

A

ABANDONMENT

A. is an important characteristic of a true *yogin*, he who practises *karma-yoga* or “Yoga of action”; according to the *Bhagavad-gītā*, A. is distinguished from pure and simple acceptance of non-action (*saṁnyāsa*). A. is described as renunciation of, which presupposes ascetic detachment (*vairāgya*) from the fruits that an action inevitably brings. The action must be accomplished but, at the same time, understood as an act of sacrifice; its aim should be the well being of all creatures and it must be performed as an offering to Lord Kṛṣṇa. In fact, the *Bhagavad-gītā* considers such renunciation of any fruits from actions superior even to contemplation. [SP]
See also *tyāga*.

ABHĀVA-YOGA

“Yoga of absence”. The first of two types of Yoga mentioned in the closing chapter of the *Īśvara-gītā* (The Song of Lord Śiva), in which it is defined as follows: “When the object of attention is one’s own form as a void, devoid of any appearance, this is known as A., through which *ātman* can be seen”. [SP]

ABHAYA

“Absence of fear”, “security”. It is the last of the twelve *yama*-s or “abstentions” (the first of the eight elements that constitute classical Yoga) according to the *Uddhava-gītā* (The [divine] song addressed to Uddhava), it indicates the condition of perfect peace which comes from the knowledge of truth. A. is also an important gift of the divinity, that guarantees this perfect state devoid of any agitation to his devotee. [SP]
See also *abhaya-mudrā*.

ABHAYA-MUDRĀ

“Gesture of the absence of fear”. The name of one of the most important *mudrā*-s, gestures or poses represented in the divine images and also used by worshippers (for example, in the cult of Śiva). A. consists in keeping the hand lifted with its palm facing towards the front. In divine images (*mūrti*) this gesture often accompanies the so called *varada-mudrā*, the pose by which the divinity bestows grace and favours; similar to the above but with fingers pointing downwards. [SP]

ABHIDHARMA

“Supreme *dharma*” that is “supreme truth”, or “metaphysics”. Illustrated in the most doctrinal and theoretical part of Buddhist



Kṛṣṇa in *abhaya-mudrā* (~900 A.D.).

teachings, regarding *prajñā* or “wisdom”, to which the third part of the Pāli Canon (*Abhidhamma-piṭaka*) and numerous other works in Sanskrit are dedicated. According to Vasubandhu, the renowned Buddhist philosopher of the 5th century A.D., knowledge of A. gives the same results as those guaranteed by the practice of Yoga. [PC]

ABHINAVAGUPTA

Important master of Tantrism and in particular, of Kashmirian Śaivism, who lived between the 10th and 11th century, and who is considered one of the greatest Indian thinkers. His works include: a comment on the *Bhagavad-gītā* entitled *Bhagavadgītārthasamgraha* (A summary of the meaning of the *Bhagavad-gītā*); the *Parātriṃśikāvivarāṇa* (a comment on *Parātriṃśikā*, which is part of an important *Tantra* of the Trika school) and a voluminous treatise, *Tantrāloka* (The light of *Tantra*-s), which sets out to explain “the truth about the *Tantra*-s, following logic and tradition”, so that the faithful guided by this “light” can orientate themselves in the complex ritual of Tantrism. [SP]

ABHINIVEŚA

Determined devotion to a particular intent. It is one of the five *kleśa*-s or “afflictions” described in the *Yoga-sūtra*: attachment to life, or an innate fear of death formed at birth, which is in the nature of every living being and is as deeply rooted in the fool’s mind as in that of the wise man. Given that it is impossible to fear something of which one has no experience, A., according to the commentary of Vyāsa on the *Yoga-sūtra*, is the fruit of latent impressions derived from the experience of death in past lives. [PC]

ABHIṢEKA

A purification ritual, a consecration by bathing, sprinkling or unction. Two ceremonies are designated by this term: the complex ceremony, by which kings (and ministers) were once consecrated, which included a ritual bath and unction; and the ritual still used today, in which water, milk and perfumes are poured on to sacred statues, especially on *liṅga*-s. In a

particular form of Śākta Tantric Yoga, practised by the followers of the Hindū current that venerates the supreme Divinity principally in the form of *Śakti*, the Divine Mother of the Universe, the eight forms of A. mark the eight stages along the *yogin*’s spiritual path. In the first step, the disciple purifies himself from any bad tendencies and dedicates himself to the repetition of the *mantra* received from his *guru* at his initiation. In the second step he begins the true practice of Yoga which will be perfected at the sixth A. The *yogin* worships *Śakti*, initially under the terrifying aspect of Kālī, then under the redemptive of Tārā, then under the luminous aspect of Tripurasundarī, lastly under the androgynous aspect of Ardhanariśvara. By the seventh and eighth A. the *yogin* becomes a *jīvanmukta*, a “living released” reaching the supreme state of *paramahansa*. [PC]

ABHYĀSA

“Exercise”, “practice”. According to the *Yoga-sūtra*, the effort to attain peace of mind, must be made daily, constantly, and cultivated in every place and in every circumstance. According to Vyāsa A. must be accompanied by ascetic penitence, chastity, science and faith. The *Haṭhayoga-pradīpikā* expressly states that success in Yoga is attained only by its practice, not by means of discourse or by mere theoretical knowledge. [PC]

ABSOLUTE

The ultimate Reality in the principal spiritual traditions of India and in particular in the Yoga of the *Bhagavad-gītā*. Conceived as the supreme Spirit, it is devoid of any qualities or attributes and is beyond both the physical and psychic world and also individual conscience. [SP]

See also *Brahman*.

ABSTENTIONS

See *yama*.

ĀCAMANA

In Tantrism, a symbolic act of purification of the body, by which water is sipped from the palm of the hand, with the lips held near the

wrist and fingers pointing upwards, and is sprinkled on some limbs. This purification regards not only the “gross” or physical body (*sthūla-śarīra*) but also both the “subtle” body (*sūkṣma-* or *līṅga-śarīra*) and the causal body (*[mahā]-kāraṇa-śarīra*). [SP]

ĀCĀRA

In Tantrism this word indicates a path, a behaviour, a particular rule of conduct, that represents the level of perfection attained by a certain type of *sādhaka* or initiate. The *Kulārṇava-tantra* lists seven, in an increasing order of importance and perfection: 1) *vedācāra*, “the path of the *Veda*”, which requires physical and mental purity, aimed at strengthening *dharmā*. It consists in the accomplishment of daily rites known as *vaidika* because they are inspired by traditional ritual practice. It is also indicated as the path of ritual action, *kriyā-mārga*; 2) *vaiṣṇavācāra*, the “path of the devotee of Viṣṇu”, a devotional path (*bhakti-mārga*) founded on a deeper consciousness of absolute reality (*Brahman*); 3) *śaivācāra*, the “path of the devotee of Śiva”, which marks the beginning of the path of awareness (*jñāna-mārga*); 4) *dakṣiṇācāra*, the “favourable path” to realization (*sādhana*) as well as to worldly activity (*pravṛtti*). It concludes the first cycle of Ā., globally known as *dakṣiṇa* (which is commonly, even though perhaps mistakenly, called the “path of the right hand”). It requires the ability to contemplate and concentrate on the triple *Śakti* (*kriyā-*, *icchā-* and *jñāna-śakti*, identifiable with the *Śakti* of *Brahmā*, *Viṣṇu* and *Śiva* as far as worship is concerned); 5) *vāmācāra* the “path opposite” to active life (*pravṛtti*). It is the “path of renunciation” or “of return” (*nivṛtti*) (tendentiously named “the path of the left hand”, *vāma*, or “the path that can be covered together with a woman”, *vāmā*), which also indicates the last three Ā.-s; 6) *siddhāntācāra* (or *Aghorācāra* or *Yogācāra*), “the path of the accomplished end” (or “of the Aghora-s” or “of Yoga”), in which the *sādhaka*, who masters the eightfold Yoga, realizes further detachment from the world; 7) *kaulācāra*, “the path of the noble devo-

tee”, in which the *sādhaka* attains total consciousness of *Brahman*, and *samsāra* definitively ends. The first three Ā. refer to the devotee’s condition as a “domestic animal” (*paśu-bhāva*), the fourth and fifth to the condition of a hero (*vīra-bhāva*) and the last two to the divine condition (*divya-bhāva*). [SP]

ĀCĀRYA

Master able to show the devotee and in particular the *yogin* the correct behaviour (*ācāra*) to attain realization (*sādhana*). The generic meaning of the word is “master”. [SP]



Śiva as a divine master (Dakṣiṇāmūrti).

ĀCĀRYA-SEVANA / ĀCĀRYA -UPĀSANA

“Service to the master”. Listed in the *Uddhava-gītā* (the [divine] song addressed to Uddhava) among the ten *niyama*-s or “observances” of Yoga; it consists in an attitude, not only of true devotion (*sevā*), but also of veneration (*upāsana*) of the master (*guru*, *ācārya*), a figure of great importance in all schools of Yoga. [SP]

ACCOMPLISHED

See *siddha*.

ACCOMPLISHED POSTURE

See *siddha-āsana*.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

See *pāramitā*, *siddhi*.

ACTION

The Indian religious tradition considers A. as an obstacle to the accomplishment of the final emancipation from suffering determined by the continual return of the spirit in the transitory world of exteriority (*samsāra*). Therefore it has privileged *nivṛtti*, which essentially consists of the renunciation of action in order to avoid forming new ties with transitory forms of existence, rather than *pravṛtti* which requires active involvement. This bond is known as *karman* (lit. “action”), which is the intrinsic conditioning factor in human activity. From this point of view it does not much matter whether A. is “good” or “bad” in itself, as both have an effect and determine the presuppositions for rebirth in another life in which pleasure and pain will exist in the same measure as the positive and negative fruits produced. The only acceptable, unconditioning A. is therefore sacrifice (also known as *karman*), through which, from ancient times, the needs of worldly life were legitimized by considering them as gifts of the gods or “leftovers” from their meals. The Brahmanic doctrine of *dharmā* has singled out characteristic actions of every category of individuals, based on the function of each of them in human society, reserving for Brahmins alone – at least in principle or in a first formulation of the doctrine – the privilege of passing through the four *āśrama*-s or “stages of life”, the entire path of human experience, before reaching, in the fourth and last stage, complete renunciation (*sannyāsa*), which permits entry into that perfect condition of total liberty indicated as *mokṣa* or *nirvāṇa*.

In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, the use of the term *karma-yoga* (the union with the Lord by action) instead of *karma-mārga*, affirms the possibility of acting in a way which does not create bonds, because it is “disinterested”: this is the *niṣkāma-karman*, “A. without desire”, accomplished for the good of all creatures and offered to God, the “glorious Lord” Kṛṣṇa, personal divinity who establishes an

exclusive relationship of love and participation with his devotees. [SP]

See also *karman*, *kriyā*.

ADAMANTINE POSTURE

See *vajra-āsana*.

ADARŚANA

“Non-vision”, antonym of *darśana* “vision”, which is understood as the capacity of the soul (*puruṣa*) to know nature (*prakṛti*), while recognising itself as pure consciousness and therefore separate from nature. According to the Yoga-darśana, A. is therefore a synonym of ignorance, which causes the bond between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. Therefore, liberation is attained by the destruction of A., ignorance. [PC]

ĀDHĀRA

“Support”, “prop”, “base”. Gorakṣanātha (11th-12th century), the renowned master of *haṭha-yoga*, numbers sixteen Ā. in various parts of the human body, from the tip of the big toe to the top of the head, as follows: toes, ankles, knees, thighs, perineum, sexual organ, navel, heart, neck, throat, tongue, nose, the space between the eyebrows, forehead, head and the so called “opening of Brahmā” (*brahma-randhra*). Concentration on these principal points, given a series of precise connections, allows the *yogin* to acquire an absolute control over his most important vital and psychic functions. The *Haṭhayoga-pradīpikā* adds that the Ā. are controlled by *viśuddha-cakra* or “centre of purity”, which is located at the throat. [SP]

ADHARMA

“Disorder”, “injustice”. Antonym of *dharmā*, its growth accompanies the progressive decadence of moral law in the four cosmic ages (*yuga*). The man-god Kṛṣṇa states in the *Bhagavad-gītā* that every time there is a decline in *dharmā* and a growth of A., he generates himself in the world (this is the doctrine of the “descents of the divine” or *avatāra*-s), to protect the good and destroy the wicked, thereby restoring the right “order” within the universe. [SP]

ADHIKĀRA

In Tantric Yoga, these are the rights and duties or “qualifications” acquired by the disciple (*śiṣya*) of *mantra-yoga* (Yoga of sacred “magical” words) as he progresses along the path of realization (*sādhana*) under his *guru*’s guidance. Traditionally there are seven: 1) *dīkṣā* or initiation, by which the master teaches the disciple the *mantra* or secret formula of prayer; 2) *mahādīkṣā* or great initiation, by which the master introduces the disciple to the practical aspects (*kriyā*) of Yoga, for which he takes vows; 3) *puraścaraṇa*, which requires the complete control of the *mantra* (*mantra-siddhi*) by the practicant (*sādhaka*); 4) *mahāpuraścaraṇa*, as the above 3 but performed with a particular ritual; 5) *abhiṣeka* or consecration, by which the master guides the disciple’s learning of the secret procedures of realization (*sādhana*); 6) *mahābhiṣeka* or great consecration, also known by the name of *pūrṇābhiṣeka*, complete consecration, by which the disciple is assimilated to the master; 7) *tadbhāva*, “to become him”, by which the *sādhaka* attains the union with his chosen divinity (*iṣṭa-*

devatā), thereby opening the doors to the realisation of *mahābhāva* or “great state”, that is *samādhi*. [SP]

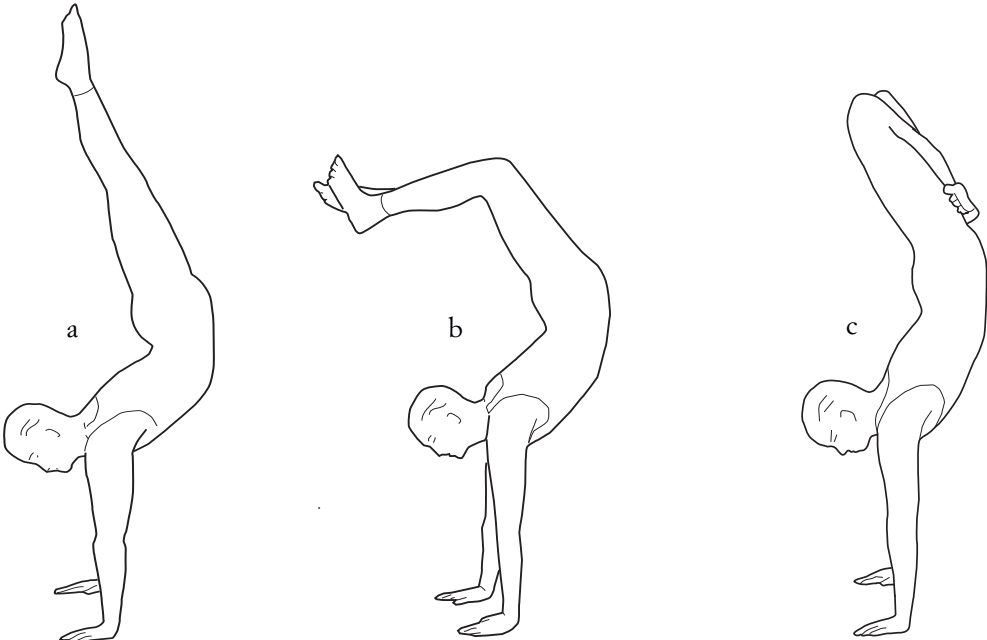
ADHIKĀRIN

Said of a person “qualified” to practise Yoga. Self control and perseverance are two of his main qualities and, apart from unshakable faith in the science of Yoga and in the advantages deriving from it, the conditions of his success are: respect for the *guru*, equanimity, control of the senses and moderation in the consumption of food. [SP]

ADHOMUKHAVR̥KṢA-ĀSANA

“Posture of the upside-down tree”, or handstand: an *āsana* of *haṭha-yoga* belonging to the category of inverted poses. Also known as *hasta-āsana* (posture on the hands).

Practice. Stand with legs straight, arms above the head, bend the body forwards until hands touch the floor with a distance of about 40 cms between them. Bend the knees enough to give a good push upwards while exhaling. It is advisable for beginners to start by practising against a wall until they have



Adhomukhavṛkṣa-āsana: a) basic posture; b) variation 1; c) variation 2 (with legs in *padma-āsana*).

found their balance. The posture is usually held for 10-20 seconds. Release the posture while exhaling, returning to the initial position.

Variations. 1) Rather than keeping the body as vertical as possible, the spine and legs are flexed backwards: the legs also slightly bent at the knees. Only the arms are completely extended. 2) In this second variation, the legs are folded in the posture of the lotus (*padma-āsana*).

Benefits. Strengthens arms and shoulders and improves sense of balance. It also has all the benefits of the inverted postures: improving circulation in the brain and stimulating the thyroid. Variation 1 vigorously massages the spine helping it become more supple and flexible.

ADHYĀTMA-UPANIṢAD

“The *Upaniṣad* regarding the supreme Spirit”. See *Yoga-śāstra*.

ADHYĀTMA-YOGA

Expression meaning “union with the supreme Self”, or “Yoga regarding the absolute Self”; found initially in the *Kātha-upaniṣad* and used in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* (The teachings by Vasiṣṭha on Yoga) to denote a non dualistic form of Yoga (*advaita*), whose objective is the attainment of spiritual experience with the One who embraces and includes all. Referred to in the teachings of contemporary masters such as Hari Prasad Shastri. [SP]

ĀDI-MUDRĀ

“Gesture of the universal principle”. Performed seated in *vajra-āsana* (adamantine posture), with eyes closed: fingers enclose thumbs to form fists, which are then placed at the groin. This *mudrā* is used to utter the sound *M*, the nasal resonance of the sacred syllable *OM*, which represents the totality of being in its unrevealed-causal form. [RR]

ĀDINĀTHA

“The primeval Lord”. An epithet by which the god Śiva is venerated by the adepts in *haṭha-yoga*, in particular by the so called

nātha-yogin-s, known also as *kānpbāṭa-yogin-s*, who follow the teachings of Gorakṣanātha. Śiva, as Ā., is considered the foremost of all *yogin-s*, and is portrayed immersed in profound meditation at the top of Mount Kailāsa, his usual dwelling. [SP]

ADORATION

Practised towards a personal divinity, A. is one of the *niyama-s* or “observances” of Yoga.

See *arcā, īśvara-praṇidhāna, pūjā*.

ADVAITA

“Non-duality”. A word which alludes to the final unity of the Being and of reality, used in the various schools of Yoga as a synonym of *samādhi*, the perfect recollection (called “ecstasy” by M. Eliade) that is the end and the ultimate aim of every yogic discipline. [SP]

ADVAITA-VEDĀNTA

Denomination comprising a number of schools. The literal meaning is “the conclusion towards which the sacred word tends” (*vedānta*), according to those who refuse duality (*a-dvaita*). A. comprehends at least three orientations largely divergent from each other. All three, however, are solidly in contrast to other two trends: the first of which accepts both duality and non-duality; the second of which is markedly dualist. The non-duality with which it is concerned, according to the antagonistic schools, opposes the subject (*puruṣa*) and the object (*prakṛti*); the conscious individual principle (*jīva*) and universal principle (*ātman*); devotee (*paśu*) and divinity (*pati*) etc. A. principally denies the supposed duality between a cosmic foundation of being (*Brahman*) and a personal foundation (*ātman*). The three above-mentioned orientations can be briefly identified as follows: the first and most radical one is known as “Absolute non-dualism”; the second, in which the theistic current moves the centre of interest from an impersonal Absolute to a personal divinity, taking the name of “qualified non-dualism”; the third allows more space to devotion (*bhakti*) and defines itself as “pure non-dualism”.

The principal masters are respectively Śāṅkara (788-822?), Rāmānuja (1017-1137) and Vallabha (1473-1531). The form of non-duality which gives its name to the system and the orientation under Śāṅkara, is principally that which flows between the divinity (*Īśvara*) and the individual conscious principle (*jīva*). The two remain distinct for Rāmānuja, who also proposes the existence of a third fundamental entity, an entity “devoid of consciousness”. [AP]

ADVAYA

“Non-dual”. In Tantrism it indicates the liberated state (*mokṣa*) in which every opposition and distinction (between Śiva and *Śakti*, between the conscious principle and the body, between subject and object, etc.) is nullified. This state is reached through the *guru*’s teachings. [AP]

ADVAYATĀRAKA-UPANIṢAD

“The *Upaniṣad* by which non-duality is reached”. This brief *Yoga Upaniṣad*, of twenty *verses*, affirms that the only existent entity is *Brahman*, in the form of *sat* (being), *cit* (consciousness) and *ānanda* (beatitude). In order to grasp the whole meaning of the work, which is linked to *tāraka-yoga*, it is important to examine the double meaning of *tāraka*: a) enabling someone to pass, to cross (in particular flowing water); b) rescuing. Therefore, knowledge of the uniqueness of one being allows to cross the cycles of existences and reach ultimate liberation (*mokṣa*). After describing particular visualisations, able to grant definitive salvation (for example concentration on Kuṇḍalinī, the sleeping Power in the body portrayed as a serpent coiled in three and half coils), *tāraka-yoga* is analysed. In its inferior form it still depends on shapes (*mūrti*), while its higher form is above and beyond the latter and any type of mental perception: the *yogin* thereby attains supernatural powers or perfections (*siddhi*). [GS]

ĀGAMA

1. “Authoritative witness” or “verbal perception”. Together with perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inference (*anumāna*), one of the three

types of “valid knowledge” or “real perception” (*pramāṇa*), which, according to the *Yoga-sūtra*, constitute the first of the five “mental functions” (*citta-vṛtti*). An object, either perceived or deduced by an expert person is described by words with the aim of transferring the knowledge of the object itself to somebody else. Mental change, which has as its sphere the meaning of words, is the verbal perception of the listener. When the speaker has neither perceived nor deduced and speaks of things that are unacceptable, the authority of verbal perception is lacking.

2. “That which has come down to us (through tradition)”. In the threefold repartition of the Tantric texts, the *Ā.* are those most directly linked to Śaivism (they are in fact also known as *Śiva-tantra*). There are twenty-eight main *Ā.*, ten of which known as *śaiva* and eighteen as *raudra*; there are also numerous secondary ones, or *upāgama*. It is impossible to determine precisely the date of their compilation, which has continued uninterrupted until today. However the most ancient probably go back to the first centuries A.D. The central theme of *Ā.* analyses ritual in all its complexity; they also contain detailed rules for the religious practice and the building of temples and sacred images, as well as doctrinal commentaries, mythological narratives and descriptions of yogic practices. There are also Buddhist and Jaina *Ā.* [PC]

ĀGAMA-VIJÑĀNA

According to the *Yoga-sūtra* this compound word indicates knowledge based on the testimony of the Vedic sacred texts.

AGES OF THE WORLD

See *kalpa, yuga*.

AGHORĪ

A class of *śaiva* ascetics also known as *aghorapanthin-s*. Aghora means “not terrible” and is an euphemistic epithet for Śiva and an *aghorapanthin* is he who follows the path of Śiva in this form. The *Ā.*, are descendents of the *kāpālīka-s* (so called because they carry a skull to accept alms). They eat from human

skulls, frequent cemeteries, feed on rubbish and every sort of meat, apart from horse-meat; until the end of the 19th century they practised cannibalism. [MR]

ĀGNEYA-SNĀNA

“Bath of flames”. Tantric practice to purify the body, consisting in covering and rubbing one’s body with sacrificial ashes. [AC] See also *kāya-suddhi*, *snāna*.

AGNEYĪ-DHĀRANĀ

“Concentration on fire”. Concentration (*dhāraṇā*) on fire (*agni*) as a cosmic element (*tattva*) is the third phase of the “fivefold concentration” (*pañca-dhāraṇā*) which is described in some traditional texts of Yoga, such as the *Gheraṇḍa-sambhitā* and the *Yogatattva-upaniṣad*. In mystic Tantric physiology, the element Fire is connected with the “centre” (*cakra*) *maṇipūra*, situated at the level of the navel, and with the part of the body comprised between the anus and the heart; its symbols are a red triangle and the syllable (or *bīja-mantra*) *RA*; the appointed divinity is Rudra. This form of realization is attained by visualising and holding the vital spirit (*prāṇa*) for two hours. The *Yogatattva-upaniṣad* points out that such practices must be done in relation to the part of the body associated with fire, thereby rendering the *yogin* completely immune to burns. [SF]

AGNI

“Fire”. In the Tantric sphere it indicates one of the five *mahābhūta* or gross elements. Associated with the colour red, the syllable *RA*, the triangle and Rudra, it is found in the eye, in the shoulders and in *maṇipūra-cakra*, the circle of energy situated at the level of the navel. The taste (*rasa*) that denotes it, is of sharpness. As for the other *bhūta*-s, the complex symbology associated with it supports a series of very elaborate meditative practices. A. flows in the higher part of the nostrils. [AP]

AGNI-MANḌALA

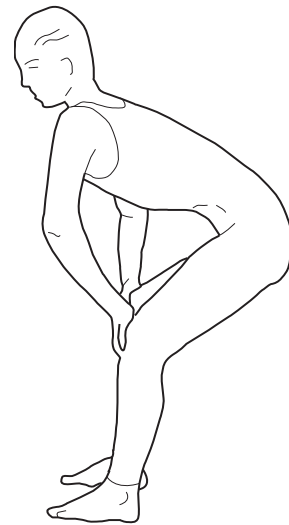
“Orb of fire”. A technical term from Tantrism. The triangular seat of fire is found at

the centre of the human body (two finger-widths above the anus and two below the membrum virile), we find the triangle-shaped seat of Fire, shining like molten gold. In quadrupeds this seat is square in form, in birds circular, in reptiles hexagonal and in insects octagonal. In the human body it takes the form of stem nine finger widths long, glowing like a lantern, four finger widths high and deep. In birds and quadrupeds this stem is oval in form with the centre in the navel. Within this there is a circle of energy (*cakra*) in the shape of a wheel with twelve spokes, containing images of Viṣṇu and other gods. [AP]

AGNISĀRA-DHAUTI

“Purification by fire”. Technique of *haṭha-yoga* described by the *Gheraṇḍa-sambhitā*, belonging to the category of *dhauti* (hygienic practices that constitute one of the *ṣaṭkarma*-s, the six “acts” used to cleanse the body of every impurity): it is in fact one of the “internal purifications” (*antar-dhauti*).

Practice. Standing, with legs apart, knees slightly bent, hands resting on knees. While exhaling fully, emptying the lungs completely, the abdomen is repeatedly contracted at the level of the navel towards the spine. The



Agnisāra-dhauti

Gheraṇḍa-sambhitā states that the abdomen must be contracted a hundred times but it is advisable for beginners to limit the practice to 10 to 30 contractions. Note that the movement of the abdomen is isolated: therefore one should avoid both lifting the ribs and expanding the thorax.

Benefits. This practice strengthens the abdominal muscles; invigorates the vital organs; cures stomach problems (whether acid, alkaline, muscular or nervous dyspepsia); also augments the “gastric fire” meaning digestive capacity. When accompanied by an appropriate diet, it cures constipation. It is not, however, free from contra-indications: it should be avoided in the case of acute inflammation of the digestive system, ulcers or excessive enlargement of the spleen.

AHAM BRAHMĀSMI

“I am the Absolute (*Brahman*)”. One of the “great sayings” of the *Upaniṣad*-s, found in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad*. Of the four collections of texts that make up the sacred Word (*Veda*) it is linked to that of the black *Yajur-veda*, it is also linked to the spiritual order founded by Śaṅkara at Śṛṅgeri. The devotee who tries to penetrate the truth of this saying through meditation contemplates as a model the divine sage Vāmadeva. It is thought that he who knows how to understand perfectly and make his own the notion of identity between his own Self and *Brahman*, escapes from the dominion that the gods have over man. [AP]

AHAMKĀRA

The sense of *ego* (*aham* = “ego”) or principle of individuation; the phase in which matter (*prakṛti*) finds itself when touched by evolution’s impulse, thereby passing from a state of *mahat* (a mass of energy) to that of an unitary mass, devoid of perceptions, still without personal experience, but already with the obscure consciousness of being an ego. Depending on which of the three qualities of *prakṛti* is predominant, A. can transform itself qualitatively. If *sattva* (lightness) is predominant, the five cognitive senses appear and the interior sense which connects the

perceptive activity with that of the biological motor; if *rajas* (mobility) is predominant the five organs of activity manifest themselves; if *tamas* (inertia) is predominant the five *tanmātra*-s appear which are the genetic nuclei of the physical world. [MR]

AHAMKĀRA-DOṢA

The six bad inclinations belonging to *ahaṃkāra* (sense of *ego*) in Tantric Yoga: lust (*kāma*), anger (*krrodha*), greed (*lobha*), infatuation (*moha*), pride (*mada*) and envy (*māt-sarya*). They are destroyed by contemplation of *svādhiṣṭhāna-cakra*, situated in the sacral plexus. [PC]

ĀHĀRA

“Food”, “diet”. An important component of the practice of Yoga, as it is believed that a healthy and “pure” diet constitutes the basis of inner purity. In this regard the *Bhagavad-gītā* classifies food in three categories, referring to the “intrinsic qualities” of Nature (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*). Defined as *sattvic* is “food that lengthens life and gives steadfastness, strength, health, joy, satisfaction and is tasty, sweet, substantial, agreeable”; defined as *rājasic* is food that is “bitter, acid, salty, spicy, sharp, sour, that burns or creates suffering, pains or illness”, and lastly food defined as *tāmasic* is “old, bland, rank, stale, left over and unsuitable for sacrificial purposes”. The *Bhagavad-gītā* points out that food classified as above is desired by people when one of the three qualities (*guṇa*) prevails. [SP]

See also *mitābhāra* and *pathya*.

AHIMŚĀ

Word derived from the Sanskrit root *hims*- which means “to hit”, “to insult”, by adding the privative *a-*. It takes the meaning of “innocence”, “non-violence”, forgoing hitting or injuring any living being and requires, therefore, respect for every form of life. Remembered together with mortification, charity, rectitude and truthfulness in the *Chāndogya-upaniṣad* (3, 17, 4) and celebrated as the “supreme *dharmā*”, that is, the foremost ethical rule, in the *Mahābhārata*

(14, 43, 21), A. is also one of the five fundamental rules of ethical behaviour for Buddhists and Jainists; especially those who belong to the strictest ascetic current (that of Digambara-s), interpret it in a particularly rigorous fashion. For those who follow the path of Yoga A. is one of the *yama*-s or pre-scriptions that should be first observed in order to proceed along the path of personal realisation. [SP]

AIŚVARYA

“Lordship”. Superhuman faculty (*siddhi*) of the *yogin*, able to give him sovereignty over the laws of nature in a way similar to that of the supreme Lord (*Īśvara*). [SP]

AJAPAHAMSA-VIDYĀ

“Knowledge of the meditative formula (*mantra*) *hamṣaḥ* not recited”. The *mantra* in question is known as “not recited (consciously)” but rather spontaneously, because it is believed that it is a mere alternation of inhalation and exhalation. This is a technical Tantric term. [AP]
See also *ajapa-kriyā*.

AJAPA-KRIYĀ

“Practice of the unrecited *mantra*”. It is the unconscious recitation (*japa*) of the *mantra* *hamṣaḥ*, which when repeated transforms itself for phonetic reasons into *hamso hamso hamso...*, so that it can also be read “*so 'ham*” (the euphonic result of *saḥ abam*). A celebrated *mantra* from the *Upaniṣad*-s that means “I am That” and expresses therefore the identity of the individual spirit (*ātman*) with the Absolute (*Brahman*). Some *Yoga-upaniṣad*-s attest that this *mantra* is recited unconsciously by the simple act of breathing in and out, and therefore, it is repeated about twenty-one thousand times during twenty-four hours. According to the *Laya-yoga-sambhitā*, when the mind is completely absorbed in the recitation of the *mantra* “*so 'ham*” it blends with the vital breath (*prāṇa*) permitting the attainment of consciousness of the Self: for this reason the *hamṣa*, a wild white goose common in India, has become a symbol of the liberated soul. [SP]

AJAPA-MANTRA

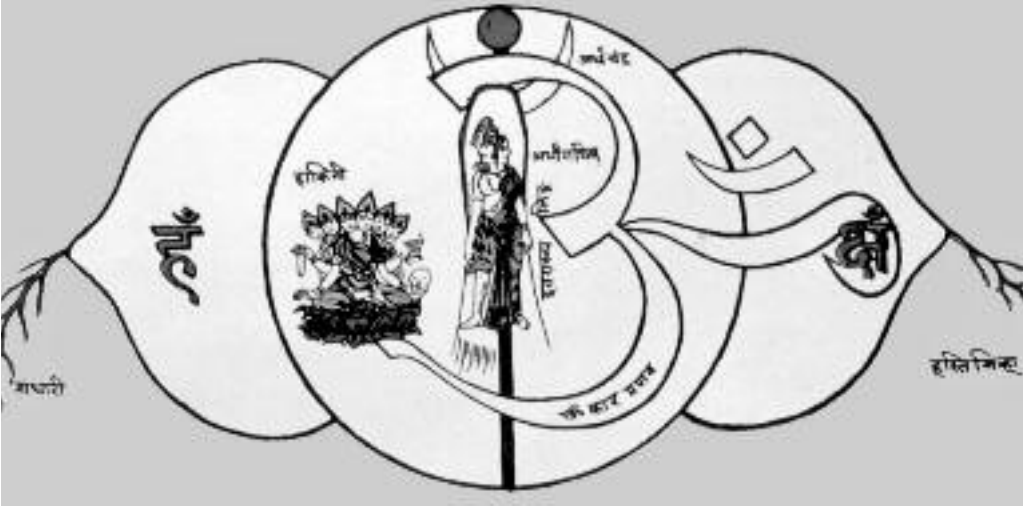
It is the *mantra* “*hamṣaḥ*” considered “not recited” (*ajapa*) as it is believed that it coincides with the simple act of breathing.
See *ajapa-kriyā*.

AJIVIKA

Name of a non-Brahmanic sect of begging-ascetics (*śramana*) of ancient India founded by Makkhali Gosāla (in Sanskrit: Maskari Gośāla), who lived in Northern India, probably between the 7th and 6th century B.C. The name Ā. indicates a person “who obtains the basic necessities of life by begging”. The Ā.-s were no longer found in the North of India around the 5th century A.D. but survived in the South until the 13th-14th century. They distinguished themselves by their ascetical rigor, vying with *yogin*-s and *jaina* monks in the practice of the most terrible forms of penitence. Their system of thought is founded on the concept of *niyati* (established order of things, destiny, chance) and therefore, their vision of the world is decidedly fatalistic and considers human effort as totally ineffective. [SP]

ĀJÑĀ-CAKRA

“Circle of unlimited power”, or “of command”: it is one of the six canonical *cakra*-s. Identified by some as the cavernous plexus, it is situated between the eyebrows, where the mystic third eye is to be found and is depicted as a lotus with two shining white petals, which bear the letters *HA* and *KṢA*, both completed by *candra-bindu* (the sign *M* that indicates nasal resonance). A circular shaped pericarp, adorned with a halfmoon surmounted by the *bindu*, it is the seat of *mahat-tattva*, to which this *cakra* is correlated as seat of *buddhi* (intellect), and of *ahamkāra* (the sense of *ego*), of *manas* (mind) and of the cognitive senses (*indriya*) in their subtle form. It also relates to Tapar-loka and to the unarticulated sound (*nāda*), which also acts as a support for the *bīja-mantra*. This *cakra*'s *siddha* is Mahākāla, the realised being in eternity, or the Great Time (one of the forms of Śiva). The *bīja-mantra* is *pranava*, the sacred syllable *OM*, “the immortal *bīja* simi-



Traditional image of *ājñā-cakra*.

lar to the autumn moon” (*Śiva-saṃhitā*, 5, 97), the *mantra* par excellence that is identified with *Brahman*, with the *Veda* and with all the gods. The *bīja-mantra* sustains the guardian divinities, which are the sacred *liṅga* and the *Devī* or *Śakti* Hākinī, who is white and has six faces with three eyes each, is seated on a white lotus and has four or six arms. This *cakra* has no linked element, being above them as it is above all the preceding *cakra*-s.

In this lotus which excels all others, the channels *idā* and *pingalā* meet for the last time and unite, as also the *Varaṇā* and the *Asī* unite with the Ganges in the sacred city of *Vāraṇasī*, where *Śiva Viśvanātha* (Lord of the universe) has his abode.

According to traditional accounts, the *sādhaka* that contemplates this hidden and secret lotus, completely destroys every *karman*, can penetrate the body of others at will, excels among silent ascetics (*muni*), becomes omniscient and clear-sighted, acquires superhuman powers and becomes one and the same with *Brahman*, creator, keeper and also destroyer of the world. [SP]

AJÑĀNA

Synonym of *avidyā*.

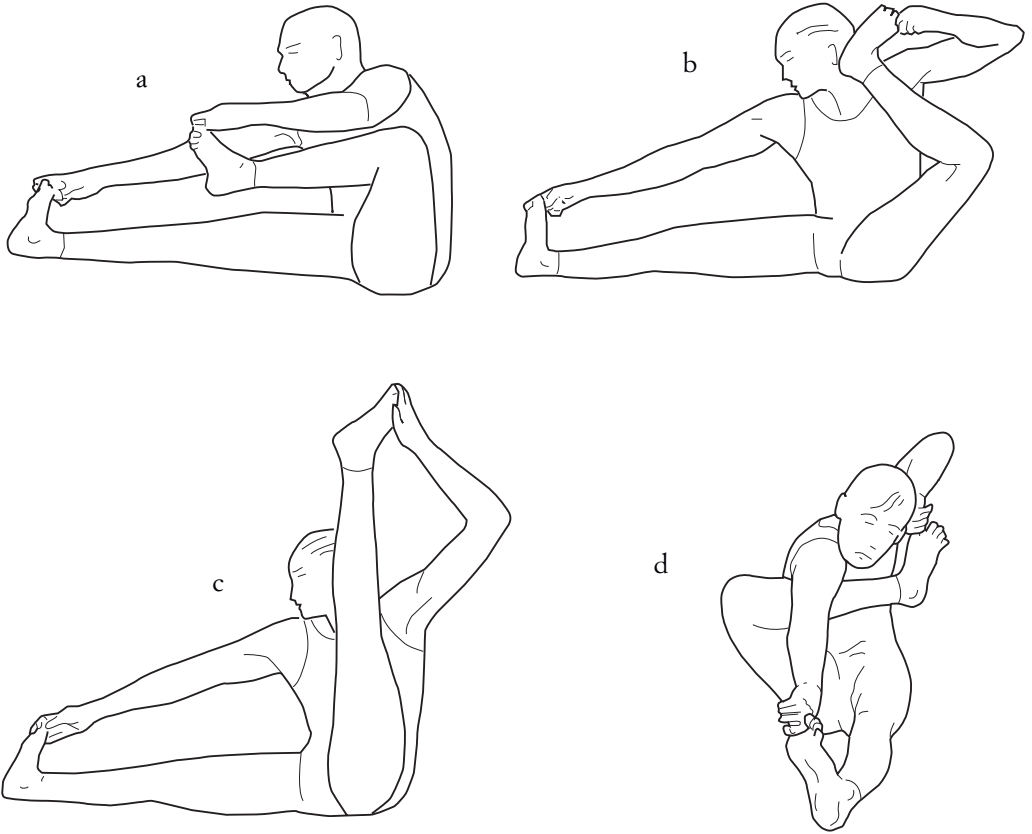
ĀKARṆADHANUR-ĀSANA

“Shooting bow posture” or “Archer posture”. *Āsana* of *haṭha-yoga* belonging to the category of sitting postures.

Practice. Initial position seated on the floor, legs together and straight out in front, clasping big toes. While exhaling bend the left arm and lift the left leg while bending it and pulling the foot backwards to the left ear. This position is held without moving while breathing normally for about 10-20 seconds. Then while exhaling the left leg is straightened as much as possible vertically next to the ear, holding the position for another 10-20 seconds while still breathing normally. To release the pose bend the knee while slowly lowering the left leg until the initial position is reached. After a short relaxation repeat with the other leg.

Variation. Clasp the right big toe with the left hand and the left big toe with the right hand. Then while exhaling and keeping the left leg stretched out on the floor, bend the right knee pulling firmly with the left arm in order to bring the right foot near to the left ear. The pose should be held for about 10-20 seconds, breathing normally; it is then repeated on the other side.

Benefits. Especially effective in toning leg



Ākarnadhanur-āsana: a-b) dynamic stage; c) basic posture; d) variation.

muscles, which are lengthened and rendered more supple, and the abdominal muscles. This variation strongly stimulates hip joints and knees.

ĀKĀŚA

Mostly translated as “ether” or “space”, the term is found in the Sāṃkhya and indicates the first of the five *mahā-bhūta*-s or gross elements (the others being air, water, fire and earth) of which the *tanmātra*-s (the subtle elements: sound, touch, colour, taste and smell) are the under-layer. The atom of Ā. corresponds to the *tanmātra* “sound”. It is linked to the colour of seawater or transparency, to the syllable *HA* or to the point (*bindu*) in which every sound is dissolved, to a dot-

shaped figure; to Sadāśiva (one of the forms of the god Śiva). It is present in the ears, in the head and in *viśuddha-cakra*, the circle of energy found in the throat. Bitterness is the taste (*rasa*) that distinguishes it. As for the other *bhūta*-s, its complex simbology acts as a support to a series of very elaborate meditative practices. Ā. flows nearly imperceptively along the nostrils, and by a spiral motion it connects the areas of the other *bhūta*-s where their fluxes cross each other; this is the Tantric understanding of the term. However, according to the Yoga of Patañjali, Ā. is the empty space within which the motion of things takes place; it is the recipient in which objects are located and move; space and time are derived from it. [AP]

ĀKĀŚA-CAKRA

Synonym of *vyoma-cakra*.

ĀKĀŚA-GAMANA

Name of a supernatural faculty, not included in the canonical list of the eight *siddhi*-s, which consists of the *yogin*'s power to roam in space (*ākāśa*), to walk on water, to walk on spider-webs and rays of light. According to traditional sources, the *yogin* masters such powers by dominating the relationship between the body and *ākāśa*, attaining the state of thought and transforming things into light. [MR]

ĀKĀŚĪ-DHĀRAṆĀ

“Concentration on space”. It is concentration (*dhāraṇā*) on space (*ākāśa*) as a cosmic element (*tattva*) and is the last phase of the “five-fold concentration” (*pañca-dhāraṇā*) described in the *Gheraṇḍa-sambhitā* and the *Yoga-tattva-upaniṣad*. Tantric mystic physiology connects this element with *viśuddha-cakra*, found at the level of the throat, with the part of the head above the eyebrows and with Sadāśiva (one of the forms of the god Śiva). The symbols representing it are a white or light blue circle, often enclosed in a downward pointing triangle, and the *bija-mantra* HAM. Concentration on space is attained by visualising the aforementioned symbols and by holding the “vital breath” (*prāṇa*) for a period of time which should be of two hours according to the *Gheraṇḍa-sambhitā*. The perfect realisation of this concentration, the texts say, allows the *yogin* to move freely in the entire universe. [SF]

AKLIṢṬA

“Unspoiled”. In the *Yoga-sūtra* Patañjali indicates by this term those mental functions (*citta-vṛtti*) which lead to metaphysical consciousness and are unconditioned by the limiting action of the so called “afflictions” (*kleśa*); they do not, therefore, stimulate the process of *karman* and can carry man towards liberation. [SF]

AKṢY-UPANIṢAD

“The secret doctrine revealed by the eye [of the heavens] (the Sun)”. In this work, of only

50 verses, Āditya, the Sun, after being honoured, explains knowledge of Truth, of what is (*tattva-jñāna*). He then lists and describes the seven stages, which lead to the progressive detachment from the world in order to reach final emancipation. It is at the fifth stage in particular that the process of the abandonment of the sense of *ego* begins: this stage corresponds to deep dreamless sleep, during which every psychic-physical activity is completely suspended. Lastly, the seventh and highest stage is that of those who live but are free from the cycle of births and deaths (*samsāra*), having become liberated whilst living (*jivan-mukta*). At this highest pinnacle of Yoga, which is beyond the limits of words, of experiences, of the world and of the body, only the sacred syllable exists, OM, which, though it transcends all, nevertheless encloses all. [GS]

ALABDHA-BHŪMIKATVA

“Failure (in reaching *samādhi*)”. According to Patañjali, it is one of the nine factors of mental distraction (*citta-vikṣepa*) which obstruct the practice of Yoga. It consists in the inability to concentrate in such a way as to have a clear vision of reality and therefore to realise the state of *samādhi*. [SP]

ĀLASYA

“Indolence”. According to Patañjali, it is one of the nine factors of mental distraction (*citta-vikṣepa*) that obstruct the practice of Yoga. As Vyāsa explains, it is a form of lethargy or sluggishness caused by physical and mental heaviness. [SF]

ALCHEMY

The attempts by the diverse orientations present in various schools of Yoga, to create a perfect body (“adamantine body” according to what is called diamond vehicle in Buddhism sphere; “perfect” or “immortal body” according to *hatha-yoga*), are to a great extent linked to practices and theories of alchemy. The *yogin*'s body goes through a process of dissolution and successive re-composition, as in an alchemic procedure. Similarly, the transformation of humble metals

into gold is included in the supernatural faculties (*siddhī*) that are opened to the initiate during the course of his ascetic path. The “divine body” or rather “the Gnostic body” of *hatha-yoga* is realised by a true transmutation of flesh. In popular tradition the themes of the elixir of immortality and of the transmutation of metals are found in the mythology concerning the figure of the *yogin* with the gift of magical powers. Where Patañjali’s “high” tradition distances itself from the use of what we would call propagandist or miraculous superhuman faculties, the heritage of popular culture never tires of telling the various miraculous feats that the *yogin* can carry out. Western travellers, whether of the past or today, from Marco Polo to François Bernier, describe their amazement at the sight of such practices or the tales about them. Nor do muslim historians ignore the fascination evoked by these mysterious figures. Indian literature is swarming with allusions to alchemist *yogin*-s and in the *Hatha-yoga-pradīpikā* itself two verses can be found in which there is a parallelism between mercury, an unstable element par excellence, and the mind which never tires of directing its attention to various objects without ever finding rest. As the alchemist aims to stabilize mercury in order to swallow it (it is believed that the ingestion of mercury enables levitation), so the *yogin* must strive to block the vital force (which in reality is another manifestation of the mind) in order to be able to float in the air at will.

The fact that alchemy practices are closely bound to those of Yoga is proved by the Buddhist texts which state that the transformation of metals can be carried out by either alchemical or magical techniques and by the “force of *samādhi*”, that is through Yoga. There is no proof of dependence of Indian A. on Arabian. If there has been any relationship it was rather between A. and Tantrism, the latter being a pan-Indian and archaic tradition. Tantric alchemists are found above all in Nepāl or in the extreme Southern India, where the alchemists take the name of *siddha*-s (tamil *sittar*). It is above all in the Tantric texts that the most precise references

to A. can be found. The *Śiva-sāmbhitā* states that the *yogin* is able to fabricate gold from any metal, by rubbing it with his own excrements and urine. Such teachings were already present in the *Upaniṣad*-s, where, however, A. is considered an obstacle to the path of spiritual perfection. A Tibetan text tells the story of a *siddha* who was able to change copper into silver and silver into gold. All such references implying a solidarity between Yoga and A. support a theory of a fundamental soteriological function of alchemy. This is not pre-scientific rudimentary chemistry but a technique of spiritual evolution. As the alchemist works on base metals to transform them into gold, so the *yogin* works on his physical and psychic body to extract the spiritual element. This comparison obviously acquires a higher value given that gold is the classic symbol of immortality. Mercury can be used to stabilize gold, in order to enable it to be absorbed by the human body thereby assuring immortality. And again: mercury is the seed of Śiva, as mica is the ovule of the Goddess. The union between the two renders man immortal. Alchemy practices are therefore instruments for the acquisition of an incorruptible body, as this alone can guarantee liberation and spiritual autonomy.

All this recalls the speculations on the control of the vital breath, which in turn can be symbolically identified with mercury. Therefore, both the *yogin* and the alchemist aim, each in his own environment, micro- and macro-cosmic respectively, to exempt themselves from inevitable decadence to achieve a state of incorruptibility. The correspondence between micro- and macro-cosmos that lies at the base of the archaic Indian vision, therefore fosters interpenetration between the two doctrines. Lastly the theory, belonging to *hatha-yoga*, of the “union of the sun and the moon” is singularly close to the *coniunctio solis et lunae* of Western A. [AP]

See also *rasa*.

ALLIGATOR POSTURE

See *makara-āsana*.

ALL LIMBS POSTURE

See *sarvāṅga-āsana*.

AMARĀṆĪ

Synonym of *amarolī*.

AMARAUGHA-PRABODHA

“The reawakening of the perennial flux” (immortality). The text, of 74 verses, was composed by Gorakṣanātha, according to the colophon. The four types of Yoga and their principal characteristics are described here. *Rāja-yoga* is the most important of all and is identified with *amaraugha*, which alone enables the achievement of bodily perfection. Among the other components of Yoga, *mahā-mudrā* (the great seal) and *mahā-bandha* (the great contraction) are analysed. Then follows the description of how to attain *amaraugha-siddhi* or superhuman power, thanks to which the initiate defeats time, gains immortality and becomes similar to Śiva: the *yogin* is then a being definitively liberated from the cycle of existences while still living (*jīvanmukta*). [GS]

AMAROLĪ

Mudrā, also known as *amarāṇī*, which is part of erotic mysticism and constitutes a variation of *vajrolī-mudrā*: it enables the sperm released during *maithuna* (sexual union) to be reabsorbed. The *Śiva-saṃhitā* states: “If by chance sperm is released by sexual excitement and the union of moon and sun comes about, the *yogin* reabsorbs the sperm through the tube: this is *amarāṇī*”. The *Hathayoga-pradīpikā* adds that one must also absorb *amṛta* (the saliva identified with ambrosia) that is “drunk” by the tongue during the execution of *kbecari-mudrā*. [MR]

AMBHAS

“Water”. One of the gross elements (*mahā-bhūta*) of the *Sāṃkhya-darśana*. It is a synonym for *āpas*.

ĀMBHASĪ-DHĀRANĀ

“Concentration on water”. Concentration on the cosmic element water (*ambhas*) and the second step in the “fivefold concentration”

(*pañca-dhāraṇā*), described in some Yogic texts, such as the *Gheraṇḍa-saṃhitā* and the *Yogattattva-upaniṣad*. In Tantric mystic physiology, water as a cosmic element is connected to the “centre” (*cakra*) *svādhiṣṭhāna* (“foundation of the self”), located above the sexual organ, and to the part of the body between the knees and the anus; its symbols are the white half-moon and the syllable (or *bija-mantra*) *VAM*; Viṣṇu is the associated divinity. The *yogin* concentrates on these images while holding the vital breath (*prāṇa*) for two hours, thereby becoming, according to the texts, exempt from any adversities caused by water. [SF]

AMBROSIA

See *amṛta*, *soma*.

AMṚTA

“Ambrosia”. According to Hindū mythology, A. was produced by the churning of the primordial ocean of milk, by the gods and the demons. Later a bitter quarrel began because both of them wanted to possess the precious liquor. It was only thanks to a trick



The mythical production of *amṛta* (8th century).

by Viṣṇu (who took on the appearance of a beautiful young girl, Mohinī, thus disturbing and distracting the demons) that the gods were able to take possession of the beverage of immortality. A. is frequently used as a synonym for *soma* in haṭhayogic literature, a sacred liquid produced by crushing and then filtering herbs, the species and powers of which are still the object of study and research: the offering of this drink is the central moment in the Vedic sacrifice. The receptacle for the A. as for the *soma*, is the Moon, called Candra or Soma, as queen of the plants from which the nectar of the same name is derived. According to the *nāthayogins*, within the micro-cosmos which is the human body, A. is produced by the Moon which is found in the “lotus of a thousand petals”, the *sahasrāra-padma*, located at the top of the head; from here it oozes incessantly dripping through a curved channel (*vaṅkanala*) crossing the head and collecting in the region of the palate, from where it continues its downwards fall to the navel, to the fire in *maṇipūra-cakra* which consumes and destroys it. Thanks to *kbecarī-mudrā* (a particular “seal” that consists in inserting the tongue, after resecting the fraenum, into the space within the nasal cavities) the *yogin* reaches the double aim of impeding the harmful flow and of absorbing the A. in order to acquire the physical and mental benefits it can bestow once it is preserved and possessed. Identical in its substance but different in its form, which is concrete, “material” (*sthūla*), is *bindu* or sperm, also known as *candra-amṛta*, the ambrosia produced by the Moon. As well as the arrest of A. in the subtle body (*liṅga-śarīra*), the blocking of the sperm in the coarse or material body (*sthūla-śarīra*) is another direct consequence of the practice of *kbecarī-mudrā*. [GS]

AMṚTABINDU-UPANIṢAD

“*Upaniṣad* of the drop of ambrosia”. This brief text, which has 24 lines, can be defined as an abridgement, Vaiṣṇava in character, of the doctrine of *rāja-yoga*. It states that one can know *Brahman*, the absolute Reality, only after passing the stage of reasoning,

which is the mental phase: the practice of Yoga and the repetition of the sacred monosyllable *OM*, achieve this. *Brahman* is the pure unarticulated sound; the nasal resonance of the syllable *OM*. The individual Self, *ātman*, is also unique and eternal but seems multiple as it is incarnated in various living beings. Therefore the acquisition of consciousness of the identity of these two transcendent essences is fundamental, in order to make one’s own the affirmation “I am *Brahman*” (*ahaṃ brahmāsmi*), one of the *mahāvākya*-s (great, sacred sayings) of the *Upaniṣad*-s. The devotee must be conscious that *Brahman* is none other than Vāsudeva (Viṣṇu): in this particular vision, the last end of the yogic path is the consubstantiation with Viṣṇu himself. [GS]

AMṚTANĀDA-UPANIṢAD

“*Upaniṣad* of the immortal sound”. The description of the immortal or uncaused sound (*anābata-nāda*: sound not produced from the beating or the knocking of anything) which is experimented thanks to the practice of Yoga, is central to this work of 38 verses. *Brahman* himself is the sacred monosyllable *OM*: the secret power of this syllable is in the nasal resonance *M*, which is neither vowel nor consonant; inexpressible, it is pure vibration, perfect and immortal. The *Upaniṣad* also analyses the control of the vital breath (*prāṇāyāma*) in its three phases: inhaling, exhaling and retention and describes the five vital breaths that, once unified, flow along the *suṣumnā* to *sahasrāra-cakra* (the “centre of a thousand petals” at the top of the head), bringing about the definitive liberation from the cycle of births and deaths. [GS]

ANĀHATA-CAKRA

“Circle of the uncaused sound”: it is one of the six canonical *cakra*-s, so called because the silent ascetics (*muni*) perceive sound without there being any impact between two objects (*anābata-śabda*). It is also known as *hr̥daya-cakra* (*cakra* of the heart), because it is found in the cardiac area. It is also identified by some with the cardiac plexus and is considered by the *Śiva-sambhitā* as the seat of

prāna (the vital breath) and of *jīvātman* (the individual soul). It is depicted as a brilliant red lotus of twelve petals, with the letters KA, KHA, GA, GHA, ŪA, CA, CHA, JA, JHA, ŪA, TA, THA, each completed by the nasal resonance represented by *candra-bindu*. Within the circular *maṇḍala* which constitutes the pericarp is found the world of Vāyu (the wind), represented by a *yantra* made up of two superimposed equilateral triangles (one pointed downwards and the other upwards) so as to form a hexagon, each side of which is surmounted by an equilateral triangle. The *bija-mantra* is YAM, called *vāyu-bija* or *pavana-bija* (seed of the wind), which is placed above the black antelope, mount of Vāyu or wind, the element associated with this *cakra*, as is touch, Mahar-loka (“world of light”) and the circulatory system. Within the *bija-mantra*, *Śakti* is represented by a triangle pointing upwards within which the *bānalīṅga* is represented in the form of fire. The divinity-*siddha* protector of this *cakra*, represented within the *bija-mantra*, is Pinākin (a form of Śiva, or Īśāna, or Rudra armed with a trident) and the *Devī* or *Śakti* is Kākinī, portrayed with four heads, seated on a red lotus flower, with four hands, two of which holding a noose and a skull, while the

other two are held in a gesture of conceding favours (*varada-mudrā*) and of removing fear (*abhaya-mudrā*). The goddess is dressed in yellow and is adorned with jewels and a garland of bones.

The *Śiva-saṃhitā* affirms that he who meditates on this *cakra* is not only desired by divine women, but also has the incomparable knowledge of the past, of the present and of the future, clearvoyance, clear-hearing and the extraordinary ability to float freely in the air. The *Ṣaṭcakra-nirūpaṇa* also describes the extraordinary fruits of the meditative concentration on this *cakra*: excelling among *yogin*-s, control of the senses, the love of beautiful women, inimitable eloquence; similarity to Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī’s beloved, and the ability to enter another’s body. [SP]

ANĀHATA-NĀDA

“Sound not produced by percussion”. Also known as *anāhata-śabda*, it indicates a series of inner sounds perceived by the *yogin* who practises *yonī-mudrā* (described in the *Gheṛaṇḍa-saṃhitā*, for example) which consists in sealing ears, eyes, nostrils and upper and lower lips respectively with thumbs, forefingers, middle-fingers, ring fingers and little fingers. At this point in the consciousness of the meditator different sounds are heard, which are divided into four stages (initial, of unification, of consciousness, of completion) which are described accurately in the *Haṭhayoga-pradīpikā*. In the first, a tinkling sound like that of tinkets is heard; in the second, the sound of a kettledrum; in the third that of a drum; in the fourth that of a flute. The aim of the practice is to concentrate one’s attention on the sounds as they become more and more subtle, ignoring the coarser ones, fixing the mind on sound alone ignoring any other sensorial messages. Various images are used to illustrate this type of mental control: the bee that while sucking the flower’s nectar ignores its perfume; the elephant controlled by goading; the bird with clipped wings; the entrapped deer; the fettered horse. The comment by Kālīcaraṇa regarding the *Ṣaṭcakra-nirūpaṇa* links the perception of the four inner sounds, localised in the same number of *cakra*-s, to the



Anāhata-cakra.

four stages of the word (*vāc*), which are conceived according to a common classification of the *Śaiva* schools, above all those in Kāśmīr. The four stages are (in descending order) the supreme, the seer, the middle stage, the articulated stage. [AP]

ĀNANDA

“Beatitude”, “joy”. Rather than to pleasures of the senses, it refers to a form of pure happiness, exempt from any involvement with worldly objects; that very same happiness that is one of the three principal characteristics of the Self, while the other two are the fact of being (*sat*) and consciousness (*cit*). One of the sheaths that envelop the Self, is constituted by pure bliss (*ānandamaya-kośa*), by which it is meant to express the estrangement of the conscious principle from this very refined experience, as it still remains anchored to the phenomenal world, not being identifiable with the pure subject that is the Self. [AP]

ĀNANDAMAYA-KOŚA

“Bliss-made sheath”. It is the innermost of the five *kośa*-s or sheaths that must be removed by meditation in order to reach *ātman*. Given that, for the Vedānta, the very *ātman* consists of being, consciousness and bliss (*sat-cit-ānanda*), infinite and eternal joy must be distinguished from the transient bliss pertaining to the sheath: only the latter, is “experienced” in the true sense of the word, and arises when one no longer identifies oneself with the body, breath or mental functions. [AC]

ANANTA

“The Infinite”. An immense mythological serpent that represents continuity. It is depicted cradled in its own coils above the waters of primitive chaos. The god Viṣṇu lies abandoned upon it sleeping deeply, while resting absorbed during the time that runs between two successive manifestations of the world. The cosmic waters represent the ocean of unconsciousness that characterises both the divinity and the universe in this period of the cycle. A. is known by other names such as Vāsuki, which serves as a



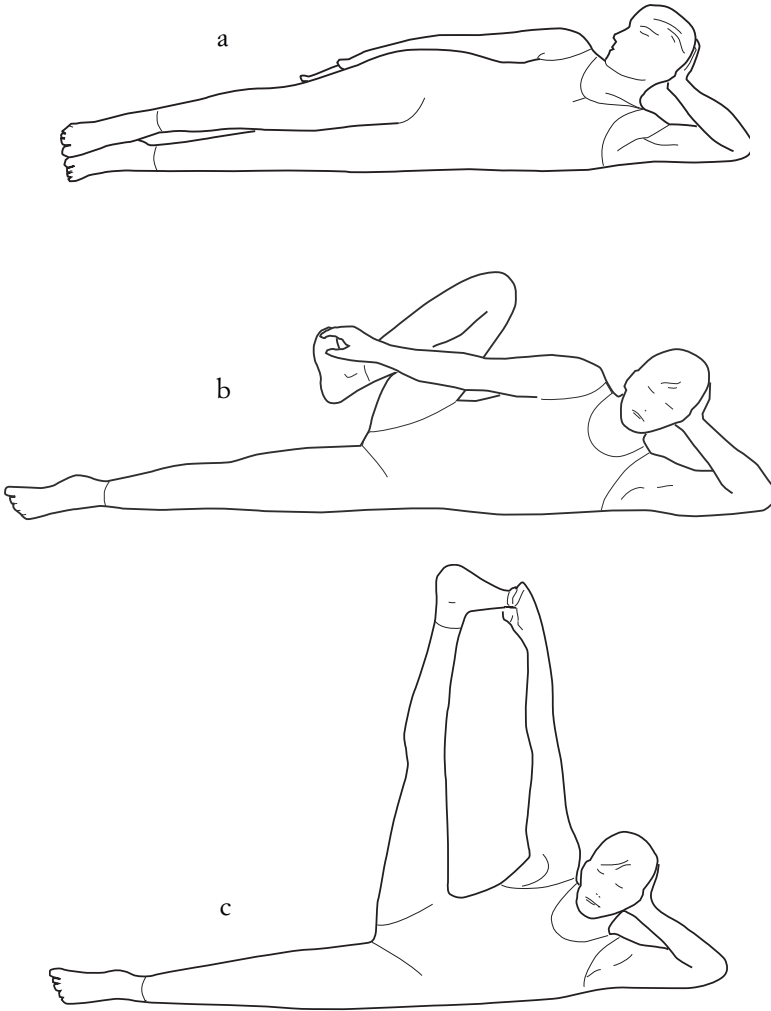
Viṣṇu lying on the serpent Ananta (Anantaśāyin).

rope pulling the churn in the myth of the churning of the ocean of milk; and of Śeṣa, “rest”, intending “that which remains of the world after its dissolution”. In some texts Vāsuki, is however, considered a figure distinct from A. [AP]

ANANTA-ĀSANA

“Posture of Ananta”. An *āsana* of *baṭha-yoga* belonging to the category of lying postures. *Ananta* means infinite, eternal: the mythical serpent Śeṣa, on which Viṣṇu lies (on his side in a posture that recalls this *āsana*), is also known by this name, floating on the cosmic waters at the end of a dissolution of the world.

Practice. Lying on the left side, bend the left arm so that upper arm is on the floor while the forearm supports the head. The legs are kept together and extended with the right arm relaxed along the right side. In the dynamic phase bend the right knee while inhaling, clasping the big toe with the right hand and then extending the leg, while exhaling in a slow and graceful movement until it is as vertical as possible. The posture is held from 15 seconds to a minute, breathing normally and concentrating on the muscles at the back of the leg, which must be kept relaxed during the exercise. Release the posture by slowly bending the knee while inhaling and returning to the initial position.



Ananta-āsana: a) starting position; b) dynamic stage; c) final posture.

After a brief relaxation the posture is repeated on the other side.

Easy variation. If it is too difficult to extend the leg while clasping the big toe the position can be made easier by holding the lower leg.

Benefits. Protects against rheumatism in the shoulders and rib pain. The lengthening of the leg muscles prevents sciatica and is very helpful for those who practise sports which put pressure on the legs, protecting against muscle tearing caused by lack of elasticity.

ANAVASTHITATVA

“Fickleness”, “instability”. One of the nine factors of distraction of the mind (*citta-vikṣepa*), which, according to Patañjali’s *Yoga-sūtra*, are an obstacle to the practice of Yoga. The principal commentators on the *Yoga-sūtra* describe A. as a lack of fixation of the mind in the state of consciousness reached, its inability to maintain itself in the state of “enstasy” (*samādhi*) after this has been reached. [SP]

AṄGA

“Limb”, “part”, “stage”. Patañjali numbers the eight limbs of Yoga; abstentions (*yama*), observances (*niyama*), postures (*āsana*), control of breathing (*prāṇāyāma*), withdrawing of the senses (*pratyāhāra*), concentration (*dhāraṇā*), meditation (*dhyāna*) and “ecstasy” (*samādhi*). These limbs are in turn subdivided into external (*babir-aṅga*) and internal (*antar-aṅga*): the first regulate behaviour towards the outside world in which one’s own body, the other living creatures and all inanimate things are comprised; the second discipline thought. The terms “external” and “internal” are in any case relative, because according to Patañjali the distinction between the outer and inner limbs does not correspond to the distinction between the physical and psychological sphere: the *nirbīja-samādhi* is an *antar-aṅga* compared to the previous stages. Abstraction, which consists in withdrawing the senses from objects, is already a mental operation and, on the other hand, the first limbs, the abstentions etc. should not be understood in a physical sense only. Therefore the outer limbs constitute a preparatory level, and the inner ones, the operative level. [AC]

AṄGAMEJAYATVA

Instability due to factors of disturbance in the tonic systems of the body. The fundamental aim of the postures (*āsana*) in Yoga is to overcome A.: for example by eliminating trembling caused by emotional conflicts, stress, tensions, etc.

ANGER

See *krodha*.

AṆIMAN

“Smallness”. It is one of the eight *siddhi*-s (superhuman powers that can be obtained by the *yogin*) described in the *Yoga-sūtra*: it consists in the faculty of voluntarily reducing the body dimensions until they become microscopic. Patañjali states that the *yogin* can attain A. thanks to a complete dominion over the elements. This is reached by applying together the last three limbs of eightfold Yoga, *saṁyama*, which consist of *dhāraṇā*

(concentration), *dhyāna* (meditation) and *samādhi* (perfect recollection or “ecstasy”), to the five forms that constitute these elements. [GS]

AṆJALI-MUDRĀ

The gesture by which charity is received or offered. It consists in bringing the hands together in front of the body, holding the palms upward and slightly concave, so as to form a cup, and then lifting them until they reach the forehead. The variation of this *mudrā* where the hands are held against the chest with palms together with straight or slightly bent fingers, expresses veneration and it is used particularly in the Tantric cult, symbolising the total offering of oneself. It is a common gesture in Indian daily life, as it is also the traditional form of greeting. [SP]

AṆJANEYA-ĀSANA

“Posture of the son of Añjanā”, that is “of Hanumat”. *Āsana* of *baṭha-yoga* commonly known as “split posture”.

Practice. On the knees, bring hands to the ground in parallel about 50 cm apart. While inhaling, bring the body weight onto the hands and toes; rise by straightening the

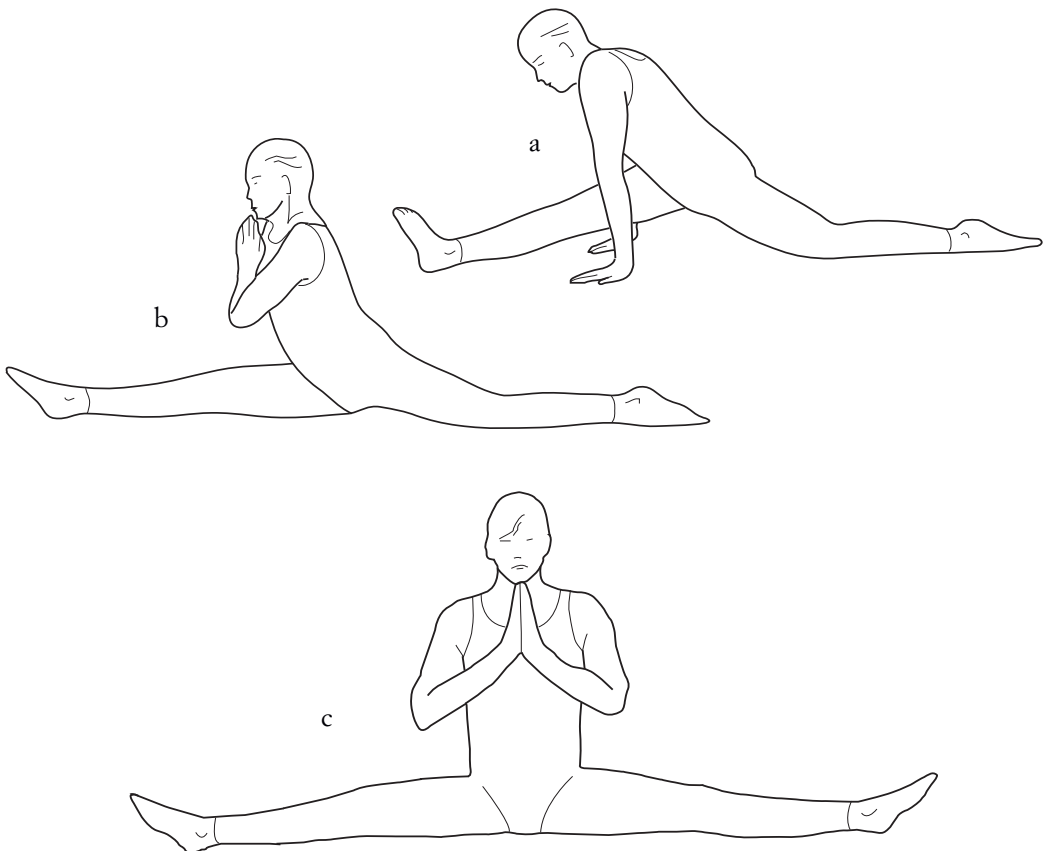


Gesture of *añjali* in a sculpture of the 2nd century A.D.

knees. While exhaling stretch the right leg forwards resting the heel on the floor and bringing the left foot backwards using the inner side of the foot to maintain stability. Keep the lower body raised and gently bounce the body up and downwards. Slowly release the weight from the hands, until the lower body touches the floor, then push on both heels creating an intense traction of the back tendons in order to completely stretch both legs, so that the back of the knees, the thighs and ischia touch the floor. The hands are held in a prayer-like gesture in front of the chest, or arms are extended above the head with hands together. The posture should be held from 15 seconds to a minute. Breathing is slow and regular. To relax the posture, while inhaling bring the body weight back

on to the hands, and while exhaling return to the initial position with bent knees. Repeat on the other side keeping the posture for the same time. Rigorous daily exercise is needed in order to correctly perform this difficult posture.

Variation. The “frontal” splits: starting from the standing position, legs opened to the sides as far as possible keeping feet parallel; while exhaling bring the upper-body forward so that the hands come to the ground. Slowly let the heels slip until the lower body is seated on the ground with legs open, stretched out symmetrically on the ground from the ankles to the groin. The hands are held together at the chest in a gesture of prayer and the posture is held for a few seconds, breathing slowly. To release the *āsana* place the hands on the floor



Āñjaneya-āsana: a) initial position; b) basic posture; c) variation.

bringing the body weight on to them and slowly bringing the legs together, keeping the feet parallel with the soles on the floor until the legs are together. This posture is much more difficult than the lateral splits and needs constant practice.

Benefits. This *āsana* lengthens the tendons in the back of the legs, toning and stretching the adductor muscles of the thighs; it improves circulation in the legs and gives a pleasant sensation of bodily balance and symmetry. The variation exercises the hip joints, rendering them more supple, and improves the circulation in the pelvic area. [CV]

ANNAMAYA-KOŚA

“Food-made sheath”. According to the Vedānta it is the first of the five *kośa*-s or sheaths that must be transcended in order to reach the *ātman*. It is the gross body, formed from the elements, or *mahā-bhūta*, and its identification with *ātman* is eliminated by meditating on all that differentiates the latter from the earth, from water, from fire, from air and from space. [AC]

ANTAḤ-KARAṆA

The inner organ, consisting of two sheaths (*kośa*), which are called mental sheath (*manomaya-kośa*) and consciousness-made sheath (*vijñānamaya-kośa*). It is fourfold, comprising the following aspects of mental life: 1) *manas*, which registers and coordinates sensorial data and offers a first comprehension; 2) *buddhi*, which discriminates between the data offered by *manas*, thus producing an articulated image of the object perceived and resolving any possible doubts about it; 3) *ahaṅkāra*, the sense of self through which the perceived object opposes itself to the perceiving subject which appropriates it; 4) *citta*, which represents the mind’s capacity to consciously contemplate the object. This subdivision is of Vedāntic inspiration: according to the Sāṃkhya, *citta* is practically a synonym of *buddhi*. [AP]

ANTAḤ-ŚUDDHI

“Inner purification”. According to the *Mantra-yoga-sambhitā*, purification is attained by

cultivating a series of positive attitudes, such as courage, charity, self-control, self-confidence, study of the *Veda*, mystical practice, non-violence, detachment, abandonment of all egoism, etc. Such virtues constitute the “divine gifts”, as opposed to “demoniacal gifts” (pride, arrogance, attachment, etc.). He who privileges the demoniacal gifts is destined to become a slave to them, whereas the *yogin* who, through clear discernment turns to the divine gifts, is purified and attains liberation.

ANTARA-KUMBHAKA

See *kumbhaka*.

ANTAR-AṄGA

“Inner limbs”. Name including the last three *aṅga*-s or “limbs” of classical Yoga: *dhyāna* (meditation), *dhāraṇā* (concentration) and *samādhi* (perfect recollection or “enstasy”). See also *aṅga*, *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*.

ANTARĀYA

“Obstacle”. In the *Yoga-sūtra*, Patañjali uses this word to describe the impediments that the *yogin* meets along the path of spiritual progress and that consist in the nine “sources of distraction of the mind” (*citta-vikṣepa*). [SP]

ANTAR-DHAUTI

“Inner purification”. A number of techniques of *haṭha-yoga*, belonging to the *ṣaṭkarma*-s (the “six practices” or “acts” of *haṭha-yoga*, aimed at cleansing the body from any impurity described in the *Gheraṇḍa-sambhitā*). It consists of four purifications, called *vātasāra-dhauti* (purification by air), *vārisāra-dhauti* (purification by water), *agnisāra-dhauti* (purification by fire) and *bahiskṛta-dhauti* (outer purification).

ANUGĪTĀ

“The song that follows”. Title of an important section of the *Mahābhārata* (14, 16-51), at the end of the terrible war described in the poem; it repeats the teachings of Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, stressing the principal concepts. [SP]

ANULOMA-VILOMA

A variation of *prāṇāyāma* during which breathing alternates from one nostril to the other.

Practice. A complete cycle of A. is as follows: first, inhale (*pūraka*) through the left nostril, while the right one is closed by pressure from the right thumb. Then retain the breath (*kumbhaka*), and lastly exhale (*recaka*) through the right nostril (the left one is closed by the pressure from the ring and little finger of the right hand). Then invert the order: inhale through the right nostril, retain the breath, then exhale through the left nostril. In a complete cycle of A. each of the three phases is carried out twice through a single nostril: this technique is thus unlike all other exercises of *prāṇāyāma* where each is completed once through both nostrils.

Benefits. This variation of *prāṇāyāma* is also known as *nāḍī-śodhana* or *nāḍī-suddhi*, in other words “purification of the channels”, as it frees the air passages from impurities, while, at a deeper level, it purifies the arteries of the subtle body, helping circulation and the absorption of *prāṇa*.

See also *samanu*.

ANUMĀNA

“Inference”. Numbered by Patañjali among the means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*), together with direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) and authoritative testimony (*āgama*), A. is a mental process that has the function of attributing a certain quality to a determined object, founded on the presence or not within this object of a characteristic element of that quality. As we know, for example, that the characteristic of objects in motion is their presence in different places, we can deduce that the stars are in motion, as they have such a characteristic. [SF]

APĀNA

“Expulsive” or “descending” breath mentioned in the *Gheraṇḍa-saṃhitā* as one of the ten “breaths” and one of the two principal breaths, the other being *prāṇa*. According to Vyāsa it is that particular type of vital energy that cleanses the body of impurities and acts

in the lower body down to the soles of the feet. In *haṭha-yoga* it represents alternatively exhalation or breaths that flow from the anus. The *Haṭhayoga-pradīpikā* affirms that the *yogin* must invert the descending course of A., forcing it to flow upwards by contracting the perineum (*mūla-bandha*) until it reaches the area of fire (that is *manipūra-cakra*, at the level of the navel) thereby joining *prāṇa* and provoking the awakening of Kuṇḍalinī.

According to the *Śiva-saṃhitā* A. presides over excretion, ejaculation and expulsion of the foetus, and is found in the anal area. The term became important in both *haṭha-yoga* and Tantrism but was already cited in the *Bhagavad-gītā*: “Others then, who are dedicated to the control of the vital force, sacrifice *prāṇa* in *āpana* and *āpana* in *prāṇa*”. [AP]

APARIGRAHA

The term, in its literal meaning (“non possession”), indicates the renunciation of marriage, and also refers to rejection of avarice, abstention from material goods, voluntary poverty that consists in abstaining from accumulating in any way objects of delight, whether deriving from language, touch, taste or smell. Together with abstention from violence, from untruthfulness, from stealing and from lust, it completes the list of the five *yama*-s or “abstentions” that constitute the first limb (*aṅga*) of classical Yoga. [MR]

ĀPAS

“Water”. In the sphere of Tantrism and Sāṃkhya-Yoga, it indicates one of the five *mahā-bhūta*-s, or “gross” elements, (space, air, fire, water and earth). It is linked to: the colour white; to the syllable VA or KA; to the circle or half-moon; to Viṣṇu; it has its centre in the organ of taste, in the feet and in *svādhiṣṭhāna*, the circle of energy (*cakra*) located above the sexual organ. It is associated with sourness as a taste (*rasa*).

As for the other *bhūta*-s, the complex symbology associated with it acts as a support to a series of very elaborate meditative practices. Ā. flows in the lower part of the nostrils. [AP]

APAVARGA

“Liberation”. According to the Sāṃkhya-darśana, it is the ultimate aim of man and consists in the complete end of the three forms of suffering: 1) *ādhyātmika* (inner), that includes both physical and psychological suffering; 2) *ādibhautika* (originating from *bhūta*-s, “beings”, “creatures”), which includes suffering caused by external agents belonging to the human or animal world; 3) *ādbidaivika* (originating from superhuman forces), which includes the inauspicious influences of planets, spirits and demons. [SP]

See also *mokṣa*.

APHORISMS

See *sūtra*.

APHORISMS OF YOGA

See *Yoga-sūtra*.

APRAKĀŚA-MUDRĀ

“Gesture of the non-manifested”. This *mudrā* has the function of retaining *prāṇa* within the body after contracting the throat (*jālandhara-bandha*). It is carried out by holding the breath after inhaling, then exhaling slowly, beginning from the abdomen, then from the chest and the clavicle area. [RR]

ĀRĀDHANA

Synonym of *arcā/arcana*.

ĀRAMBHA-AVASTHĀ

“Initial stage”. One of the four stages in the practice of Yoga, according to the *Haṭha-yoga-pradīpikā*, that of *prāṇāyāma* in particular; the other three stages are *ghaṭa*, *paricaya* and *niṣpatti* (stages of unification, of knowledge and of crowning). One can speak of A. both in relation to breathing control and in relation to the perception of a sound in the area of the heart. The *yogin* that begins to practise *prāṇāyāma* causes abundant transpiration: in this initial stage the body needs to be rubbed down carefully, so that it is not weakened. Another “initial stage” occurs when one manages, by controlling the breath, to perforate the knot of Brahmā in *anāhata-*

cakra (the “centre of uncaused sound”, located in the heart area): in this case beatitude is felt in the heart cavity, tinkling similar to that of bracelets and other ornaments is heard, and the sound “uncaused” (*anāhata*) is heard in the body. The *yogin* who reaches this state acquires a divine, splendid, healthy and perfumed body, and his heart brims with happiness. [AC]

ARANI

The name of two pieces of wood, one of which is taken from the *samī* tree (*Prosopis spicigera*): it is bar-shaped with a cavity, and forms the base; the other is of a small stick of *āsvattha* or *pippala* (*Ficus religiosa*), the pointed extremity of which is placed in the cavity of the horizontal bar. Used in India since the Vedic age for rituals; by making an alternated rotation (called *manthana*) of the vertical part with the hands, a flame is sparked by which the sacred fire is lighted. The rotary friction of A. is used as an image of *pranava-dhyāna*, a particular meditative practice mentioned in some *Upaniṣad*-s. [SP]

ĀRANYAKA

“Forest texts”. These are the concluding books of the Vedic *Sambhitā*-s, considered an integral part of the *Veda*, intended for forest hermits. As in the *Brāhmaṇa*-s, to which they are closely linked, sacrificial exegesis is a central theme. However, while the former consider the more liturgical aspect, the latter privilege a symbolic interpretation of sacrifice, its mystic and secret meanings. Given their speculative and esoteric character, their ascetic spirit and the themes covered (such as the identity of *Brahman* and *ātman*), they are very similar to the *Upaniṣad*-s, of which the principal ones are included in the Ā. [PC]

ARCĀ/ARCANA

“Adoration” practised for a personal divinity. A. is considered as one of the twelve *niyama*-s (observances) by the *Uddhava-gītā* (The [Divine] Song addressed to Uddhava), an important section of the *Bhāgavata-purāna* (Ancient recitation of the Bhāgavata-s). [SP] See also *īśvara-praṇidhāna*, *pūjā*.

ARCHER POSTURE

See *ākarnādhānur-āsana*.

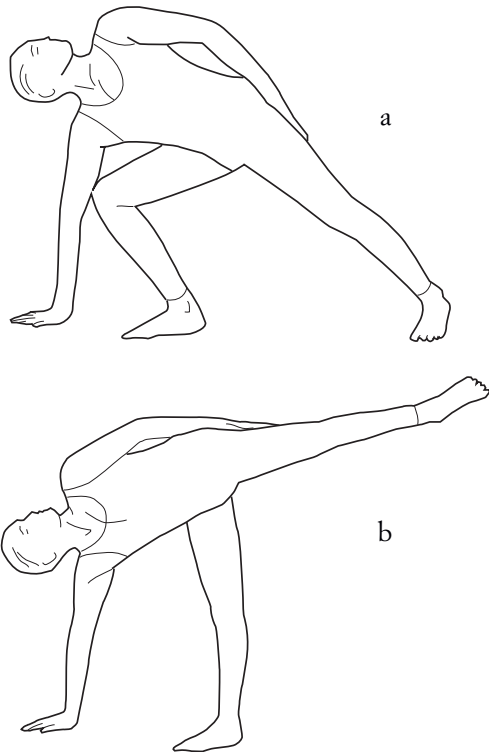
ARDHA

“Half”. In *haṭha-yoga* this term, used before the name of an *āsana*, indicates an easier variation or a partial execution of the posture, as opposed to *paripūrṇa*, which indicates a complete and consequently more difficult execution of the *āsana*.

ARDHACANDRA-ĀSANA

“Half moon posture”. A *haṭha-yoga āsana* belonging to the category of standing postures.

Practice. Standing straight with arms by the sides. While inhaling, take a side step with one foot of about the same length of the leg. At the same time open both arms sideways at shoulder height. While exhaling, turn the right leg outwards bending the right knee and the body towards the right, lowering the right arm until it touches the ground, palm down,



Ardhacandra-āsana: a) intermediate posture; b) final posture.

so that the arm pit is just above the knee. Lift the left leg to a horizontal position while straightening the right leg, which carries the body weight with the right hand helping balance. The left arm lies along the left side. The posture is held for about 15 to 30 seconds breathing gently. It is released while exhaling by lowering the left leg, straightening the body and bringing both arms back to shoulder height. It is then repeated on the other side.

Benefits. Strengthens the leg muscles in particular, as well as those of the glutei and lumbar region; it also tones the abdominal organs.

ARDHA-HALA-ĀSANA

See *hala-āsana*.

ARDHA-MATSYENDRA-ĀSANA

See *matsyendra-āsana*.

ARDHA-NĀV-ĀSANA

See *nāv-āsana*.

ARDHA-ŚALABHA-ĀSANA

See *śalabha-āsana*

ARJUNA

Mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* as the champion of the five Pāṇḍava brothers, son of the god Indra (as Yudhiṣṭhira is of Dharma, Bhīma of Vāyu, Nakula and Sahadeva of the two Aśvin-s). He incarnates the ideal of the warrior prince (*kṣatriya*). In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa, *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, a faithful ally of Indra in the *Veda*, reveals the supreme Yoga to him, which brings about the union with *Bhagavat*, the glorious Lord. [SP]

ĀROGYA

“Health”. One of the most important results and signs of success in the practice of *haṭha-yoga*. According to the *Haṭhayoga-pradīpikā*, “following a purification of the *nāḍī*-s, the ability to retain one’s breath at will is born and the gastric fire is revived; the inner sound (*nāda*) manifests itself; health is obtained”. [SP]

ARREST OF MENTAL FUNCTIONS

See *nirodha*.

ARUNDHATĪ

Another name for *Kuṇḍalinī*.

ASAKTA

“Free”, “independent”. The *yogin* is A. once he has renounced not only material well-being, but also desires and passions, reaching a state of indifference that allows him to dedicate himself to inner research. [MR]

ASAMCAYA

“Absence of provisions”. Listed as one of the twelve *yama*-s or “abstentions” by the *Uddhava-gītā* (The [divine] Song addressed to Uddhava), an important section of the *Bhāgavata-purāna* (Ancient Recitation of the Bhāgavata-s). [SP]

ASAMPRAJÑĀTA-SAMĀDHI

“Unconscious *samādhi*”. Perfect meditation and concentration in which only the karmic impulses (*samskāra*) remain, reached after having eliminated all mental functions (*citta-vṛtti*). The best way to realise this *samādhi* is to practise absolute detachment (*vairāgya*): a practice (*abhyāsa*) with a support, as were all those that produced conscious ecstasy, is unable to realise the unconscious ecstasy. Therefore the support must be something that stops *citta-vṛtti*-s and does not use real objects. This *samādhi* is completely devoid of an object. Given that after this practice the mind (*citta*) has no support and is as though inexistent, this state “without seeds” (*nirbīja*) is called unconscious “en-stasy”. [AC]

ASAMSAKTI

Condition of “disconnecting” or of “detachment”. It is that of the *yogin* who has reached *asamprajñāta-samādhi* (unconscious *samādhi*), given that it is a condition in which every tie with the phenomenal world is broken. [PC]

ASAMSKṚTA

The contrary of *samskṛta* (confectioned, elaborated) meaning therefore the perfection of the indescribable and indivisible reality that is not “composed” nor conditioned in any way: such is *mokṣa* or *nirvāna*. [SP]

ĀSANA

Term literally meaning “seated posture”, from the root *ās-* (to seat oneself, be seated) or simply “posture”. Etymologically speaking the term appears to refer to seated postures, especially suitable for meditation. The extension of its use to comprise other practices in which the body is held in other positions could be attributed to a later understanding, in which the meaning is that of a bodily posture that contributes to mental and physical stability, generating a sense of well-being.

The *Haṭhayoga-pradīpikā* expressly states that Ā. constitute the first limb of *haṭha-yoga*, while in the *Gheraṇḍa-saṃhitā* they constitute the second of seven “accomplishments” (*sādhana*) after the practices of purification (*ṣaṭkarman*). In the Yoga of Patañjali, divided into eight “limbs” (*aṣṭāṅga*), Ā. occupy third place after abstentions (*yama*) and observances (*niyama*).

There are various ways of translating the term Ā. The most common is “posture”, but this word does not entirely explain the meaning of Ā. In fact, in a common position which is held effortlessly there is no consideration of mental attitude; thought is not allowed during the practice of Ā.: on the contrary a particular kind of consciousness is advised while the Ā. is held (for example, consciousness of breathing) in such a way that there be no interference from mental activity. Sometimes the term Ā. is translated as “pose”. However, this word is not suitable to explain Ā., as a pose is not a natural position of the body. It could be the expression of an emotion or a thought. An Ā. has nothing to “express”, there is no facial “expression” during its execution. Another term referring to Ā. is “exercise” which is also inaccurate: the practice of Ā. is not simply physical exercise. Tiredness due to muscular effort follows physical exercise. The expression “physical exercise” gives the idea of repeated forced and rapid movements of all or a part of the body. Ā., on the contrary, are mostly static: they are usually not repeated, nor is there tension or muscular fatigue. Therefore Ā. can only be defined as postural models.

Characteristics. On the basis of the text of Patañjali (*Yoga-sūtra*, 2, 46-48) it is possible to define the characteristics of Ā., the method of practice and the effects which can be attained by applying these principles. Ā. is above all defined as *sthira-sukha*, “stable and comfortable”: this definition of Ā. characterizes it as a practice that influences the psychic sphere besides the physical one. Ā. in fact requires a precise mental and physical condition during practice, therefore requiring a preparatory stage. During this stage complete muscular relaxation must be reached, as well as deep and regular breathing associated to a normal heart beat similar to that during rest and complete attention of the mind, which is still and concentrated on the body and on breathing. The text of Patañjali contains a precise indication regarding the way to realise the condition of stability and well-being in Ā.: relaxation of any effort and identification with the infinite. Firstly, one can observe that these are two aspects which cannot be evaluated by an on-looker but must be the object of conscious perception of the practising person: he alone can evaluate his experience with these indications. The reduction of effort implies the most relaxed state possible while static, in the sense of a progressive reduction and elimination of every tension or contraction that is not needed to maintain the position. The ability to remain static depends on the balance between elastic forces (extension of muscles and ligaments) and action of the muscles. This balance can be brought about by using the specific techniques of each Ā. to avoid muscular effort. The stability in time of this balance depends greatly on systems that regulate posture through automatic reflexes; this comes about in a subtle and harmonious fashion the greater the relaxation. Progress in the mastery of Ā. therefore implies a gradual reduction of voluntary muscular activity (used to maintain the position) which is replaced by the conscious use of a series of reflexive mechanisms until the Ā. can be held automatically (as happens for the common positions whether seated or standing). It is in this sense that the suggestion from

Patañjali to concentrate the mind on the infinite should be interpreted, that is to reduce the mind's participation in the Ā., orientating it towards an entity devoid of those emotional contents that could influence the level of tension (muscular and neuro-vegetative). If this can be considered the direction in which practice should be developed, the possibility of realising this progressive reduction of voluntary activity derives from refinement and practice, at least in the learning stage, from concentration understood as an attitude of passive listening (remaining attentive and conscious), maintained for the duration of the Ā., to the sensations and the activity of the inner world and from the consequent acquisition of a fuller consciousness of the body (refinement of the body as a whole).

The dynamic phases, when adopting and releasing an Ā. must also adhere as closely as possible to these indications: the motion should be slow, gradual, uniform, without sudden movements, relaxed, gentle and as effortless as possible. This allows the reciprocal action of the muscles and the articulations to unfold with the greatest ease and long enough time for the correction of muscle tone and influence on the blood circulation within the muscles.

During the Ā. specific training is needed at both a physical and mental level. Practice of the Ā. purifies the body, strengthens it, reduces tensions and conflicts. The slow, well controlled movements together with correct breathing, encourage the mind to remain attentive, concentrating on the action without dispersing itself in distractions. The Ā. should be held as effortlessly as possible, keeping the muscles not needed to maintain the Ā. as relaxed as possible, using as few muscular fibres as possible in order to allow the auto-regulation of the muscles to act while static. Execution inspired by a competitive attitude or by development founded on the principle of ability is of no use and can be counterproductive, an obstacle for the realisation of stability and cause of possible traumas of the muscles and ligaments. During the Ā. no form of breathing control is expected. The instruction is to allow the breath to flow sponta-



Yogin in a classic meditation posture (*padma-āsana*, lotus posture).

neously so that the respiratory rhythm regulates itself according to the body's needs, both in the dynamic and static phases. An exercise following these indications can be easier for a beginner, above all when there is a rigidity of the limbs and/or a limited elasticity of the muscles and tendons.

General physiological effects. The principal benefits derived from the practice of the Ā. are: 1) strengthening of the body against stress; 2) training of the psychophysiological functions for higher practices; 3) action on the visceral muscles; 4) action on the locomotive apparatus. Some Ā. strengthen the muscles while others lengthen them. The body becomes stronger, improved muscle tone corrects posture. Full muscle activity is closely tied to better cardiac function and circulation, and therefore to improved nutrition of the tissues, greater oxygenation and use of the capillaries, creating a state of general well-being. In the immobility of the Ā. there is a continual coordinated neuro-muscular activi-

ty. The lengthening of the muscles improves the mobility of the joints, rendering the body more supple. Blood circulation around the joints increases and the waste products are eliminated more efficiently. This helps against the stiffening and aging of muscle and joint tissues. Each Ā. has a specific action on some of the internal organs and balances the central and vegetative nervous system. Nerves are toned and receive more nutrition. The increase of inner pressure and flow of blood to the vital organs and the massage that some Ā. give to these organs tone and maintain the health of the internal organs in the abdomen and pelvis. If the sympathetic nervous system too is balanced and healthy the internal organs gain the greatest of benefits. The cardiovascular system is stimulated to drain the tissues, favouring the blood flow to and from the organs. In this way the body is detoxified and purified. The entire endocrine system is adequately stimulated and rebalanced, thanks to the specific action of some postures on the principal glands. The practice of Yoga promotes the control and purification of the nervous system, rather than aiming at the increase in muscular strength and mass.

While there are no reliable data to evaluate the effects and specific mechanisms of every single Ā. perhaps it is worth considering, on the base of available knowledge, the effects of an average progressive programme of practice of the Ā., which can exert a profound action on superficial and deep bodily sensitivity. Particularly considering the spinal nerves and the possible action of the Ā. on the reflexes, given the association between skin and visceral reflexes, some researchers claim that by repeated stimulation in that area, the practice of *haṭha-yoga* brings about a reduction in their reactivity. The ability to perceive the body and its sensations is refined by the consciousness and attention during practice. This, associated with a conscious and more subtle control over the motor system, allows a greater intensity of perception which in turn allows a greater consciousness of the body as a whole.

Another effect is the reduction of muscle activity, of the heart beat and the respiratory

volume: the slow process of learning leads to a better control of the various muscular masses. Further effects are consciousness, attention, slowness, reduction of effort, reduction of contraction in the antagonistic muscles, capacity to refine movements. Concentration renders the position less tiring and practice renders concentration more efficient.

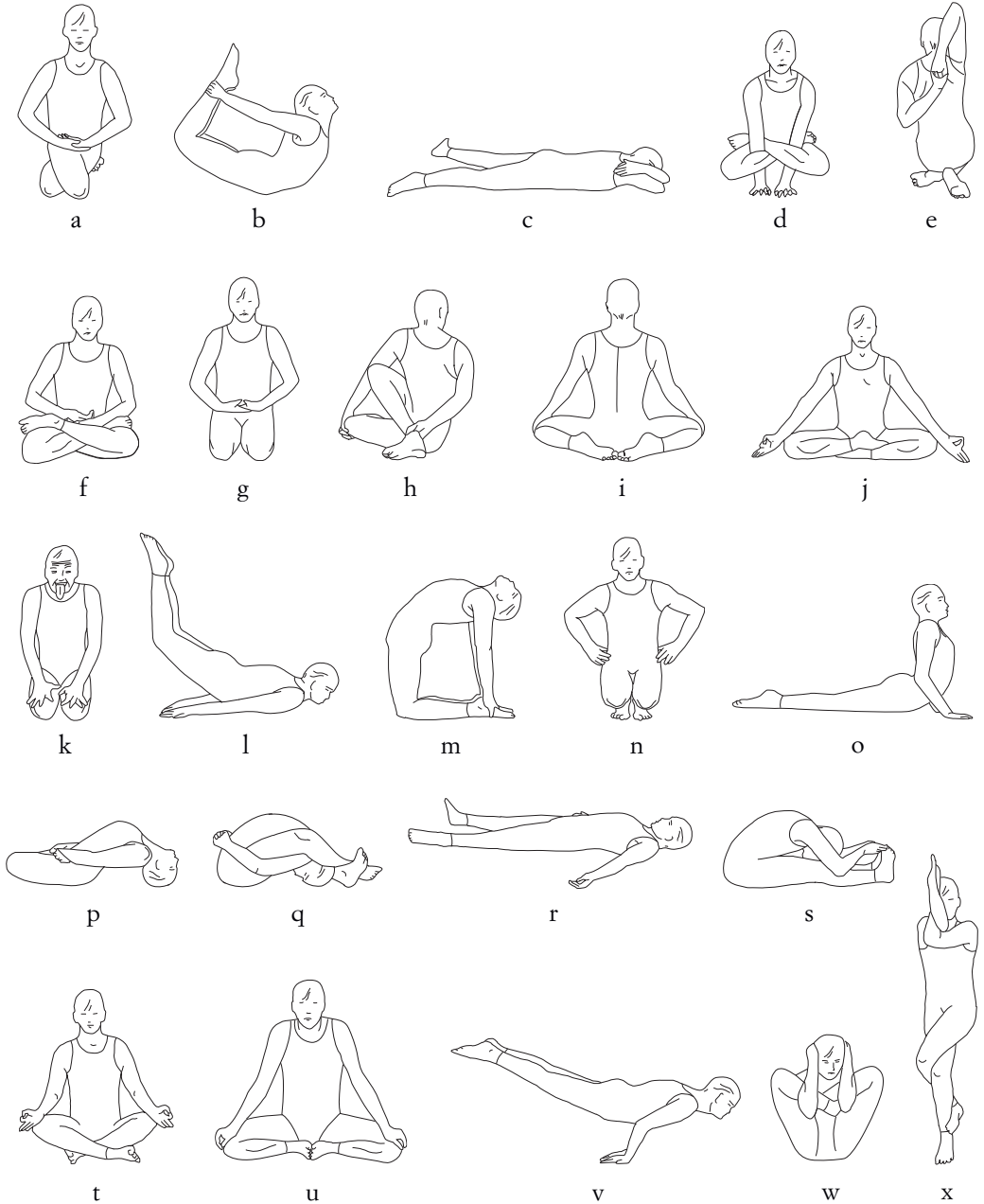
Action on respiration. Given the particular attention paid to respiration during practice, lung capacity is improved. The muscles involved in breathing are used more effectively and strengthened. The correct movement of the diaphragm favours natural and spontaneous breathing not only during practice. The Ā. teach correct breathing which also allows the control of the mind removing negative mental states. Once the diaphragm is free from tension it prevents anxiety and stress localised at the level of the solar plexus.

Action on the mind. The execution and maintenance of a posture requires control, coordination and precision. The mind actively participates in this control without distractions in thoughts or images caused by external factors. The learning path proposed is complete: control of the body (the physical), stability of the mind, progressive inward orientation of the mind's flow, in order to experience non-duality at a spiritual level. Practice of the Ā. not only guarantees psycho-physical well-being but also mental balance. The mind is calmed and relaxes thanks to the constant control it must exert over the body and breathing. Furthermore, the mental characteristics are closely linked with posture: for example, dissatisfaction and depression cause a contraction of the body, whereas excitement causes its extension. Therefore every physical attitude is linked to emotive and psychological factors contributing to the personality: the postural models characterised by the Ā., when practised correctly, can eliminate some emotive and psychological problems, resulting in a balanced personality thanks to greater self-control and improved introspection.

Action on the subtle body. The Ā. and correct breathing favour and improve the ab-

sorption and distribution of the vital energy (*prāṇa*) within the body. The *nāḍī*-s, the channels through which *prāṇa* flows, are drained and purified. For this reason the practice of Yoga does not cause fatigue but on the contrary revitalises the whole body. The *prāṇa* is absorbed in a greater quantity and flows more intensely within the body, which becomes more energetic and healthy. Many postures exert a specific action on the "centres of energy" (*cakra*-s) of the subtle body, partially corresponding to the plexuses of Western physiology. The more important therapeutic effects of the Ā. are often linked to this action upon the *cakra*-s

Classification. Notwithstanding the variety and length of the lists given by the various schools, the classification maintained by the authors puts the Ā. in two distinct principal categories: 1) meditative Ā. (variations of the seated posture) which can be maintained for a long time and are indicated for meditation and *prāṇāyāma*; 2) corrective and educative Ā., postures aimed at promoting and maintaining a psycho-physical balance by a specific and conscious action on the various organs and systems of the body. Some authors propose further subdivisions within this category, by grouping the Ā. based on: a) the diverse mechanisms of action and the type of psycho-physical response activated; b) their specific purposes (stimulation of the spine and spinal nerves, action on the organs etc.); c) the position of the body and muscles involved. As regards muscles and joints, some postures tone and strengthen muscles, with a positive result on the body's posture, while others lengthen the muscles and mobilise the joints, rendering the body agile and supple. By observing the relationship of the body to space the Ā.-s could be subdivided into different categories: 1) lying postures (face up and face down); 2) standing postures (for example many positions for "warming up"); 3) postures on the hands and knees (mostly variations); 4) head down postures; 5) seated postures; 6) postures of balance. Some Ā. are held for only a few seconds and are therefore more dynamic than others which take longer to execute. Therefore the Ā. can be subdivid-



The main āsana-s of *hatha-yoga* according to the *Gheraṇḍa-sambhitā*: a) *vīra* (hero), b) *dhānur* (bow), c) *mākara* (crocodile), d) *kukkūṭa* (cock), e) *gomukha* (cow face), f) *padma* (lotus), g) *vajra* (diamond), h) *matsyendra* (of Matsyendra), i) *maṇḍuka* (frog), j) *siddha* (perfect yogin), k) *simba* (lion), l) *śalabha* (locust), m) *uṣtra* (camel), n) *utkata* (unsteady), o) *bhujāṅga* (serpent), p) *matsya* (fish), q) *kūrma* (tortoise), r) *śava* (corpse), s) *pāścimottāna* (back stretching), t) *svastika* (fortunate), u) *gorakṣa* (of Gorakṣa), v) *mayūra* (peacock), w) *uttānakūrma* (extended tortoise), x) *garuḍa* (of Garuḍa the vulture).

ed in: static and dynamic postures. The former are usually held for a few minutes while the latter for only 10 seconds at the most.

The principal postures can be considered as follows: *adbomukhavr̥kṣa* (upside down tree); *ākarnādhānur* (shooting bow); *ananta* (of Ananta); *āñjaneya* (son of Añjanā); *ardhacandra* (half moon); *baka* (crane); *bhadra* (auspicious); *bhujāṅga* (serpent); *cakra* (wheel); *danda* (stick); *dhānur* (bow); *dvipādaśīrṣa* (two feet to the head); *ekapādaśīrṣa* (one foot to the head); *garbha* (foetus); *garuḍa* (of Garuḍa); *gomukha* (cow face); *gorakṣa* (of Gorakṣa); *gupta* (concealed); *hala* (plough); *jānuśīrṣa* (head to knee); *kanda* (bulb); *kapoṭa* (pigeon); *kṛṣṇa* (of Kṛṣṇa); *kruñca* (heron); *kūkkuṭa* (cock); *kūrma* (tortoise); *makara* (crocodile); *maṇḍūka* (frog); *matsya* (fish); *matsyendra* (of Matsyendra); *mayūra* (peacock); *mukta* (free); *natārāja* (dancing Śiva); *nāv* (boat); *padabasta* (hands to feet); *padāṅguṣṭha* (big toe); *padma* (lotus); *pariḡha* (beam/crossbar); *pārśvakoṇa* (side angle); *pārśvottāna* (sideways stretching); *paścimottāna* (back stretching); *pavanamukta* (purifying); *purvottāna* (upward plank); *śalabha* (locust); *saṅkṛta* (contracted); *sarvāṅga* (all limbs); *śava* (corpse); *setubandha* (bridge); *siddha* (perfect yogin); *siṃha* (lion); *śīrṣa* (headstand); *sūryanamaskāra* (sun salutation); *śvāna* (dog); *svastika* (fortunate); *tāḍa* (mountain); *titibha* (firefly); *tolāṅgula* (weighing scales); *trikoṇa* (triangle); *triśūla* (the trident); *uṣṭra* (camel); *trivikrama* (of Trivikrama); *utkṛta* (unsteady); *vajra* (diamond or thunderbolt); *vakra* (spine twist); *vāmadeva* (of Vāmadeva); *vasiṣṭha* (of Vasiṣṭha); *vātāyana* (horse); *viparītakarāṇī-mudrā* (gesture of turning upside down); *vīra* (hero); *vīrabhadra* (of Virabhadra); *vṛkṣa* (tree); *vṛṣa* (bull); *vṛścika* (scorpion); *vyāghra* (tiger); *yogadanda* (Yoga stick); *yogamudrā* (seal of Yoga). [CP and CR]

ĀSANA-JAYA

Perfect mastery of the postures of *haṭha-yoga* in which the psycho-physical mechanisms are re-programmed. Once mastery is reached the *yogin* can sit in a meditative *āsana* for a great length of time with no unease.

ASĀṄGA

“Non attachment”. Listed as one of the twelve *yama*-s or “abstentions” in the *Uddhava-gītā* (The [divine] Song addressed to Uddhava), an important chapter of the *Bhāgavata-purāna* (Ancient Recitation of the Bhāgavata-s). [SP]

ASCETIC

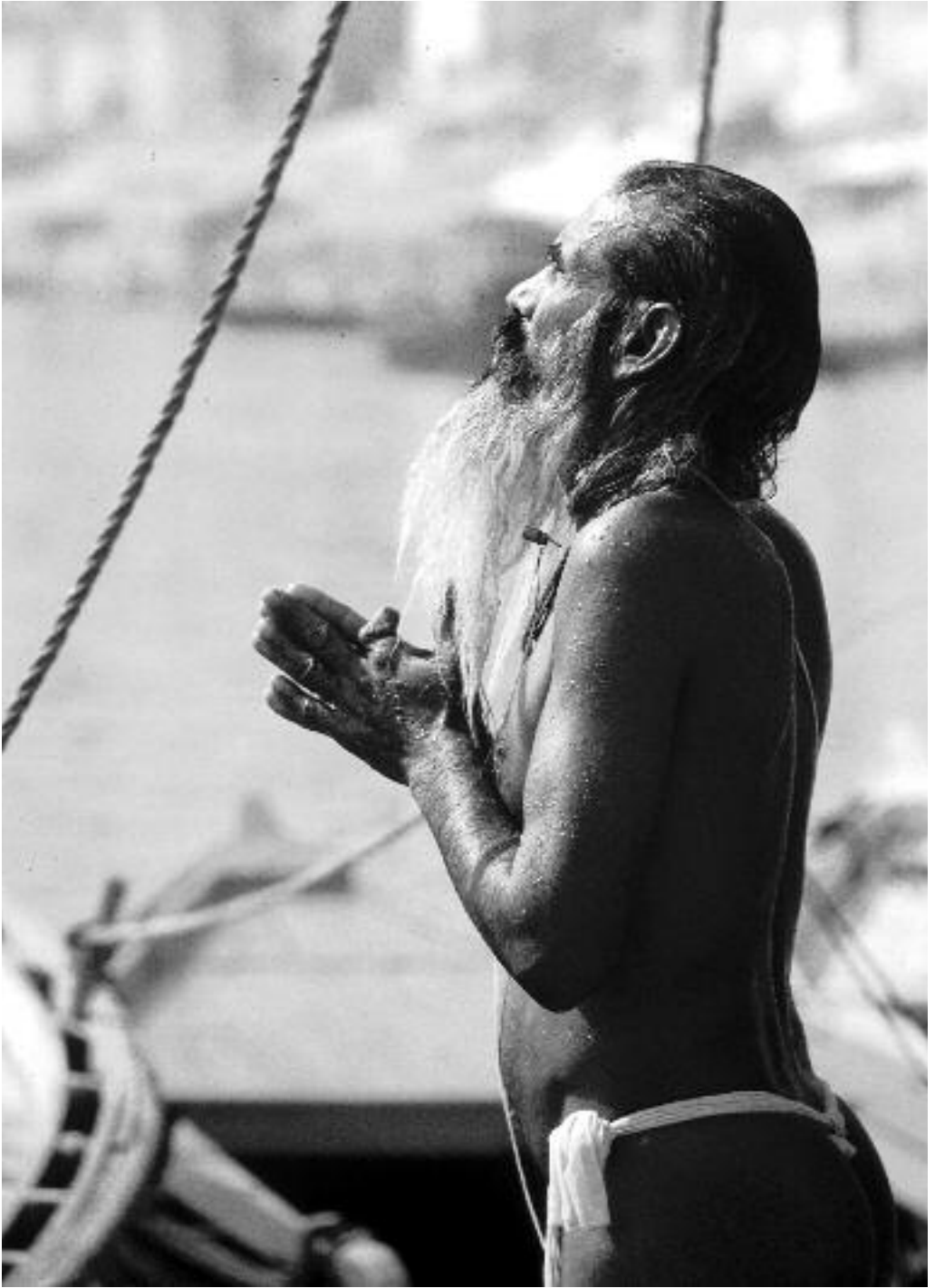
See *bhikkhu*, *muni*, *parivrājaka*, *saṃnyāsin*, *yogin*.

ASCETICISM

An important part of the spiritual path of those who practise Yoga; it is the true base of their ethics, so much so that the term *yogin* has become a synonym of *yati* (ascetic). The ascetic penitence (*tapas* which means “heat”) is considered as a sort of sacrificial inner fire into which the offering of the attachment to the *ego* is made, in order to find the uncontaminated essence of the Self. [SP]

ASMITĀ

“Egotism”. Used in the *Yoga-sūtra* in two ways: to define a type of *samprajñāta-samādhi*; and to indicate one of the five “afflictions” (*kleśa*) of the *buddhi*, which render the real nature of the Self obscure. In the first case, A. characterises a stage of the *samprajñāta-samādhi*, in which *buddhi* is used as the object of contemplation. As a consequence of this self-reflection, the subject no longer has the objective world towards which he exercised his activity and which justified his existence (knowledge and knower are reciprocally implied). This form of *samādhi* is the prelude to the highest realisation of Yoga, *asamprajñāta-samādhi*, in which the empirical *ego*, having become inactive, disappears and *puruṣa* shines in all its purity. In the second case, A. is the sense of *ego* and of “mine” when the subject identifies itself in mundane objects and experiences, which are nothing but the product of various combinations of the three *guṇa*-s (constituents or qualities of nature) and which do not belong to the nature of the real Self, *puruṣa*. [SF]



Yogi in prayer on the bank of the Ganges, in Varāṇasī.

ASPARŚA-YOGA

A method of reintegration realised by a system of “not touching”, that is to keep away from any contact and any ties (in fact, *asparśa* means lack of contact). It is a well-known method documented in the *Upaniṣad*-s. The principle of being untouchable is diffuse among Hindū-s, who retain that the contact with objects and with some individuals can either contaminate or purify man. For this reason they avoid contact with those individuals whose habits or professions are considered cause of contamination and in some circumstances even with their own family members. The *yogin* who follows reintegration by A. avoids any relationship with living beings, above all avoiding pleasures based on this contact, which are considered transient and a source of great suffering. [MR]

ĀŚRAMA

1. The traditional four stages of the life of a Brahmin, which are: 1) *brahmacārin*, as a student who while living chastely learns the

sacred texts under the guide of a teacher; 2) *grhastha*, as the head of a family; 3) *vānaprastha*, as a hermit living in the forest, who, after having fulfilled all his duties towards his family and society, dedicates himself to meditation, to mystical practice and rituals; 4) *saṃnyāsīn*, as he who renounces, untying any bonds including those of rituals and religion, then wandering homeless, with one aim only, that of liberation from rebirths and identification with *Brahman*. [PC]

See also *puruṣārtha*.

2. Given that the stage of renunciation constitutes an ideal for whoever aims at fulfilling the ultimate end of human life (*mokṣa* or “liberation” from *saṃsāra*), the word Ā. is used to indicate the place suitable for conducting a monastic life; a hermitage where the words of a wise master can be listened to or where, in poverty, silence and meditation, one’s personal search for truth can be furthered. Many Ā.-s have become famous, such as that founded by Mahātmā Gāndhī at Sābarmatī and Sevāgrām; Belūrmaṭh, near Calcutta, which is one of the organisational centres of the Mis-



Inside an *āśrama* in Rishikesh.

sion of Ramakrishna; that founded by Aurobindo at Pondichéry; the five principal monasteries (*matha*) in the Advaita-vedānta tradition under Śaṅkarācārya (Dvārakā, Badarīnātha, Purī, Śrīgeri and Kāñcī); that of Ramana Maharshi at Tiruvannamalai; and lastly a Christian one, Śāntivanam, founded near Tiruchirapalli (Tamiḷ Nāḍu) by French priest Jules Monchanin.

The Ā.-s dedicated to the study and practice of Yoga are numerous. They are mostly found in pleasant areas far from city chaos, such as Rishikesh above Haridvār. Others are in the Śivalik hills, where the Ā. of Śivānanda is located, and Loṇāvlā near Pūne, which is a renowned centre of *haṭha-yoga* attracting disciples from all over the world. [SP]

AṢṬĀṄGA-YOGA

The name of classical Yoga or *rāja-yoga* (described by Patañjali in the *Yoga-sūtra* or “Aphorisms of Yoga”), which alludes to its being constituted of “eight limbs” (*aṣṭāṅga*): *yama* (the five “abstentions”); *niyama* (the five “observances”, or rules of moral discipline); *āsana* (postures); *prāṇāyāma* (control over breathing); *pratyābhāra* (withdrawal of the senses from their objects); *dhāraṇā* (concentration); *dhyāna* (meditation); and *samādhi* (perfect recollection). The first five *āṅga*-s are also known as *bahir-āṅga*-s (outer limbs), while the last three, also known as *antar-āṅga*-s (inner limbs), as a whole, are called *saṃyama*. [SP]

AṢṬA-SIDDHI

See *siddhi*.

ASTEYA

“Abstention from theft”. One of the five *yama*-s (abstentions) that constitute the first limb of Yoga in the *Yoga-sūtra* of Patañjali. It consists not only in avoiding the appropriation of goods belonging to others, but also in the suppression of any desire for such appropriation. [SP]

ĀSTIKYA

“Faith”, opposed to negativism towards spiritual reality. A virtue that constitutes one of the twelve *yama*-s or “abstentions” according

to the *Uddhava-gītā* (The [divine] Song addressed to Uddhava), an important chapter of the *Bhāgavata-purāna* (Ancient Recitation of the Bhāgavata-s). [SP]

ASURA

“Divine spirit”, and later “demon”. Used in the more ancient parts of the *Veda* to indicate divine beings. In the mythology that then follows they become synonymous with the Daitya-s, rivals of the Āditya-s, and finally with the demon-enemies of the *sura*-s (gods) and antagonists of the *deva*-s, the “luminous gods”: they are forces of evil against those of good. Sometimes the A. win against the *deva*-s, especially thanks to the extraordinary powers attained by ascetic practice, with a temporary dominion of the universe, until they are destroyed, usually by an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, and universal order (*dharma*) is re-established. [SP]



Birth of an *asura* (tempera, 18th century).

AŚVINĪ-MUDRĀ

“Gesture of the mare”. One of the 25 *mudrā*-s described in the *Gheraṇḍa-saṃhitā*. It consists in repeatedly contracting and dilating the anal sphincter. The text states that this practice cures any illness of the rectum and awakens the sleeping energy of Kuṇḍalinī giving the *yogin* strength and vigour.

ATHARVA-VEDA

“The *Veda* (Sacred Science) of the *atharvan*-s (priests of fire)”. It is the last of the four books (*saṃhitā*) of the *Veda*, not included in

the *trayī-vidyā* or “triple sacred knowledge”. Its most ancient name, *Atharvāṅgiras*, “[collection] of the *atharvan*-s and of the *aiṅgiras*-s”, mentions two categories of priests of fire, dedicated to rituals of white and black magic respectively. The A. comprises 731 hymns in 20 chapters, many of which are magic spells aimed at helping the devotee, protecting him and freeing him from the obstacles he encounters during his existence. Particularly in some hymns of the 14th book, we find the evidence of the anxiety for the search for the ultimate Reality, which will find its full expression in the *Upaniṣad*-s. [GS]

ATITHYA

“Hospitality”. An emergent quality of the ethical behaviour in the Hīndū tradition, which constitutes one of the “five daily sacrifices” that every devout Hīndū should fulfil, the “sacrifice for men” (*nṛ-yajñā*). A. is listed among the twelve *niyama*-s or “observances” of the *Uddbava-gītā* (The [divine] Song addressed to Uddhava), an important chapter of the *Bhāgavata-purāna* (Ancient Recitation of the Bhāgavata-s). [SP]

ĀTMAN

“The Self”, “the spiritual substance”, within every man. According to some the word Ā. derives from the root *an-* “to breathe”, according to others from *at-* “to move oneself”, and it is properly the reflexive pronoun “self”. It then becomes the object of research for the ancient Vedic thinkers who sometimes identify it with the vital breath (*prāna*), and sometimes as a receptacle of impressions transmitted by the senses which flow together towards a conscious centre in every person. The concept of Ā. is the centre of inner research of the sages of the ancient *Upaniṣad*-s, who, like Socrates, taught their disciples self-knowledge above all. Within the thought of the *Upaniṣad*-s the word Ā. indicates the principle of life that not only flows invisibly in all living beings, but also within the whole universe: in this case it takes the name of *Brahman*, the cosmic principle, the universal spirit, the only Reality, the pure subject of knowledge and therefore not knowable if not

apophatically. In the doctrine of the non-dualist Vedānta, expounded by the great philosopher Śāṅkara (7th-8th century) on the base of the speculation of the *Upaniṣad*-s, Ā. and *Brahman* are nothing other than two terms used to define a same principle: the undifferentiated Absolute, whose fundamental attributes are being (*sat*); consciousness (*cit*); and supreme beatitude (*ānanda*). The bond that this transcendent Reality seems to have with the visible manifested world is the fruit of an illusion (*māyā*) which man must learn to go beyond as though it were a veil that hides the true nature of things.

All the schools of Indian thought admit the existence of Ā. except Buddhists and materialists, who maintain that there is no permanent foundation of the empirical self, understood as a transient succession of states of consciousness. [SP]

ATTACHMENT

In every inner practice for the attainment of salvation or liberation, A. is indicated as one of the greatest obstacles, whose removal is indispensable for any real spiritual progress. In the Indian doctrines A., together with ignorance which is its cause, is considered principally responsible for rebirths: as the *Bhagavad-gītā* clearly states, it is not the actions themselves but the A. that accompanies them that causes the karmic ties that enchain beings to the *saṃsāra*. Ignorance and A. are therefore the knot to be undone to attain liberation. The close relationship which binds them can be explained as follows: man in the shadow of ignorance exchanges his true Self, the eternal light of Consciousness (*ātman* or *puruṣa*), with the mind and with the body, and this false identification generates A. for the psycho-physical self, which is as transient and illusory as the reality surrounding it. A. manifests itself as egoism, the thirst for pleasure, the aversion for anything unpleasant or painful, and the obsessive craving for existence: these are the *kleśa*-s (“afflictions”, the five negative factors in mental life according to the Yoga-darśana), which originate from the first of them, ignorance or *avidyā*. [PC]

ATTENTION

The exercise of A. is of fundamental importance in Yoga (and not only in Yoga but also, in different ways, in all the other contemplative disciplines). Yogic concentration consists precisely in consciously directing and focusing A. on a given object, which can be within the body (breathing, the *cakra*-s, sounds and images evoked mentally) or without (parts of the body, images of divinities, sounds and lights). The exercise of A. cannot be strictly circumscribed to the moment of yogic practice alone, or rather the yogic practice of A., but if understood correctly it should be exercised continually, until a permanent mental habit is generated within, which frees the practitioner from every form of mental dissipation and from that passivity towards the objects of experience and of the automatic mechanisms of the mind that constitute the mental habit of the ordinary man. A withdrawn attitude of constant and vigil consciousness characterises the *yogin*, whose A. is always directed to *ātman* (Self) and is withdrawn from the tyranny of the senses. It is described well in the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, by the well-known comparison with the flame that does not flicker where there is no wind. In Hinduism other precise methods have been developed by which the A. slowly becomes similar to a constant and uninterrupted flow, such as the *japa*, the repetition of a *mantra*, and the *nāma-smaraṇa*, the constant memory of the name of God, which has a Christian equivalent in the hesychastic prayer (the constant memory of the presence of God or the “custody of the heart” taught by the Fathers of the Church). However in no other discipline is such a great and explicit importance given to the exercise of A. as in the Buddhist practice of *sati*, a term mostly understood as “consciousness” or “mental presence” indicating an attitude of pure A., intense and detached. In this practice, which singles out breathing, observed without exercising any control or effort over it, as its privileged ground, A. is applied to every experience in its immediacy, devoid of any form of judgement, of interpretation or of logical argu-

ment. The *yogin* therefore learns to live in the present, moment by moment. He experiences differently, no longer through the filter of his own conceptualisations and mental constructs, suggested by latent impressions (*vāsanā*) which surface from the subconscious. [PC]

See also *concentration*.

ATYĀHĀRA

“Excessive consumption of food”. According to the *Hathayoga-pradīpikā*, it is one of the things that render the practice of Yoga void, together with violent efforts, idle chatter, observance of particular religious obligations (such as fasting, cold baths at sunrise, etc.), relationships and fickleness. [SP]

See also *ābhāra*, *laghvābhāra*, *mitābhāra*, *pathya*.

AUM

See *OM*.

AUROBINDO

Aurobindo Ghosh was born in Kolkata in 1872. At only seven years of age he was sent to England by his father to study, returning to India when he was twenty. He decided to oppose British rule, taking part in armed resistance. During the years passed in Great Britain A. developed a secular and pragmatic mental attitude. Consequently, once repatriated, he refused to have any contact with the spiritual experience of India and therefore with Yoga, until his brother Barin became dangerously ill due to a tropical sickness that no doctor was able to cure. He was healed thanks to the intervention of a *yogin*, and A. became convinced that Yoga could have concrete effects in the physical world. He then began to practise Yoga with the aim of finding greater strength to support his political action. In 1907 he met Lele, the *yogin* who taught him how to attain mental silence. In 1910, after being arrested by British officials and imprisoned for a year, A. sought refuge in Pondichéry, a small French colony in the South of India, out of British jurisdiction, where he remained until his death in 1950. He dedicated himself completely to that inner adventure which he recognised as

the true action, the only action really able to change the ways of the world. "The object of our Yoga is the perfection of being, not the annulment of being", he stated. While following the path of the perfection of being, A. wrote a magnificent synthesis of the paths of Yoga. This synthesis, his *pūrṇa-yoga* (Integral Yoga), revealed the possibility of taking man beyond Yoga itself. Yoga is the conversion of individual consciousness into universal consciousness, the conscious union of the being with All, of the human being with the Divine Being. The exceptional feature of integral Yoga, as A. stressed, is the conviction that the Divine Conscience must not only be reached, but brought within matter, making it descend into physical nature. The spiritual realisation of man is an evolution of physical nature. The Divine Being, the Trinity: Existence-Consciousness-Beatitude (*Sat-Cit-Ānanda*), manifests Reality. Reality, all that exists, is Consciousness and Joy.

Matter is therefore a form of consciousness. The change in consciousness towards which Yoga tends must be a change of the material conditions of the world. The world which man experiences is a mental and individual interpretation of reality. In this representation of reality, the Divine Nature is transfigured into a triple human nature *bhūr-bhuvah-svah* (body-vitality-mind, according to A.): vitality being understood as the complexity of human desires beginning from the desire of conservation of one's own life. Man's spiritual realisation, that is of going beyond individual existence to attain the universality of being, must be an integral transformation of man, in the sense that human nature must change as a whole, on both the vital and mental plane, so that transformation means evolution of the species.

A. therefore, saw the possibility of a change in the human species. Man is not the last stage of nature's evolution, but is the stage in which nature is capable of a conscious evolution. For A. Yoga became the instrument for a voluntary acceleration of evolution. In *The Synthesis of Yoga* A. explains the practice of his Yoga, *pūrṇa-yoga*, which unites the three paths of Yoga (*trimārga*): Yoga of knowledge



Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950)

(*jñāna-yoga*), of love (*bhakti-yoga*) and of good deeds (*karma-yoga*), fusing them in a search for the Divine that comes about through the effort of "all the parts and forces of consciousness and of being". Evolution is the ascent of nature towards the Divine Reality. There are other steps above man in this ascent. There is an infinite power vaster than our actual mind: a power that A. defined as "supermental". In order to follow the integral path of Yoga, total submission to the Supreme of every exterior and individual motion is indispensable. "Superman" will be born from the reversal of present consciousness, through which the central being of man, his profound spiritual essence, "the psychic being", will surface, directly guiding life within matter. [SC]

AUSPICIOUS POSTURE

See *bhadra-āsana*, *svāstika-āsana*.

AUTOGENIC TRAINING

A relaxation method based on passive concentration invented by German neuro-psychiatrist Johannes Heinrich Schultz. As he tells us, Schultz began to develop the first concepts of A. between 1908 and 1912. The results of his studies were presented in his

book *Das Autogene Training*, which he published in 1932 and which was soon translated into all the major foreign languages. Although A. has its origin in hypnosis and in self-hypnosis (Schultz based his A. on observation of the method of hypnosis practised by O. Vogt), it resembles in many ways certain forms of Yoga, so much so that some writers have defined it as “Western Yoga”. In particular, lower A. recalls *yoga-nidrā*, while the exercises of higher A. can be compared to certain forms of Yoga meditation. Lower A. consists of two basic exercises and four complementary ones. These exercises are performed in a specific lying or seated position that fosters relaxation of the muscles. First of all, the practitioner quiets their mind through the internal visualisation of the formula “I am (perfectly) calm”. The two basic exercises of “heaviness” and “warmth” follow. The experience of physical heaviness is achieved through mental repetition of the formula, “My right arm is heavy”. When the practitioner physically experiences heaviness in his right arm, the focus moves on to the left arm, repeating the formula, “My left arm is heavy”, then to the right leg and finally to the left one. Because of the phenomenon of “generalisation”, the feeling of heaviness naturally spreads throughout the body. This effect of generalisation is the result of the transfer of information between neurons in the cerebral cortex. The therapeutic value of A. lies precisely in the stimulation of the brain, which also involves its deeper layers, such as the limbic system. The experience of warmth is also created through the mental visualisation of the formula, “My right arm is warm”, allowing the feeling to spread throughout the body. Normally a feeling of heaviness is due to the lack of muscle tone caused by relaxation. In A. this process is reversed: by inducing the feeling of heaviness, A. leads to a deep state of relaxation. The feeling of warmth is aimed at producing vasodilatation, the widening of the blood vessels. In reality, it is not simply a matter of a sense impression, because after the “warmth” exercise, there is an observable rise in body temperature. The two basic exercises are fol-

lowed by the four complementary ones: heart exercise (perception and control of the heart beat), breathing exercise (perception and control of breathing), abdomen exercise (the experience of a pleasant feeling of warmth radiating from the solar plexus), and the cool forehead exercise (the experience of a pleasant cool feeling on the forehead). Higher A. consists of exercises that are called “psychic” in order to distinguish them from the body-centred exercises of lower A. If training is limited to the body-centred exercises, A. becomes “a cover up therapy” aimed at removing the symptom. When the “psychic” exercises are used, A. is then “an uncovering therapy”, and forms part of an analytical approach. [SC]

AVADHŪTA

“He who has thrown off (all worldly bonds)”. Term used in a generic sense to indicate an ascetic, but it is also and above all used in a specific sense, in *Tantra-yoga*, in *sabaja-yoga* and among the *sant*-s, to designate the *yogin* who has “rid himself of” every attachment and has gone beyond duality. Used also to define *rāmānandin* monks (followers of the *sampradāya*, that is of the “tradition”, of *guru*-s who follow Rāmānanda) and the *nātha-yogin*-s. Unlike the term *saṃnyāsīn*, A. can refer to both monks and to heads of families, as it essentially expresses an interior state. According to the *Mahānirvāṇa-tantra*, there are two types of A.: *parivrat*, he who is still imperfect but while fulfilling his duties as head of a family constantly cultivates worldly detachment; and *paramahansa*, he who has reached perfection and has truncated also externally every worldly bond. [PC]

AVADHŪTA-GĪTĀ

“The song of the ascetic”. Title of a *Gītā* composed in imitation of the *Bhagavad-gītā* (The song of the glorious Lord). It is a brief exposition of the principles of the Advaitavedānta in 271 verses distributed in eight chapters. Its composition is traditionally attributed to *avadbhūta* Dattatreya, that is to say the legendary sage, son of Atri and Ana-

sūyā, who was in reality a partial *avatāra* of the god Viṣṇu, or even a manifestation in a single person of the triad constituted by Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva. This figure, whose story is amply narrated in the *Mārkaṇḍeya-purāna*, is considered the teacher of the *anārya* peoples of Southern India, who still adore him today as one of the most complete expressions of divine reality.

The first three chapters of A. are about “knowledge of the Self”, the fourth discusses the topic of “true nature”, the fifth deals with “impartiality and equanimity”, the sixth with “liberation” and the last two again with “knowledge of the Self”, which is the fundamental theme of the work. [SP]

ĀVĀHANI-MUDRĀ

In the Tantric cult, the gesture accompanies an “invitation” (*āvāhana*); it is a ritual act that precedes any form of worship performed by means of idols and is therefore the opposite of “dismissal” (*visarjana*), by which the rite is concluded. It serves to invoke and evoke the divine presence in the idol and consists in joining the hands to form a cavity (as when performing *añjali*), at the same time touching the base of the ring fingers with the thumbs. [SP]

AVASTHĀ

“State”, “condition”. Each of the four stages of the practice of Yoga, according to the *Haṭhayoga-pradīpikā*, referring particularly to *prāṇāyāma*, in the order of: 1) *ārambha* (initial stage); 2) *ghaṭa* (stage of unification); 3) *paricaya* (stage of knowledge); 4) *niṣpatti* (stage of crowning).

AVASTHĀ-CATUṢṬĀYA

The four states of consciousness, or rather of waking (*jāgrat*), of dream (*svapna*), of deep sleep (*susupti*) and “the fourth stage” (*turīya*), which are analysed and interpreted in a symbolic way above all in the *Māṇḍūkya-upa-niṣad*. The Śaiva schools of Kashmir add a “trans-fourth” state, attainable by the *yogin* in the course of his path of purification, which in reality is subject to and underlies, though unperceived, ordinary daily life. [AP]

AVATĀRA

Derived from the root *ava-tr-* (to descend), the term literally means “descent”, particularly “descent of a divinity on earth”. There are the ten classical A. of Viṣṇu: as a fish to save Manu, progenitor of mankind, from the universal flood; as a tortoise to support Mount Mandara, by which the gods made ambrosia; as a boar, to raise the earth which had been sunk to the bottom of the sea by the demon Hiraṇyākṣa; as a man-lion to kill the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu; as a dwarf to break Balis’s dominion over the triple world; as Rāma armed with an axe to exterminate the *keṣatriya*-s oppressors; as Rāma, hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*; as Kṛṣṇa; as Buddha; as Kalkin, an incarnation which will come about at the end of the present era. A.-s of other divinities are also known. God takes on mortal forms manifesting himself in the world in order to re-establish a compromised order or to help his devotees or to impart teachings; then, having accomplished his mission he returns to his paradise.

The concept of the A.-s is a synthesis of two fundamental mythical themes in the Indian tradition: that of God, who descends to restore the *dharmā* upset by demons, and that of the One, who manifests himself as the multiple creation. It summarises a syncretic tendency typical of Indian religiosity. This is how we can interpret the use of the principles of Yoga in the doctrine of the A. an vice-versa. Not only are the great *yogin*-s of ancient times considered A.-s but yogic elements have been subtly introduced into the ten A.-s of Viṣṇu, the base of Viṣṇuism. The eighth A. of Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa, describes the essence of *karma-yoga* in the *Mahābhārata*. The *Bhagavad-gītā*, in fact, is structured as a dialogue between Arjuna, the strongest of the Pāṇḍava-s, and his charioteer Kṛṣṇa. When the time comes to start a fratricidal war, noticing relations and friends among the enemies, Arjuna hesitates, filled with pity, and is tempted to abandon the action. He talks about his doubts to the charioteer, the god Kṛṣṇa, who exhorts him to fulfil his duty without worrying about the immediate result. By following an ideal of good even



Dattātreya with other images of *avatāra*-s. Rock carving in Bādāmī (Karnāṭak).

though foreign to his condition and caste, the hero goes against the principles of the *karma-yoga*, but by fulfilling his duty, even though difficult and disagreeable, he can aspire to the heavens. The accomplishment of a good deed as an end unto itself is the premise to attain, thanks to yogic techniques, supreme calmness of the soul and the recognition of Kṛṣṇa as the universal God. [MR]

AVERSION

See *dveṣa*.

AVIDYĀ

“Ignorance”. According to the *Yoga-sūtra* of Patañjali A. is the principal of the five *kleśa*-s or “afflictions” of the intellect (*buddhi*) and consists in the erroneous conception of the true nature of the Self, by attributing the qualities of permanence and purity to physical and psychic phenomena, qualities which in reality are a prerogative of the soul (*pu-ruṣa*): man’s true Self is therefore erroneously identified with the impermanence of the body and its mental structure. This happens because the intellect, which contains the psychic individuality of man, consisting mainly of *sattva-guṇa*, is extremely translucent and

reflects the light of the soul, acquiring intelligence and consciousness or rather the capacity to unify and refer to itself the complexity of impressions inherited from past existences or derived from the actual experience of the external world. However, because of ignorance (A.), it ascribes to itself the consciousness which it receives uniquely from the soul and which, in turn, attracted by its illusory similarity to the intellect, imagines itself to be the authentic subject of experience, thus becoming involved in the cycle of rebirths, regulated by the laws of *karman*. A. determines both man’s conscious and subconscious activity. It is one of the major obstacles that the *yogin* meets in the course of his mystical practice and it is overcome by completely interrupting mental activity. The soul then reveals itself in its own substantial autonomy.

In primitive Buddhism A. has an analogous connotation, as an original misunderstanding, wherein the individual assumes the impermanent and unsubstantial world to be real; in later speculations, influenced by Vedāntic philosophy, A. becomes a cosmic force that veils reality by creating the illusory forms of the world. [SF]

AVIRATI

“Intemperance”. Numbered by Patañjali among the nine “mental distractions” (*citta-vikṣepa*) that impede the practice of Yoga. A. is caused by an excessive attraction for the objects of the senses, which pushes man towards mundane occupations. [SF]

AVYAKTA

“Indistinct”, “not manifested”: according to the Sāṃkhya-darśana, such is *prakṛti*, the “substance” or “nature” in its condition of perfect balance, before the beginning of the evolutionary process that results in the manifestation of the visible world. [SP]

AWAKENING

In the Sāṃkhya-darśana and Yoga ontology, the reality each man experiences does not belong to him but is somehow external to his real being, or to his Self, hiding a deeper reality, a spiritual reality which is the conscious principle of the individual. In other views, such as that of Vedānta, world is conceived as a sort of mirage or hallucination, a fruit of the mysterious illusory power, magic (*māyā*) of the supreme divine Reality. Of the three known stages of awareness (wakefulness, sleep and deep sleep), the status we call wakefulness rather seems like a dream from which we need to “wake up” to reach the awareness of reality in order to realize the full knowledge of the truth. For these reasons, the Indian tradition (not only Hindū, but also Buddhist and Jaina) gave the name of A. (*bodhi*) to that sudden revelation from which saints and wise men benefit. They see it as the end of all experience of the sphere of becoming and the entrance into an indefinable state of complete freedom, calm and equanimity, achievable already in this life by the “living-liberated” (*jīvan-mukta*) which heralds the endless beatitude of the perfect condition, with no space or time, characterizing the liberation (*mokṣa*, *nirvāna*) from the eternal cycle of rebirths (*saṃsāra*). [SP]

AWARENESS

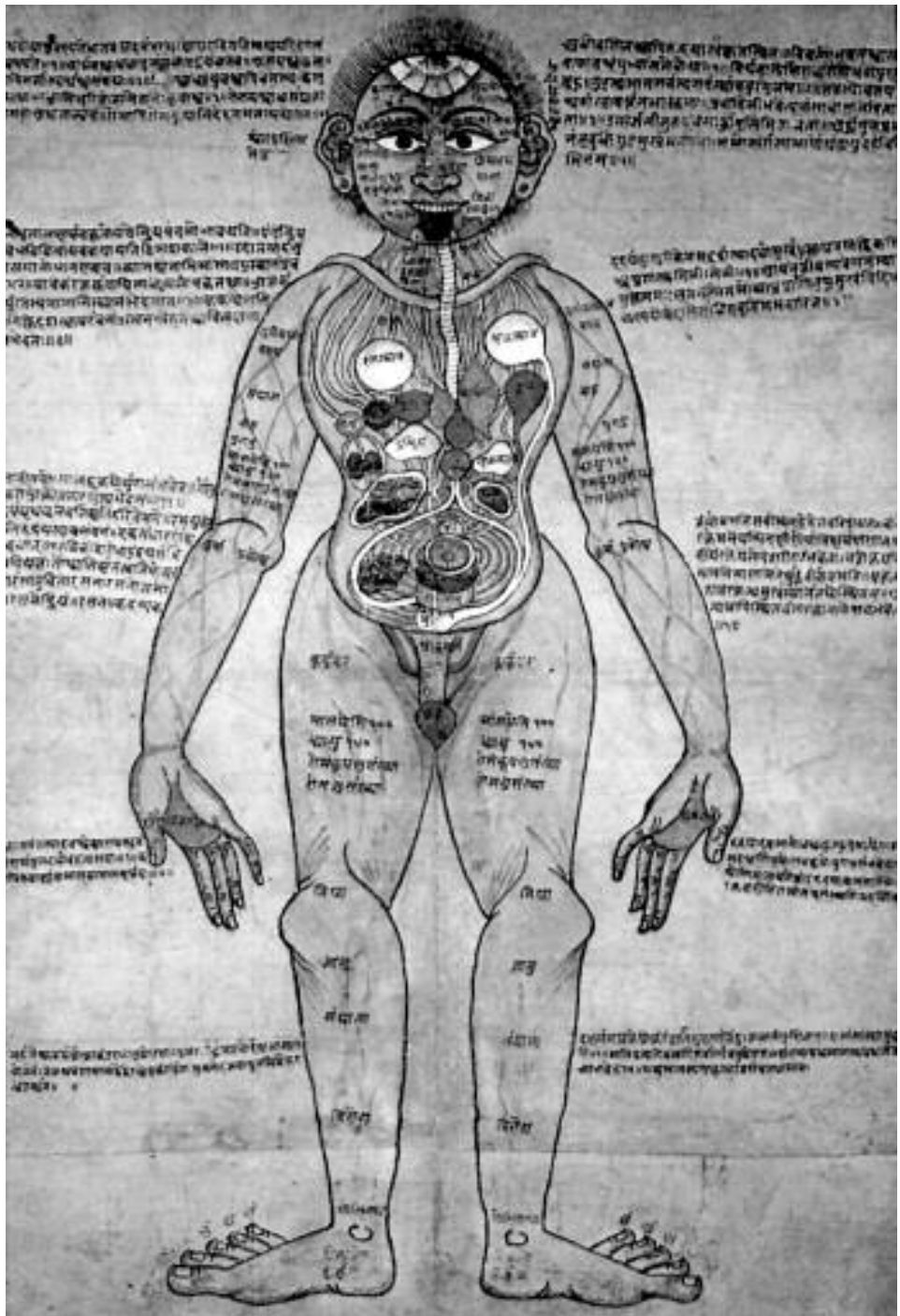
A., which plays the role of impassive witness of the events of mental life without ever being involved in the cognitive process, rep-

resents an extremely important element in the ancient Indian understanding of the world. Even before giving life to a series of conceptual categories, which are given ample attention in the diverse schools including the Yoga-darśana, such as *cit*, *citta*, *ātman* etc., the fundamental intuition of the difference of A. from knowledge (the difference of the role of witness in a cognitive process from the process itself, which comes about blindly until illuminated by the light of awareness) is the turning point for the understanding of a completely different world from the one we are used to. [AP]

See also *caitanya*, *states of consciousness*.

ĀYURVEDA

“Science of life”. The name given to Indian medicine coded and explained in the texts of Caraka (2nd cent. A.D.), Suśruta (4th-6th cent. A.D.) and Vāgbhāṭa (7th cent. A.D.). While Suśruta mainly deals with surgery, Caraka amply illustrates the principles, which are also philosophic, of medicine, often using the doctrines of the Sāṃkhya and of the Vaiśeṣika. Vāgbhāṭa reorders the teachings of predecessors adding much useful information. Even though Ā. should be concerned mainly with causes of disease, symptoms and treatment, it depicts an interesting conception of man and the world. Man is defined by Caraka as mind, *ātman* and body. While *ātman* is the conscious eternal and unchangeable principle and is therefore not subject to illness, the mind and the body can be altered, pathological. The optimal state of the mind consists in the predominance of *sattva-guṇa*, which brings clarity and serenity, with a balance within the body of three pathogenic elements (*doṣa*): wind, bile and phlegm. As *rajas* and *tamas* provoke mental illness, a lack of balance between wind, bile and phlegm produces physical illness. Madness and depression are not considered mental illnesses, but passions like anger, lust, fear etc., which can be controlled by Yoga. The Āyurvedic doctor can heal physical illnesses in particular but also can alleviate those that we call “mental illnesses”, such as madness, which is both a physical and mental disturbance. The three



The human body in a Nepalese painting of the 18th century.

pathogenic elements can be increased by certain substances and foods, and decreased by others. Each individual has a certain constitution or *prakṛti*, in which the *doṣa*-s, separately or in various combinations, worsen until they compromise the physiological functions of the body. Illness can be preceded by premonitory symptoms or can manifest itself suddenly. Another source of ailments can be the alteration of the seven principal bodily elements (*rasa*, blood, flesh, fat, bones, marrow, sperm or female blood) each of which produces the next. The doctor's aim is to bring the body back to its original balance, prescribing for the patient substances which have qualities that are antagonistic to those of the altered element. Āyurvedic texts describe numerous illnesses, among which are various types of fever, haemorrhages, urinary problems, skin problems and leprosy, haemorrhoids, swellings, broken bones, ophthalmic and otorhinolaryngoiatric illnesses. It is a very elaborate treatment using drugs containing animal, vegetable and mineral substances.

The general principle stated by Vāgbhaṭa, according to which similarity breeds similarity and diminishes anything different, is followed by Āyurvedic doctors who therefore prescribe meat to an underweight patient, without bothering about religious taboos. Every *doṣa* has determined qualities and is alleviated by substances with opposite characteristics. Wind for example, which is cold, light, dry and rough, is cured by warm, heavy, oily and soft substances. Furthermore, according to Ā. there are six tastes (sweet, sour, salty, sharp, bitter, astringent), which make some *doṣa*-s worse and cure others. Obviously, there are exceptions to these rules which are noted in detail and linked to the principle that a substance can have "special faculties" (*prabhāva*) that cause particular effects. Special diets are prescribed for various types of patients, especially for the obese for whom heavy foods which are not particular nourishing, physical exercise and non-oily



Āyurvedic physician examining a patient.

enemas are advised. One of the most important treatments is called *pañcakarman* or "quintuple treatment", which describes a procedure which uses vomiting, laxatives, oily and non-oily enemas, and the liberation of the nostrils; often the use of medicines to induce this purification of the body is preceded by massages with oils. Other parts of the Āyurvedic works are dedicated to embryology and gynaecology, to revitalizing tonics (*rasāyana*) and to aphrodisiacs (*vājīkaraṇa*). Suśruta describes the training of a surgeon using fruit and dead animals, advising that autopsies should be carried out on dead bodies which have been left in running water for a week. He dictates the rules to be observed during major surgical operations among which cataract removal and various types of plastic surgery. [AC]