

## VAJRASANA AND ITS PHYSIOANATOMICAL ASPECT

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## ABSTRACT

The word 'Yoga' is derived from *Sanskrit* root 'Yuj' which means 'to join' or 'to yok'. The union of individual self *Jivatma*, with the universal self *Paramatma* is *Yoga*. *Yoga* is performed through some specific postures called *Asanas*. The benefits of *Asanas* range from physical to spiritual level. *Asanas* not only tone the muscles, ligaments, joints and nerves but also maintains the smooth functioning and health of entire body. *Vajrasana* or 'the adamantine posture' or 'the warrior pose' is *asana* used for meditation and *Pranayama*. Most of the *Asanas* are indicated empty stomach but *Vajrasana* is indicated after meals. It is effective in maintenance of digestive system and cures disorders related to digestion. Also it provides strength to muscles of lower back and thigh, increase blood supply to abdominal and pelvic organs, hence improves the functioning of pelvic and abdominal organs. It boosts metabolism and circulation of body. It is important to keep practicing until you are absolutely comfortable in final pose. *Vajrasana* is described in second chapter in *Gheranda Samhita*.

**Keywords:** *Asana*, , back and pelvic muscles, digestive system, *Vajrasana*, *Yoga*

## INTRODUCTION

*Yoga* is very ancient system that originated in India. The word 'Yoga' is derived from *Sanskrit* root 'Yuj' which means 'to join' or 'to yok'<sup>1</sup>. *Asana* is defined as the steady posture comfortable for the practice of meditation.<sup>2</sup> *Asanas* are not only a form of physical exercise but also the method of gaining the perfect mental and physical relaxation. *Asana*<sup>3</sup> is third step of *Astang yoga*. *Vajrasana*<sup>4</sup> is the only *Asana* which is indicated after meals. *Vajrasana yoga* posture is named after its final posture: that of a diamond or thunderbolt. In *Sanskrit* 'Vajra' means "thunderbolt" or "diamond like" and 'Asana' means "posture" or "seat".

*Vajra* or thunderbolt is said to be the weapon of *Indra*, king of the *Devas* or gods<sup>5</sup>. *Vajra* is also the major *Nadi* directly connected to the genito-urinary system. So *Vajrasana* is very beneficial for reproductive as well as digestive organs and is also reasonably easy to perform. Nowadays due to change in dietary habits and daily routine, there are much people with digestive system disturbances. *Vajrasana* is indicated in disorders of digestive system. This *Asana* also provide strength to knee joint, improves stability and tone of muscles of lumbar spine, thigh and back. This *Asana* is used by people of

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Islamic and Zen Buddhist community during their prayers and meditation.

### How to perform *Vajrasana*:

The basic adamantine pose can be used for brief period of meditation and *Pranayam* initially. This *Asana* is performed after meals. Following steps<sup>6</sup> should be followed for this *Asana*:

- Kneel on the floor and knees should be close together. When kneeling, the body weight is on the knees, shins, and parts of feet. Kneeling brings the centre of gravity closer to the ground and makes certain activities, such as gardening, less stressful for the spine. Kneeling also provides a stable base from which the centre of gravity can be raised up<sup>7</sup>.

- Bring the big toes together and heels should be separated.
- Buttocks should be lowered onto the inside surface of the feet with the heels touching the sides of hips.
- Hands should be placed on the knees and palms down.
- The back and head should be straight but not tense.
- Excessive backward arching of the spine should be avoided.
- Close the eyes, relax the arms and the whole body.
- Breathe normally and fix the attention on the flow of air passing in and out of the nostrils.

**Image: *Vajrasana* final posture.**



There is a variation of *Vajrasana* called *Supta Vajrasana*. This is performed by sitting in *Vajrasana*. Then bend backward and place the forearm and elbows on the floor. Arch the spine and neck backwards till the crown of the head touches the ground. Breathe normally and remain in this position for as long as you are comfortable. This

*Asana* strengthens the muscles in back, neck, and chest region. It expands the chest and is good for lung problems.

**Duration-** Initially starts from lesser period until individual feels comfortable. Practice *Vajrasana* directly after meals, for at least 5 minutes to enhance the digestive functions. In case of acute digestive disorders, sit in

*Vajrasana* and practice abdominal breathing for 100 breaths before and after food. Do not strain. It can be performed for extended period of time if performed for spiritual aims<sup>8</sup>.

#### **Physioanatomical aspect of *Vajrasana*:**

*Vajrasana* alters the flow of blood in the pelvic and abdominal region and strengthens the pelvic and lower back muscles<sup>8</sup>. Iliacus and psoas major muscles are most important for creating hip flexion in classic sitting posture, Adductor muscles are most important to prevent it<sup>9</sup>. *Vajrasana* strengthens the Iliacus and psoas muscles and gradually lengthen the adductors with prolonged adductor stretches. Flexibility and strength of the knee joint is increased by strengthening the muscles attached to the joint by this *Asana*. Longus colli and Scalene muscles support the posture and increase the lift in head and neck region. Erector spinae supported by quadrates lumborum muscles holds the back axis, increase and maintain the lumbar lordosis, flattening the thoracic kyphosis and providing lift to that part of vertebral column. *Vajrasana* strengthens and tone these muscles, so strengthens the back and pelvis. In sitting meditative pose, body assumes the shape of the tetrahedron. It is this geometry of the meditative posture which provides so much stability. Blood travels from bottom of the feet to the heart. When the individual sit in *Vajrasana*, muscles in the anterior compartment of leg get stretched and hamstrings got relaxed. Knee joint got flexed and both side muscles of thigh e.g Gluteus muscles will share weight. Therefore circulation of blood in femoral artery and vein will be reduced.

This reduction results in greater proportion of blood reaching in abdomen, pelvis, heart, head via branches of arteries celiac trunk, mesenteric and vertebral arteries which supply these organs. This results in increase arterial supply to digestive system, improves capacity of various digestive glands thereby increasing efficiency of digestive system.

#### **Benefits of *Vajrasana*:**

- Improves stability and tone of knee joint, skeletal muscles of thigh, leg, back. Its regular practice strengthens Iliopsoas, erector spinae, quadrates lumborum and adductors and calf muscles of leg. So can be clinically recommended in tremors or weakening of muscles.
- Good<sup>10</sup> for digestive disorders by increasing vascularity of digestive organs (e.g heaviness in the stomach, Hyperacidity, constipation, intestinal gas, piles).
- Also increase arterial supply to vital organs like heart and brain, so increasing their efficiency.
- It is a versatile posture well suited for meditation. Due to its geometry, it provides so much stability. It helps to establish equilibrium throughout the body and mind. It facilitates relaxation, concentration and ultimately total peace of mind.
- It is helpful to the individuals suffering from sciatica and some lower back problems, muscle ache of lower extremities.
- The pose cures rheumatic pains in the knees and gout, and is also good for flat feet. Due to the stretching of ankles and feet, proper arches will be formed. This,

however, takes a long time and requires daily practice of the pose for a few minutes for several months. Those suffering from pain in the heels or growth of calcaneal spurs there will get relief and the spurs will gradually disappear.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Contraindications:**

- Not indicated in stiffness in foot, ankle and knees.
- Slip disc condition e.g. Arthritis of knee or ankle joint.
- Hypotension<sup>12</sup>
- It is not advisable in osteoarthritis, or in pregnancy when extra weight can overload the knee joints.<sup>13</sup>

#### **Precautions:**

It should not be practised for prolonged. It should not much practise until the ankles and knees are sufficiently flexible. Otherwise it may strain ligaments in the knee that are not accustomed to prolonged tension. Performed up to when individual feels comfortable. The pose places pressure directly on a superficial branch of the common peroneal nerve, which is subcutaneous just lateral to the head of the fibula and which supplies muscles on the anterior side of the leg. If that nerve is traumatised by prolonged sitting in *Vajrasana*, the muscles it supplies can be temporarily paralysed. Individual will express numbness sensation and lead to Peroneal Nerve Paralysis. This leads to a clinical syndrome “*Yoga Foot Drop*” – in which individual is unable to flex the ankle when he step forward<sup>14</sup>.

All these problems can be remedied by sitting 5-8 inches off the floor on a small bench with a tilted-forward seat. In this

position the knees are incompletely flexed, and because of this, little pressure is placed on the common peroneal nerve, and blood circulation is less impeded. But structurally, adamantine posture on a bench is not as stable as the classic sitting poses, as body doesn't assume shape of right tetrahedron, as in meditation poses

If the posture is beyond your capacity, individual can support the ankles with a small pillow or folded towel, placing a soft pillow between thighs and the legs, or placing a substantial pillow under the hips and between the feet.

#### **DISCUSSION:**

Today's social life is becoming much busier and stressful than earlier times. There are distinct changes in today's lifestyle and dietary habits which are not good for individual's health. Busier lifestyle and faulty dietary habits results in many musculoskeletal and digestive disorders. *Yoga* and *Asanas* are much effective in these disorders with relaxation of body and mind. *Vajrasana* can be used in these digestive and muscular diseases. There are so many people who have to stand a lot because of their job. They have to face problems like low backache, muscular pain in lower extremities, knee joint pain and sciatica etc. This asana bring back the equilibrium to the status of backbone and relaxes the lumbar area of the back. *Vajrasana* can be recommended to those people. It is also indicated to the one with flat feet. This asana involves stretching of ankles and feet, so good for heel ache.

Sedentary and stressful life of an individual can lead to mental and psychological disorders. This can also lead

to disorders like obesity, diabetes mellitus, improper digestion and constipation. There is a huge obese population nowadays, which leads to other problems like hypertension, diabetes mellitus and other cardiac diseases. Treatment nowadays has become very costlier and very difficult for common man. These can be dealt with meditation, *Pranayam* and *Yoga*. *Vajrasana* is a good posture for meditation and can control obesity and also good for vital organs like heart, brain and other digestive glands. Also it is not much time consuming and not very costlier.

### CONCLUSION:

*Vajrasana* is very useful *Asana* for nowadays lifestyle. There is a large number of population suffering from lifestyle disorders like hypertension, diabetes mellitus and cardiac diseases. Faulty dietary habits are creating many digestive disorders. Postural and musculoskeletal disorders are increasing due to hectic life. People's life is becoming much stressful. Medical facilities are becoming costlier and out of reach of poor and common man. *Yoga*, *Asanas*, *Pranayam* can solve these problems. So *Vajrasana* is important asana to cure many disorders in today's world.

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