.” How true it is! When the endocrine system remains in a balanced state with its functioning, one is controlled not only psychologically but also emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

A word of caution! Do not attempt only *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana* or end up the practice with *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana* alone; *Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana* should follow it. Many people know about *Śavāsana* and say that the practice of *āsanas* should be ended with *Śavāsana*. But how many know that it should end with inversions? We often tell you to round up the practice by following the sequence of *Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana*, *Halāsana*, *Setubandha Sarvāṅgāsana* and *Viparīta Karaṇī*, or at least doing one of these *āsanas*. The alternative for this is the forward extensions such as *Paśchimottānāsana*. Now you will know why we say so.

This caution is more important for men than women. Man is really a man because of his adrenals in spite of his sex glands. A manly strength is because of his healthy and strong adrenals, which could cheat him often if he really cannot judge his energy. Men have an excessive supply of adrenal secretions and find themselves more energetic. Often, this dominating and aggressive nature is because of excessive adrenals. It is very important to balance the hormones of adrenals with the pituitary. A

person with a balanced level of these hormones is gentle and composed mentally, having a creative nature and a depth in thinking.

The excessive activity of the adrenals can be controlled by forward extension alone. Men can check their blood pressure, anger, anxiety, diabetic tendency, aggressiveness, cruelty, etc., with forward extension. *Guruji* mentions about *Paśchimottānāsana* in *Light on Yoga* that it helps to increase vitality and leads towards sex control. The oxygenated blood is circulated around the generative organs, which brings back health. It is significant that *Paśchimottānāsana* is called *Ugrāsana* or *Brahmacharyāsana*. It controls the sexual desire with a healthy feeling and not leading towards impotency, whereas the backward extensions are recommended when one suffers with impotency. Therefore, whenever undesired seminal discharge occurs, it is time to do inversions and forward extensions. In fact, this group of *āsanas* should be well balanced with a regular practice of other *āsanas*, such as standing *āsanas* and back-bendings. Therefore, at least once a week men should do forward-bendings and inversions regularly, everyday without fail, which protects them from future diseases, such as hydrocoel, gonorrhoea, spermatorrhoea, hernia, enlarged prostate, frequent and painful urination, high blood pressure, tension, stress and strain and so on. On the other hand, they need to practise the back-bendings when they suffer from impotency.

If you have noticed the mental state of men, you will know that they take a long time to recover from mental depression. They

are courageous and do not collapse as fast as women. Their deterioration is slow. The mental tensions, worries, depression might not be as expressive in men as they are in women. These problems tell upon the body immediately in women but gradually in men. That is why most of the men suffer after forty-five and sometimes meet death too.

The introverted nature of men may be sometimes considered as a virtuous quality, but one has to find out whether it is genuine or self-killing. A real quietness or peacefulness in men or women should never be hypocrisy. If one pretends to be quiet, silent, peaceful and happy it will be suicidal. These qualities should be genuine; then there is no harm. Inversions and forward extensions save one from this pretension and from a suicidal and false state of mind.

The inversions play a great role in the life of men, in order to keep their mind in a balanced and quiet state. The forward extensions check their aggressiveness, whereas the supine positions give them freedom in their breathing process and cool down the generative organs, resulting in a calming of the mind.

Herewith is the list of *āsanas* and *prāṇāyāmas* done during menstruation:

STANDING

- 1) *Uttānāsana*
- 2) *Pādānguṣṭhāsana*
- 3) *Adho Mukha Śvānāsana*

FORWARD EXTENSIONS

- 4) *Adho Mukha Virāsana*
- 5) *Adho Mukha Svastikāsana*
- 6) *Jānu Śīrṣāsana*
- 7) *Trianga Mukhaikapāda Paśchimottānāsana*
- 8) *Ardha Baddha Padma Paśchimottānāsana*
- 9) *Maṛichyāsana I*
- 10) *Paśchimottānāsana*
- 11) *Upaviṣṭha Koṇāsana*
- 12) *Baddha Koṇāsana*

SUPINE

- 13) *Supta Virāsana*
- 14) *Supta Baddha Koṇāsana*
- 15) *Matsyāsana*

SITTING

- 16) *Virāsana*
- 17) *Padmāsana*
- 18) *Baddha Koṇāsana*
- 19) *Upaviṣṭha Koṇāsana*

SUPPORTED BACKBENDS

- 20) *Dwi Pāda Viparīta Daṇḍāsana*
- 21) *Setubandha Sarvāṅgāsana*

Note: Men can do *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana*, *Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana* and *Halāsana* before attempting *Setubandha Sarvāṅgāsana* and then attempt *Viparīta Karaṇī*. However, women should avoid these four *āsanas* during menstruation.

PRĀṆĀYĀMAS IN ŚAVĀSANA

- 1) *Ujjāyī*
- 2) *Viloma I – Inhalation-Viloma*
- 3) *Viloma II – exhalation-Viloma*

