

A Comparative Study of Yogic Practices in Classical Hatha Yoga Texts

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Abstract- Hatha Yoga, often referred to as “Forceful Yoga,” represents a path of yogic practice aimed at transcending egoic consciousness and attaining realization of the Self or Divine Reality. Although Hatha Yoga incorporates profound psycho-spiritual technology, its principal focus lies in enhancing the body's capabilities, enabling it to endure the transformative power of transcendental experience. Mystical states of consciousness exert significant influence on the nervous system and the body; however, the experience of ecstatic union is ultimately realized in the embodied state. This essential understanding inspired the evolution of Hatha Yoga. Founders such as Matsyendranath and his disciples emphasized the necessity to “forge” or “temper” the body, a concept frequently referenced in classical texts.

This paper seeks to outline the techniques and methods described in key Classical Hatha Yoga texts, namely the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *GherandaSamhita*, and *Siva Samhita*. The core components of Hatha Yoga—including Shatkarmas, Asanas, Pranayama, Bandhas, Mudras, Pratyahara, Dhyana, and Samadhi—are elaborated upon in these texts, each following its author's distinctive style, sequence, and methods. The paper provides readers with an overview of various Hatha Yoga practices, their Sanskrit nomenclature, and their organization according to the classical literature. Additional aspects integral to Hatha Yoga, such as *Mitahara* (moderate diet) and obstacles to practice, are also explored, offering a presentation likely to engage contemporary yoga practitioners and students.

Keywords: Hatha Yoga, Shatkarmas, Asanas, Pranayama, Mudras, Pratyahara, Dhyana, Samadhi, Mitahara, Guru

INTRODUCTION

Hatha Yoga is both a method of preparing human beings for spiritual awakening and an important

science of holistic health. Since ancient times, it has been utilized by rishis and yogis for self-realization and the alleviation or elimination of various diseases and physical imbalances. The strength of Hatha Yoga as a healing and transformative system lies in its foundation upon principles of harmony and unification rather than division. Classical yogic literature preserves several authoritative treatises on Hatha Yoga, including the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (HYP) composed by Yogi Svatmarama in the 15th century CE, and the *GorakshaSamhita* by Yogi Gorakshanath from the 10th century CE. Further important sources are the *GherandaSamhita* (GS), authored by Sage Gheranda in the 16th century CE, and the *Siva Samhita* (SS), whose authorship remains anonymous. Another noteworthy text is the *Hatharatnavali*, composed by Srinivasabhattacharya in the 17th century CE.

This paper primarily focuses on the techniques described in the three major classical texts—*Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *GherandaSamhita*, and *Siva Samhita*—offering a comparative overview of their treatment of key yogic practices. It analyzes aspects such as the types of yoga prescribed, the structure and chapters of each text, and various techniques, including Asana, Shatkarma, Pranayama, Mudra, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi, as well as the role of *Mitahara* and the significance of the Guru.

TYPES OF YOGA

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* advocates for “Chaturanga Yoga,” or four-limbed yoga. The *GherandaSamhita*, offering a broader and more detailed exposition, prescribes “Saptanga Yoga,” a seven-limbed system also referred to as *Ghatastha Yoga*, wherein the body is likened to a pot to be carefully prepared.

Conversely, the *Siva Samhita* is organized into five chapters and presents a synthesis of philosophical discourse and Hatha Yoga techniques, providing a more democratic and inclusive approach to yogic practice.

CHAPTER STRUCTURE

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* comprises four chapters, each corresponding to one of its primary limbs: Asana, Pranayama, Mudra, and Nadanusandhana (absorption in inner sound). Shatkarma, although essential, is introduced in the second chapter as preparatory groundwork for Pranayama. The *GherandaSamhita* is divided into seven chapters, each representing one of its seven limbs: purification

(Shatkarma), strengthening (Asana), steadiness (Mudra), patience (Pratyahara), lightness (Pranayama), perception (Dhyana), and ultimate isolation or realization (Samadhi). The *Siva Samhita* consists of five chapters. The first discusses philosophical frameworks and paths to liberation; the second addresses the microcosm, nadis, and the concept of Jivatma; the third explores the PranaVayus, the guru's importance, the ideal environment for practice, Pranayama, stages of Yoga, and descriptions of four principal Asanas; the fourth outlines eleven Mudras and their associated attainments (siddhis); and the fifth discusses obstacles to liberation, categorization of aspirants, types of yoga, six psychic centers, the sacred Triveni, and Raja Yoga.

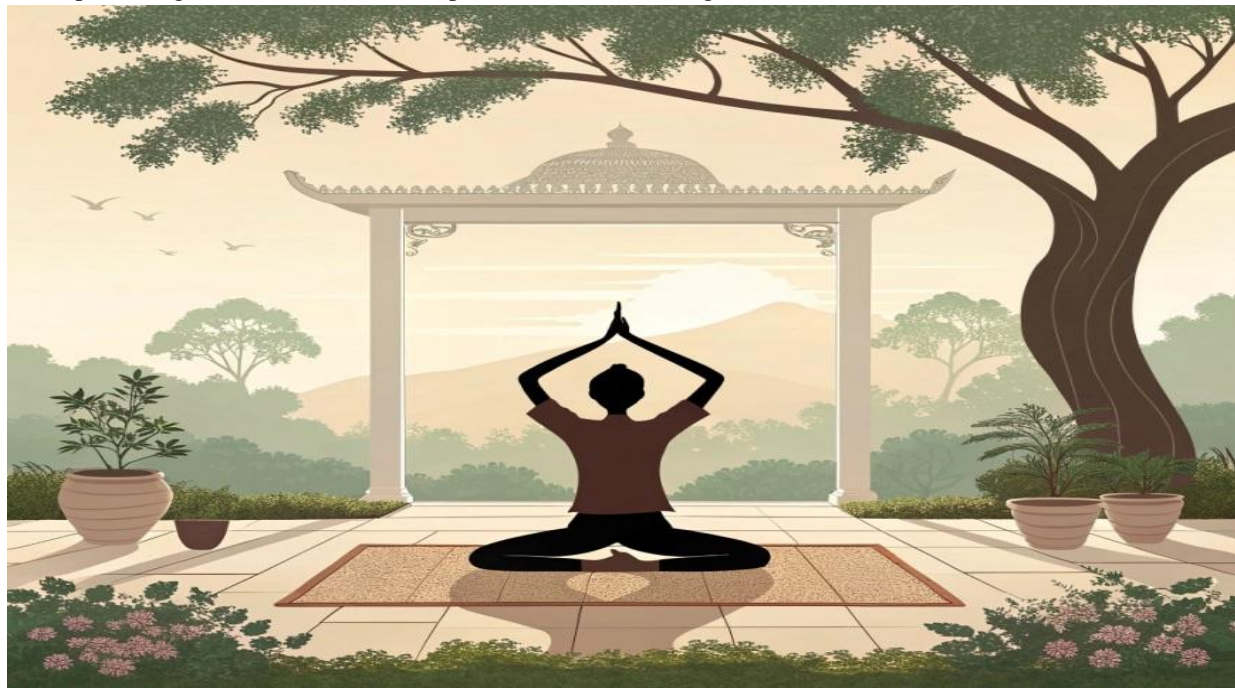


Fig.1.1. Hath Yoga Simple

Shatkarmas

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (HYP) prescribes six purification techniques, as outlined in the following verse:

"*DhautirvasthithathanetistratakamnaulikamtathaKapalabhathischaitanishatkarmaniprachakshate*" (HYP, 2.22)

The six purificatory practices are **Dhauti**, **Vasthi**, **Neti**, **Trataka**, **Nauli**, and **Kapalabhati**. Similarly, the *GherandaSamhita* (GS) also enumerates six purification acts, detailed in the verse:

abhathischaitanishatkarmanisamacharet" (GS, 1.12)

The six acts prescribed in GS are **Dhauti**, **Basthi**, **Neti**, **Lauliki**, **Trataka**, and **Kapalabhati**. In contrast, the *Siva Samhita* (SS) does not explicitly describe any shatkarmas or purification practices, distinguishing it from both HYP and GS.

Evaluation

A comparative analysis reveals subtle differences in terminology between the texts: HYP uses "Vasthi" while GS refers to it as "Basthi"; similarly, HYP

mentions "Nauli" whereas GS uses "Lauliki" for the same abdominal practice. Additionally, the sequencing varies: in HYP, **Trataka** precedes **Nauli**, while in GS, **Lauliki** appears before **Trataka**. In HYP, only **VastraDhauti** is elaborated among the Dhauti techniques. Conversely, GS offers a much broader therapeutic framework by detailing 21 distinct sub-techniques under the six primary purification methods. These are:

Detailed Breakdown of Shatkarmas in GS

1. Dhauti (Internal Cleansing)

- Divided into four types:
 - Antardhauti (internal cleansing) further classified into:
 - *Vatasara* (cleansing the stomach with air)
 - *Varisara* (shankhprakashalana or intestinal cleansing with water)
 - *Agnisara* (activating digestive fire)
 - *BahiskritaDhauti* (rectal cleansing)
 - Dantadhauti (oral and sinus cleansing), including:
 - *Dantamula* (cleansing teeth roots)
 - *Jihvashodhana* (cleansing the tongue)
 - *Karnadhauti* (cleansing the ears)
 - *KapalarandraDhauti* (frontal sinus cleansing)
 - Hriddhauti (heart region cleansing) categorized as:
 - *VamanaDhauti* (cleansing with water)
 - *DandaDhauti* (cleansing with a stick)
 - *VastraDhauti* (cleansing with cloth)
 - Moolashodhana (anal cleansing)

Thus, GS details 13 types of Dhauti practices.

2. Basthi (Yogic Enema)

- JalaBasthi (water enema)
- SushkaBasthi (dry method)

3. Neti (Nasal Cleansing)

- Using a thread for purifying nasal passages.

4. Lauliki (Abdominal Churning)

- Churning the abdominal muscles.

5. Trataka (Concentrated Gazing)

- Steady gazing on a single point or object to improve focus and mental clarity.

6. Kapalabhati (Frontal Cleansing)

- Divided into three techniques:
 - *Vamakrama* (cleansing by air movement)
 - *Vyutkrama* (sinus cleansing)
 - *Shitkrama* (mucus cleansing)

In total, GS describes 21 purification practices.

Comparative Focus

In HYP, the practice of Shatkarmas is introduced in the second chapter, following Asana, and is recommended primarily as a preparatory practice for Pranayama—specifically in cases of excess fat or phlegm accumulation. In contrast, GS emphasizes Shatkarmas as the foundational step of Hatha Yoga (or Ghatashta Yoga), dedicating an entire chapter to these practices and highlighting their importance for physical and energetic purification.

Additionally, HYP uniquely mentions the technique Gajakarani (HYP, 2.38), a practice not included among the traditional Shatkarmas and not discussed in GS.

While SS does not prescribe specific Shatkarmas, it does reference techniques such as Gomukhasana and Dhauti (SS, 5.5), identifying them as preliminary Hatha Yoga practices and suggesting that mastery over these is necessary before advancing toward Raja Yoga.

Asana

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* references 84 classic Asanas, providing detailed instructions for 15 key postures (HYP, 1.16–30). Among these, the text highlights the ShreshthasanaChatustaya (the four most important Asanas):

- Siddhasana (HYP, 1.33), also referred to as Guptasana, Vajrasana, or Muktasana
- Padmasana (HYP, 1.42)
- Simhasana (HYP, 1.47), instrumental for performing the three Bandhas
- Bhadrasana (HYP, 1.48), also known as Gorakshasana

In comparison, the *GherandaSamhita* describes 32 Asanas out of the 84 mentioned in yogic tradition (GS, 2.1–6), offering slightly more variety but less detailed elaboration compared to HYP.



Fig.2 Hatha Yoga

SS describes only four major asanas out of the traditionally cited 84 in its third chapter. These are Siddhasana (SS, 3.85), Padmasana (SS, 3.88), Ugrasana (also known as Paschimottanasana) (SS, 3.92), and Swastikasana (SS, 3.97).

Evaluation

Siddhasana, Padmasana, and Swastikasana are common to all three major texts. Siddhasana, Padmasana, Simhasana, Bhadrasana, Gomukhasana, Kukkutasana, Koormasana, UttanaKoormasana, Swastikasana, Paschimottanasana, Mayurasana, Matsyendrasana, Dhanurasana, and Virasana are shared between HYP and GS, with identical techniques described for each. Interestingly, what is termed *Paschimottanasana* in HYP and GS is referred to as *Ugrasana* in SS. Similarly, *Savasana* in HYP is called *Mritasana* in GS. In terms of practical application, GS presents a greater number of asanas compared to the other two texts.

Three Aspects of Pranayama

HYP outlines three aspects of pranayama: *rechaka* (exhalation), *puraka* (inhalation), and *kumbhaka* (retention) (HYP, 2.69).

Eight Types of Kumbhaka

HYP enumerates eight types of *kumbhaka* (HYP, 2.44): *Suryabhedana*, *Ujjayi*, *Sitkari*, *Sheetali*, *Bhastrika*, *Bhramari*, *Moorcha*, and *Plavini*. It further distinguishes *kumbhaka* into two forms: *sahita* and *kevali*.

Similarly, GS lists the "AshtaKumbhakas" (GS, 5.46), namely: *Sahita*, *Suryabhedana*, *Ujjayi*, *Sheetali*, *Bhastrika*, *Bhramari*, *Moorcha*, and *Kevali*. Additionally, *Sahitakumbhaka* is subdivided into *sagarbha* and *nigarba*.

SS discusses the technique of *kumbhaka* (inhaling through the left nostril, holding the breath, and exhaling through the right) without assigning specific names. It recommends practicing 20 rounds of this technique and introduces the practice of "Sodasa Pranayama" (SS, 3.50), describing four progressive stages: *Arambha*, *Ghata*, *Parichaya*, and *Nishpatti* (SS, 3.29). Notably, SS includes breath control techniques resembling *Ujjayi* and *Sitkari* as found in HYP.

Note: *Nadishodhana* is advised before *shatkarmas* in HYP, whereas *nadishuddhi* precedes *kumbhaka* practice in GS. In GS, *nadishuddhi* can be achieved by

two methods—*samanu* and *nirmanu*. The *Sitkarikumbhaka* is absent in GS, while *Sahita* and *Kevali* are counted among the "AshtaKumbhakas." GS prescribes the optimal ratio for retention as 20:80:40. While SS attributes the four stages to pranayama, HYP associates them with *nadanusandhana*. Intriguingly, SS instructs asana practice *after* pranayama.

Mudra

HYP introduces ten mudras (HYP, 3.6), termed the "Dasa Mudras." It also describes *Sahajoli* (HYP, 3.92–94) and *Amaroli* (HYP, 3.96–97), following the discussion on *Vajroli*, though these are not included among the ten mudras.

GS prescribes 25 mudras (GS, 3.1–3), while SS mentions 11 mudras (SS, 4.5 and 4.14).

Evaluation

Both HYP and SS emphasize that mudras awaken the dormant Kundalini and place their practice *after* pranayama. In contrast, GS discusses mudras *before* pranayama. All mudras found in HYP and SS are included in GS, though slight variations exist, notably in *Vajroli* and *Saktichalana*. The *BandhaTraya*—*Uddiyana*, *Mula*, and *Jalandhara*—are treated as mudras in all three texts, rather than distinct practices.

Pratyahara

GS details pratyahara techniques in its fourth chapter, while SS mentions it in 3.57. HYP does not discuss pratyahara as a separate technique.

Dharana

SS outlines a fivefold *dharana* (SS, 3.63), focusing on the elements and chakras. Similarly, GS discusses five *dharana* techniques as part of its mudra section (*panchadharana*). HYP does not explicitly mention *dharana*.

Dhyana

HYP does not independently discuss *dhyana*, although it is implied through *nadanusandhana*. In contrast, GS devotes an entire chapter ("DhyanaPrakaranam") to *dhyana*, describing three forms: *SthulaDhyana*, *JyotirDhyana*, and *SukshmaDhyana*, the last being the highest, performed with *Shambhavi Mudra*. SS refers to *dhyana* as part of various techniques but not as a distinct practice.

Samadhi

HYP equates *nadanusandhana* with *samadhi* and provides an elaborate description of its four stages: *Arambhavastha*, *Ghatavastha*, *Parichayavastha*, and *Nishpattivastha*. Mudras like *Shambhavi* and *Shanmukhi* (unnamed but described) are detailed in Chapter 4. Various synonyms and deeper explanations of *samadhi* and the relation between prana and mind are also provided.

GS outlines six types of *samadhi* in its seventh chapter:

- *Dhyana Yoga Samadhi* (via Shambhavi Mudra)
- *Nada Yoga Samadhi* (via Bhramari)
- *Rasananda Samadhi* (via Kechari Mudra)
- *Layasiddhi Samadhi* (via Yoni Mudra)
- *Bhakti Yoga Samadhi* (via devotion to a deity)
- *Raja Yoga Samadhi* (via Mano Moorcha Kumbhaka)

SS discusses Raja Yoga/Nirvana in Chapter 5, asserting that Hatha Yoga is incomplete without Raja Yoga.

Evaluation

All three texts acknowledge *samadhi* as the ultimate goal. HYP elaborates extensively on *nadanusandhana*, emphasizing internal sounds. GS systematically explains the stages and means of attaining *samadhi*. SS affirms the importance of *samadhi* and mentions the inner sounds (*nadas*) heard during deep absorption.

Mitahara

The concept of *mitahara* (moderation in diet) is emphasized in all three texts:

- HYP (1.51) lists *pathya* (suitable) and *apathya* (unsuitable) foods.
- GS (4.16) elaborates on appropriate and inappropriate foods for yogis.
- SS (3.34–35) stresses frequent, small meals.

Obstacles

HYP identifies six obstacles: overeating, overexertion, talkativeness, adherence to rigid rules, mingling with commoners, and restlessness (HYP, 1.15).

GS lists dangers for beginners such as excessive travel, association with women, and proximity to fire (GS, 5.26).

SS provides an extensive list of 23 avoidances (SS, 3.33).

Guru

The role of the guru is explicitly emphasized in HYP and SS. Swami Svatmarama begins HYP by saluting Adiguru Shiva and his own guru, Gorakhnath. SS states that the wisdom transmitted directly by the guru holds the greatest power (SS, 3.11). GS, being a dialogue between Guru Gheranda and disciple Chandakapali, inherently highlights the guru's importance.

CONCLUSION

This comparative study explored the key aspects of Hatha Yoga across three classical texts, offering a consolidated view for readers. Besides techniques, the role of the guru and dietary recommendations were also presented, emphasizing their vital role in yogic practice.

Among the three, HYP remains the earliest and most renowned. Both HYP and GS focus largely on technique, while SS integrates philosophical insights, including topics like the *Brahmanda*, yogic anatomy, chakras, *pratikopasana*, and *mantra japa*, unique to this text. GS stands out for its clarity, offering 102 distinct practices and systematically structuring its chapters according to the limbs of yoga.

Despite slight variations in order and naming, the essential techniques across the texts remain consistent. The shared ultimate aim is *samadhi*—whether through *nadanusandhana* (HYP), *samadhi* (GS), or *raja yoga/nirvana* (SS).

This paper thus serves yoga students and enthusiasts aiming for a deeper understanding of these foundational texts. The comparative approach brings out both the unity and subtle differences across them, aiding comprehension and practice.

Finally, a heartfelt reminder: let us not reduce these profound techniques to mere physical feats. The classical texts constantly affirm,

“*Kevalam Rajayogayah Hatha vidyopadishyate*”—
Hatha

Yoga is taught solely for the attainment of Raja Yoga. In today's world, where yoga is often mistaken for elaborate postures, revisiting and reverently practicing these teachings can help preserve the true essence of yoga—a timeless gift from India to the world.

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