

## Antenatal Yoga

By S. Ramaswami

Naadi granthishu  
Jananam Labdhwa,  
Maamse kose  
vridhim gathwa.  
Sandhishu Leela  
Natanam kruthwa,  
Rogo yogaath  
Nasyathi Ha Ha

The above stanza appears in a beautiful kavya, "Yoganjali" of my Guru, Sri. T. Krishnamacharya. "Originating from among the granthis and spreading through the tissues, disease, waltzes over the joints, but surely is destroyed by yoga"

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The purpose of this series of articles on the possible application of therapy is mainly to indicate its potential and to appraise the amount of depth of insight the yogis have had on the anatomy and physiology and the wide range of applications

However, these should not be taken as a work-book for direct application "out of the shelf" as it were, when it is emphasised that even in normal healthy individuals, a guru or a teacher is essential for practice of yoga. It is all the more so in therapeutic application of yoga.

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Before going into the mechanics of these yoga practices, let us consider what natural childbirth or sukhaprasava, could mean. It is mentioned by medical doctors, that when the cortex of the brain functions properly, the emotions cease to have an upsetting effect on us. If one considers the effect of fatigue which is a phenomenon we live with increasingly, it can be said that emotion or agitation occurs when there is no restraining influence. One could

feel the devil working havoc when one is weak with fever. It is said that the restraint necessary comes from cerebral cortex, which has the power to stop the disturbance originating in the subconscious centres of the brain. Hence it is consequential that agitation will occur as soon as cortex itself is disturbed. We know that a person where cerebral cortex functions perfectly can stand great pain with the minimum of agitation. If there is less agitation, then the muscles also function normally facilitating easy child birth. Thus the method of yoga practice as per Sampradaya is both to provide the necessary strength to the uterus and the secondary muscles that should work in unison during labour and a serene mind that has the capacity to prevent disturbing emotions from appearing. Yoga attem-

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pts to provide both the physical strength and the mental control. The expectant mother is able to direct child birth, rather than meekly submitting to it, in which case the whole process becomes painfully chaotic. Ofcourse there are conditions like Caphalo-pelvic disproportion and other mechanical obstructive cause that may not lend to natural child-birth. But some cases of cervical dystocia which may be related to psychological reasons, or intrinsic neuro muscular disturbances may benefit greatly by these practices.

Thus doing yogasanas only with proper modulated breathing or Swaasa Uchwaasa, along with the specific pranayamas mentioned by Nathamuni would help (a) a relaxed and confident mind, able to "manage" labour properly (b) the "delivery apparatus" becomes strong, relaxed and tuned to function properly. (c) The controlled breathing in asana and specific pranayamas have a sedative effect on the mother. This also helps in proper oxygenation so very necessary to the mother, and the foetus going through the difficult process to become a new born.

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The yoga practices that are helpful for normal delivery are given by Sri Nathamuni in the following verses.

Aadhyaam  
 Jatarabhaagasya  
 Vivruthihi kona  
 Panchakam  
 Sitahi Naadika  
 Sudhihi  
 Dwipaath peetancha  
 Vajrakam.  
 Dandaasanam  
 Poorvataanam  
 Suknaprasava  
 Hetawaha.

The asanas suggested are :

1. Jataraparivriti : Abdomenae stretch. 2. Konasanas: Five of them. It is learnt that Sri Nathamuni refers to the following five Konasanas: i) Uthitha Trikonaasana. ii) Urdhwakonasana : Konasana done on either Sirsasana or Sarvangasana. However these are to be done only upto the 6th month of pregnancy. iii) Upavishtakarasana: Triangle pose, sitting. iv) Suptakonasana : Konasana done lying down. v) Badhakonasana : An extension of Upavishtakonasana. 3. Dwipaadapeetam: Desk pose 4. Vajraasanam 5. Dandaasanam: Stick posture 6. Poorvataanasanam : Anterior stretching pose.

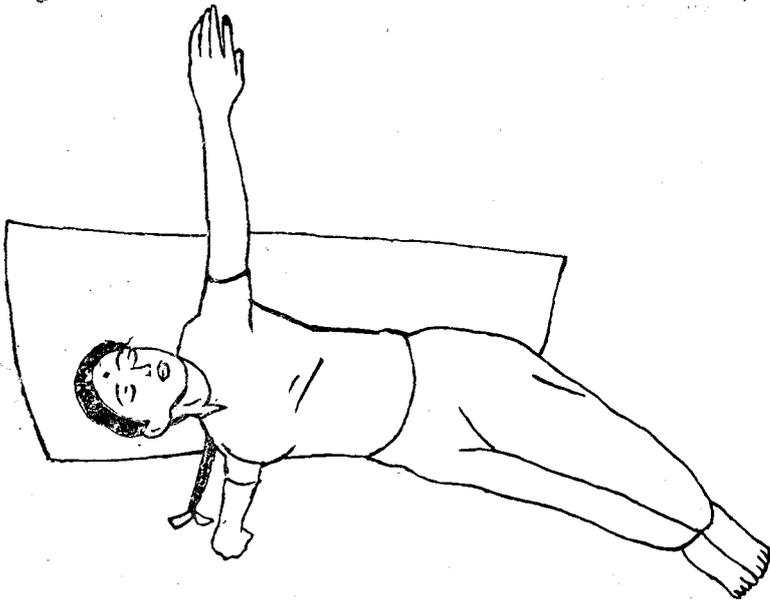
Pranayamas: 1. Seethali: for cooling the system. 2.

Naadi Sudhi : purification of Naadis.

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**Jataraparivriti :** There are many variations in this. The simplest one is taken up. Lie down face upward, on a soft carpet. Keep the legs together and arms along with the body. After a few breaths, and when you feel relaxed due to steady breathing, preferably through control at the throat, inhale stretch arms and swing them to shoulder level. On the next exhalation, slightly raise the head rotate left and place the left side of the face on the floor. After a couple of breaths, on the next exhalation pressing the arms, and upper body and anchoring the hip, from the hip swivel slowly the legs, one by one to the right side, stretching the left side all along. Close your eyes, do 6 to 12 inhalations, exhalations, with very little holding of breath in between. One may stay upto even 5 minutes in this stretching pose. Then inhale return to the starting position. Repeat it on the other side. This is Jataraparivriti (Refer sketch 1). It is helpful in stretching the abdominal and pelvic muscles. The long modulated breathing helps in relaxed stretching and enhances muscular strength.

Sketch 1



exhale as you lower the trunk on the right side, just as much as possible without undue strain. Hold the knee or shin, ankle or place the palm on the ground by the side of the right foot, depending upon your ability to stretch. Inhale, return to the starting position. Repeat a few times or stay in Uthitha Trikonasana for a few breaths. Then repeat it on the other side. One may do this asana upto the sixth month. A long

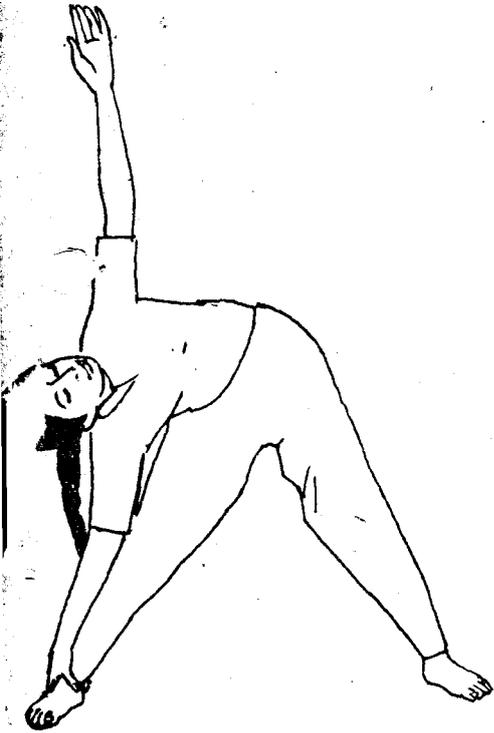
exhalation coupled with smooth movement will help getting a good stretch of the sides, especially the hip. (Sketch 2). If one is even slightly unwell, feeling weak or giddy, this should preferably be skipped. It may be preferable however, to do this posture lying down, as Jataraparivriti.

**Upavish takonasana**

(Refer sketch 3) This konasana is done sitting Startwith Dandasana. Exhale spread

**Trikonasana or Triangle Pose:** This posture is to be done carefully. Only those

that have a good balance and had been regularly practising yoga can continue during pregnancy. Start with Samasthithi. Exhale spreading the legs about 3½' to 4' depending upon one's height Take a few normal breaths and get a feel for the posture. Inhale raise arms to shoulder level. Now, exhale turn the head and neck to the left side so that you look over the left shoulder and bending the hip



Sketch 2



Sketch 3

both the legs as much as possible stretching the groins and thighs. Then inhale raise the arms overhead and do a few breaths. Next exhale slightly push the pelvis forward and hold the toes, keeping the chin locked. This may be possible upto 6 months. If holding the toes is not possible without bending forward too much, it is preferable to keep arms overhead and stay for 6 to 12 breaths. As a counterpose, exhale, keep the palms on the ground behind your back. Inhale, raise the trunk, keeping the legs still spread. Exhale return.

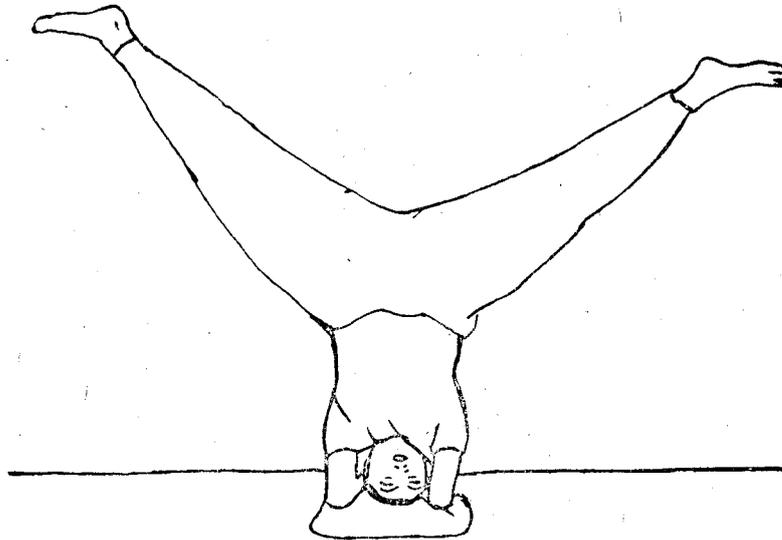
**Urdhwakonasana:** If one is capable of doing Sirsaasana and Sarvaangasana, Urdhwakonasana may be attempted. This posture has the added advantage in that, since in these topsy turvy postures,

the legs become relaxed after a while in the posture, it will be possible to get a little more stretch of the thighs, groins, perineum and the pelvis. Refer to sketch 4. This can be done only upto the sixth month.

The above group of asanas apart from providing the

necessary pelvic stretch, improve circulation and due to accompanied long breathing the abhyasi is generally more relaxed and hence the stretching will be easier.

The remaining asanas and certain niyamas mentioned in yoga texts for pregnant women will follow.



Sketch 4

