



Review article

A critical review on *Dhauti Karma*: the first cleansing procedure of *Shatkarma*

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ABSTRACT

Many of our health problems, especially those related to digestive issues, stem from poor digestion and improper elimination of waste. According to Ayurveda, metabolic and autoimmune diseases begin when *Agni* (digestive fire) is compromised, leading to the formation of *Aam* (undigested food). A thorough stomach cleanse, such as *Vaman Dhauti* (induced vomiting), can provide a lasting solution to various health problems, including indigestion, gastritis, acidity, bloating, constipation, flatulence, piles, and poor liver function. Even individuals with obesity, diabetes, and asthma often find this procedure highly beneficial. Those who regularly practice this *Kriya* typically enjoy a glowing complexion. This is a natural cleansing process, requiring no medications, only lukewarm water with a pinch of *Saindha Lavana* (rock salt). The *Shatkarmas*, which include *Dhauti*, *Basti*, *Neti*, *Nauli*, *Trataka*, and *Kapalabhati*, are traditional purification techniques. *Dhauti* is considered the foremost among these six cleansing practices, as outlined in both the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* and the *Gherand Samhita*. *Dhauti Karma* involves various cleansing methods, including *Antardhauti*, *Danta Dhauti*, *Hridhdhauti*, and *Mulashodhana*, all of which are designed for internal cleansing. *Vaman Dhauti* is one such technique, offering a simple yet complete process that can be easily learned and performed by both healthy and unwell individuals, in their own space, to prevent metabolic and autoimmune diseases and promote overall health.

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INTRODUCTION

The ancient yogis of India developed remarkable inner cleansing procedures to help the body cope with accumulated toxins. While the excretory system naturally eliminates waste and detoxifies the body, the modern lifestyle, marked by unnatural foods and habits, overwhelms these organs, making it difficult for them to handle the toxic load. This is why performing *Shatkarma* (the six inner cleansing procedures of Yoga) has become essential in our daily lives. There is no system more effective, simple, or faster than *Shatkarma* to cleanse the body in a natural way. These processes are highly scientific, hygienic, and effective in alleviating ailments caused by auto-intoxication.

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* places *Dhauti Karma* at the forefront of the *Shatkarmas*. In Sanskrit, the word *Dhauti* means "to purify," and yogis recommend several types of *Dhauti Kriyas* using water, cloth, and air to cleanse the digestive and excretory systems. *Dhauti Karma* includes various techniques such as *Antardhauti* (which includes *Vatsara*, *Varisara*, *Vahnisara*, and *Bhishkrita*), *Danta Dhauti* (including *Dantmoola Shodhana*, *Jivha Shodhana*, *Jivha Moola Shodhana*, *Karna Dhauti*, and *Kapalarandhra Dhauti*), *Hridhdhauti* (including *Danda Dhauti* and *Vaman Dhauti*), and *Mulashodhana*. *Vaman*

Dhauti is also known as *Kunjali Kriya* (referenced in verse 1(13) in *Digamberji* and *Gharote*, 1997).

This study is a literary review based on the texts of the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* and *Gherand Samhita* (Yogic texts). The aim is to mainstream *Shatkarma* and *Dhauti* as yogic procedures for waste elimination and body purification and to examine the *Vaman Dhauti/Kunjali Kriya* technique (cleansing by expelling *Kapha* from the mouth) as practiced in the present day.

SHATKARMA

The seven aids for conditioning the body are: *Shodhana* (purification), *Dridhata* (strength), *Sthairyam* (steadiness), *Dhairyam* (composure), *Laghavam* (lightness), *Pratyaksam* (realization), and *Nirliptam* (isolation). The *Shatkarmas* purify the body; *Asanas* build strength; *Mudras* cultivate steadiness; *Pratyahara* promotes calmness; *Pranayama* brings lightness; *Dhyana* fosters self-realization; and *Samadhi* leads to isolation, which is synonymous with liberation. One should practice the *Shatkarmas*, *Dhauti*, *Basti*, *Neti*, *Nauli*, *Trataka*, and *Kapalabhati*, as outlined in verses 1(9-12) of *Digamberji* and *Gharote* (1997) and verse 2(22) of *Shastri* (2009).

A person whose *Shleshma Medho Dhatu* (*Kapha* *Dosha* and fatty tissue) has accumulated should first purify

the body with the *Shatkarmas* to reduce the excess Shleshma Dhātu before engaging in Pranayama practice. The *Shatkarmas* detoxify the internal system and expel waste material. Upon completion of these practices, the body's properties are enhanced. This is why ancient Rishis highly praised the *Shatkarmas*, as noted in verses 2(21, 23) of Shastri (2009).

DHAUTI KARMA (CLEANSING PROCEDURE)

Both healthy and diseased individuals can purify the body by practicing the four types of Dhauti Karma: *Antardhauti*, *Danta Dhauti*, *Hriddhauti*, and *Mulashodhana*.

Antardhauti (inner cleansing)

The *Antardhauti* technique purifies the body through four distinct methods: *Vatasara*, *Varisara*, *Vanhisara*, and *Bahiskrita* (as described in *Digamberji and Gharote*, 1997, verses 1(14-24)).

Vatasara (cleansing air technique): In this technique, air is slowly drawn through the mouth, forming a shape resembling a crow's beak, and then exhaled slowly through the mouth while the abdomen is moved. *Vatasara* purifies the body, eliminates diseases, and increases *Deha Anala* (digestive fire).

Varisara (cleansing water technique): In this method, water is slowly drunk until the throat is filled. Then, it is expelled through the lower passage (rectum) by moving the abdomen. *Varisara* purifies the body and should be practiced with great care and secrecy. It has the effect of making the body radiant and rejuvenated.

Vanhisara (cleansing fire technique): The navel is pressed against the spine and moved up and down a hundred times to treat abdominal diseases and enhance *Jatharagni* (digestive fire). This practice brings success (*Siddhi*) to practitioners.

Bahiskrita Antar Dhauti (cleansing by expelling air): The practitioner forms *Kaki-Mudra* (crow beak mouth) and fills the abdomen with air. The air is retained for about 1½ hours, then forced down through the lower passage. This technique can only be mastered once the practitioner is able to retain air for the required duration.

Danta Dhauti (teeth cleansing technique)

Danta Dhauti involves the cleaning of five parts: the root of the teeth, the root of the tongue, the openings of the ears, and the frontal sinuses (as described in *Digamberji and Gharote*, 1997, verses 1(24-34)).

Danta Moola Dhauti (cleansing the base of the tooth): To purify the roots of the teeth, rub them with *Khadira* plant extract or clean earth until impurities are removed. This technique helps preserve the teeth and is considered one of the most beneficial Dhauti practices for yogis.

Jihvashodhana (tongue cleansing): This technique cleanses the tongue, which is believed to destroy old age, death, and disease.

Jihvamoola Dhauti (cleansing the base of the tongue): Using the index, middle, and ring fingers, the root of the tongue is cleaned slowly to remove impurities. This practice helps eliminate Kapha-related diseases.

Karna Dhauti (ear cleansing): The external orifice of the ear is rubbed with the tip of the index finger. This practice, with regular practice, enhances auditory perception.

Kapalrandhra Dhauti (head cleansing): After waking up, after meals, and at the end of the day, rub the *Bhalarandhra* (root of the mouth) with the thumb of the right hand. This practice helps prevent diseases associated with Kapha and promotes clarity of vision.

Hriddhauti (chest cleansing)

Hriddhauti can be practiced in three ways: with a stalk, by vomiting, or with a piece of cloth (as per *Digamberji and Gharote*, 1997, verses 1(35-40)).

Danda Dhauti (chest cleansing by stalk): Insert a stalk (e.g., banana, turmeric, or cane) into the throat, move it gently, and then slowly withdraw it. This helps expel *Kapha*, *Pitta*, and *Kleda* (mucus) from the upper passage.

Vaman Dhauti (chest cleansing by vomiting): After a meal, drink water until it reaches the throat, then expel it. This process, now commonly practiced as *Kunjali Kriya*, helps alleviate diseases caused by Kapha and Pitta, and is particularly beneficial for conditions like cough, breathlessness, splenic diseases, and skin disorders.

Vastra Dhauti (cloth cleansing of the chest): Swallow a strip of cloth and draw it out slowly. This technique helps treat *Gulma*, fever, enlarged spleen, skin diseases, and disorders of Kapha and Pitta. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* recommends swallowing a wet cloth, measuring about 4 *Angula* (finger widths) wide and 15 *Hasta* (cubit) long, to cleanse the digestive tract.

Moola Shodhana (rectum cleansing)

To purify the *Apana Vayu* (which governs excretion), the rectum must be cleaned using a turmeric stem or the middle finger, along with water. This practice helps alleviate constipation, indigestion, improves skin complexion, nourishes the body, and stimulates the digestive organs (as described in *Digamberji and Gharote*, 1997, verses 1(40-43)).

VAMAN DHAUTI / KUNJAL KRIYA TECHNIQUE IN THE PRESENT ERA

For *Vaman Dhauti* (*Kunjali Kriya*), the practitioner should take a *Ghee-Khichadi* (porridge with clarified butter) for dinner the previous night to prepare the digestive system. The procedure should be performed on an empty stomach in the morning after attending to natural calls. The blood pressure and pulse rate are recorded before and after the procedure.

The practitioner drinks 7-10 glasses of lukewarm water with a pinch of *Saindhava Lavana* (rock salt) per glass, depending on their capacity. The individual then

bends forward or assumes the *Kakasana* (crow pose) while waiting for the natural urge to vomit. If necessary, the practitioner can stimulate vomiting by touching the base of the tongue with the first two fingers and having an assistant apply pressure to the abdomen.

The procedure is repeated up to three rounds, until all the water is expelled or signs of *Pittanta* (Pitta symptoms) appear. After completion, the practitioner should rest in *Shavasana* for five minutes before eating *Ghee-Khichadi* as breakfast after an hour.

Individuals with high blood pressure, heart issues, hiatus hernia, or ulcerative colitis should avoid this procedure unless under professional supervision. Practitioners should also avoid eating meat, alcohol, coffee, tea, spicy foods, sweets, and overeating to prevent side effects.

DISCUSSION

All cleansing procedures should be performed under the guidance of a trained yoga instructor. *Acharya Vagbhata* emphasizes that *Vaman* is the best remedy for Kapha Doshas when practiced through the proper channels (*Vagbhat and Hridya*, 1995). *Acharya Sharangdhara* states that *Vaman Karma*, performed on an empty stomach in the morning, is beneficial when Kapha Dosha is in excess (*Srivastava*, 2009).

Vaman Dhauti is ideally performed early in the morning, as Kapha Dosha is most dominant at this time. This procedure involves filling the stomach with lukewarm water and expelling it, which helps cleanse the stomach and esophagus. It serves as a digestive cleansing, particularly benefiting conditions such as constipation, indigestion, acidity, heartburn, and biliary disorders.

The properties of *Saindhava Lavana* are described in classical texts as being *Agnideepak*, *Pachak*, and *Lekhana* (scraping), which help eliminate *Kapha* and *Ama* (toxins), while *Jala* (water) aids in purification and detoxification of the digestive tract. Thus, *Vaman Dhauti* effectively scrapes and cleanses the upper digestive tract, expelling excess Kapha and Pitta doshas, promoting balance in the body.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author(s) declare(s) no conflicts of interest.

DECLARATION

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