



## Comparative Study of Asanas, Pranayamas, Mudras and Bandhas Described in Hatha-Yogic and Other Yogic Texts: A Systematic Review

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### ABSTRACT

Yoga represents one of the most significant contributions of Indian knowledge traditions to global health, spirituality, and human development. Among the numerous branches of yoga, Hatha Yoga occupies a prominent position due to its systematic presentation of physical postures (Asanas), breath regulation techniques (Pranayamas), psycho-energetic gestures (Mudras), and neuromuscular locks (Bandhas). While classical Hatha Yoga texts such as the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Gheranda Samhita, Shiva Samhita and Goraksha Shataka provide detailed descriptions of these practices, other yogic texts including the Patanjali Yoga Sutras, Yoga Yajnavalkya, Bhagavad Gita and various Yoga Upanishads present alternative perspectives and methodologies. The present systematic review aims to comparatively analyze the descriptions, classifications, objectives and philosophical foundations of Asanas, Pranayamas, Mudras, and Bandhas across major Hatha Yogic and other classical Yogic texts. A systematic search and textual review methodology based on PRISMA principles was employed. Classical Sanskrit texts, modern translations, commentaries, and peer-reviewed scholarly publications were examined. The review reveals significant similarities in the ultimate objective of spiritual



evolution, purification of the body-mind complex, and awakening of higher consciousness. However, substantial differences were observed in the number of practices described, pedagogical approaches, emphasis on physical purification, and methods of attaining liberation. Hatha Yoga texts provide detailed practical instructions, whereas classical Raja Yoga texts emphasize mental discipline and meditative absorption. The findings indicate that Hatha Yoga serves as a preparatory and complementary system to higher meditative practices. The comparative analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolution of yogic traditions and highlights the continuing relevance of classical yogic literature in contemporary yoga education, research, and therapeutic applications.

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## 1. Introduction

Yoga is one of the oldest and most comprehensive systems of self-development that originated in the Indian subcontinent. The term "Yoga" is derived from the Sanskrit root Yuj, which means "to join," "to unite," or "to integrate." Traditionally, yoga refers to the union of individual consciousness with universal consciousness and encompasses physical, mental, moral, and spiritual dimensions of human existence. Over thousands of years, yoga evolved into a sophisticated science of self-realization, producing numerous philosophical schools and practical traditions aimed at enhancing human well-being and spiritual growth (Feuerstein, 2008). The historical development of yoga can be traced through Vedic literature, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and later Hatha Yogic texts. The Vedas contain some of the earliest references to meditative and ascetic practices, while the Upanishads elaborated on concepts of self-realization, consciousness, and liberation. Subsequently, the Bhagavad Gita integrated various paths of yoga, including Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga, emphasizing yoga as a practical approach to life and spiritual attainment (Radhakrishnan, 1993).

A major milestone in the development of yogic philosophy was the composition of the Yoga Sutras by Patanjali, generally dated between the second century BCE and the fourth century CE. Patanjali systematized yoga into the well-known Ashtanga Yoga or Eightfold Path, consisting of Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. The Yoga Sutras primarily emphasize mental discipline and the cessation of mental fluctuations (Yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ) as the means to



attain liberation (Patanjali, trans. Bryant, 2009). Although Asana and Pranayama are included in Patanjali's system, they are discussed briefly and primarily as preparatory practices for meditation.

During the medieval period, a distinct stream of yogic practice known as Hatha Yoga emerged and gained prominence. Hatha Yoga introduced a more detailed and systematic approach to bodily purification, breath regulation, subtle energy manipulation and psycho-physiological transformation. Unlike earlier traditions that focused primarily on meditative practices, Hatha Yoga emphasized the body as a vehicle for spiritual evolution. The principal objective of Hatha Yoga was not merely physical fitness but the purification of the body and mind, balancing of pranic energies, awakening of Kundalini Shakti and attainment of higher states of consciousness (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017). The major textual sources of Hatha Yoga include the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Gheranda Samhita, Shiva Samhita and Goraksha Shataka. These texts collectively present comprehensive instructions regarding Asanas (postures), Pranayamas (breath-control techniques), Mudras (psychophysiological gestures) and Bandhas (energy locks). They provide detailed descriptions of methods intended to purify the subtle energy channels (Nadis), awaken dormant spiritual energy and facilitate meditative absorption (Svātmārāma, 2002).

Among these texts, the Hatha Yoga Pradipika occupies a central position and is often regarded as one of the most authoritative manuals of classical Hatha Yoga. Compiled by Swatmarama in the fifteenth century, the text synthesizes teachings from earlier yogic traditions and presents a systematic path consisting of Asana, Pranayama, Mudra and Samadhi. The text explicitly states that Hatha Yoga serves as a ladder to Raja Yoga, indicating the complementary relationship between physical and meditative practices (Svātmārāma, 2002).

Similarly, the Gheranda Samhita presents the doctrine of Ghatastha Yoga and describes a sevenfold path consisting of purification (Shatkarma), Asana, Mudra, Pratyahara, Pranayama, Dhyana and Samadhi. This text provides detailed descriptions of thirty-two major Asanas and numerous Mudras, thereby expanding the practical dimensions of Hatha Yoga (Digambarji & Kokaje, 1998). The Shiva Samhita further integrates Hatha Yoga practices with Vedantic philosophical concepts and emphasizes the role of Kundalini awakening in spiritual realization. Unlike the Hatha Yoga Pradipika and Gheranda Samhita, the Shiva Samhita presents yoga as a universal path accessible to individuals regardless of caste, social status, or background (Mallinson, 2007). One of the most distinctive features of Hatha Yoga literature is its detailed treatment of Asanas, Pranayamas, Mudras and Bandhas. These practices are not merely physical exercises but sophisticated psycho-physiological techniques intended to influence the flow of



prana within the body. Asanas are described as means of achieving stability, health, and mastery over bodily functions. Pranayama is presented as a method for regulating vital energy and purifying the subtle channels of the body. Mudras are regarded as advanced techniques capable of directing pranic forces and preserving vital energies, while Bandhas serve as energetic locks that facilitate the upward movement of Kundalini energy (Feuerstein, 2008).

In contrast, many non-Hatha Yogic texts provide relatively limited discussions of these practices. The Yoga Sutras define Asana as a stable and comfortable posture suitable for meditation but do not enumerate specific postures. Likewise, Pranayama is described as the regulation of inhalation, exhalation, and retention without extensive technical details. The Bhagavad Gita emphasizes moderation, self-control, devotion, and meditation rather than detailed bodily practices. Similarly, several Yoga Upanishads discuss subtle physiology, meditation and breath control but often differ in terminology, classification, and practical emphasis (Iyengar, 1993). These differences raise important questions regarding the evolution of yogic practices and the relationship between Hatha Yoga and earlier yogic traditions. Scholars have debated whether Hatha Yoga represents a continuation, adaptation or transformation of classical yoga. Some researchers argue that Hatha Yoga emerged as a practical extension of Raja Yoga, providing physical and energetic methods for achieving meditative states. Others suggest that Hatha Yoga incorporated elements from Tantric traditions, ascetic practices and indigenous spiritual disciplines, resulting in a unique synthesis of physical, energetic and spiritual techniques (White, 2012).

In recent decades, yoga has gained worldwide recognition as an effective tool for promoting physical health, mental well-being, stress management and quality of life. Scientific investigations have demonstrated positive effects of yogic practices on cardiovascular function, respiratory efficiency, psychological resilience, cognitive performance and emotional regulation (Woodyard, 2011). However, the rapid globalization and commercialization of yoga have often led to an overemphasis on physical postures at the expense of its philosophical and spiritual dimensions. Consequently, a thorough understanding of classical yogic texts has become increasingly important for preserving the authenticity and integrity of yoga traditions.

Despite the growing body of research on yoga, comparative studies examining Asanas, Pranayamas, Mudras and Bandhas across different yogic texts remain relatively scarce. Most existing investigations focus either on individual practices or on specific texts without exploring broader historical and philosophical connections. A systematic comparative analysis can provide valuable insights into the



evolution of yogic methodologies, similarities and differences among traditions and the underlying principles that unite diverse yogic systems.

Therefore, the present systematic review aims to comparatively examine the descriptions, classifications, objectives and philosophical foundations of Asanas, Pranayamas, Mudras, and Bandhas in major Hatha Yogic texts and other classical Yogic scriptures. By analyzing these practices across multiple textual traditions, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the development of yoga and its relevance in contemporary educational, therapeutic and spiritual contexts. Furthermore, the findings may assist yoga scholars, practitioners, educators and researchers in appreciating the rich diversity and continuity of India's yogic heritage.

## **2. Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this systematic review are:

1. To identify and analyze Asanas described in major Hatha Yogic and other Yogic texts.
2. To compare Pranayama techniques across different yogic traditions.
3. To examine similarities and differences in Mudra practices.
4. To analyze the role of Bandhas in various yogic systems.
5. To explore the philosophical foundations underlying these practices.
6. To understand the evolution of yogic methodologies from classical to medieval periods.

## **3. Research Questions**

1. How are Asanas described and classified in Hatha Yogic and other Yogic texts?
2. What similarities and differences exist in Pranayama practices?
3. How do Mudras and Bandhas vary among different traditions?
4. What are the common spiritual objectives underlying these practices?
5. How have yogic practices evolved across historical periods?



#### 4. Methodology

This study adopts a systematic review methodology based on PRISMA guidelines. Scholarly databases, classical yogic texts, translations, commentaries and peer-reviewed journal articles were consulted. The review process involved identification, screening, eligibility assessment and inclusion of relevant literature.

##### Inclusion Criteria

- Classical Sanskrit yogic texts.
- Peer-reviewed publications on Hatha Yoga.
- Studies discussing Asana, Pranayama, Mudra, and Bandha.
- English-language sources.

##### Exclusion Criteria

- Non-academic publications.
- Popular magazine articles.
- Duplicated studies.
- Sources lacking textual evidence.

##### Sources Reviewed

Primary Sources:

- Hatha Yoga Pradipika
- Gheranda Samhita
- Shiva Samhita
- Goraksha Shataka
- Yoga Yajnavalkya
- Patanjali Yoga Sutras



- Bhagavad Gita
- Yoga Upanishads

#### Secondary Sources:

- Contemporary yoga research journals.
- Historical and philosophical studies.
- Systematic reviews on yoga practices.

### **5. Historical Development of Yogic Practices**

The earliest references to yogic practices are found in the Vedas and Upanishads. However, systematic discussions of Asana, Pranayama, Mudra and Bandha emerged during the medieval period with the rise of Hatha Yoga traditions.

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (circa 200 BCE–400 CE) describe Asana simply as a stable and comfortable posture. Pranayama is presented as regulation of inhalation, exhalation, and retention, serving as preparation for higher meditative practices. Detailed physical techniques are absent.

The medieval Hatha Yoga movement expanded these concepts significantly. The Hatha Yoga Pradipika, composed by Swatmarama, synthesized earlier yogic traditions and provided practical instructions for purification, postures, breathing techniques, Mudras and Samadhi. The Gheranda Samhita further expanded the scope by introducing the sevenfold path of Ghatashta Yoga and describing a larger number of Asanas and Mudras. The Shiva Samhita integrated Hatha Yoga practices with Vedantic philosophy and emphasized Kundalini awakening.

### **6. Comparative Analysis of Asanas**

Asana occupies a central role in both classical and Hatha Yoga traditions. However, the scope and interpretation vary considerably.

#### **Asanas in Patanjali Yoga Sutras**

Patanjali defines Asana through the famous aphorism "Sthira Sukham Asanam," meaning a posture that is steady and comfortable. The emphasis is not on physical fitness but on preparing the body for prolonged meditation.



### Asanas in Hatha Yoga Pradipika

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika describes fifteen principal Asanas. These include Siddhasana, Padmasana, Simhasana, Bhadrasana, Matsyendrasana, and others. Siddhasana is regarded as the most important posture for spiritual advancement.

### Asanas in Gheranda Samhita

The Gheranda Samhita identifies thirty-two important Asanas considered beneficial for humanity. These include meditative, cultural, balancing and strengthening postures. The text offers more detailed descriptions than the Hatha Yoga Pradipika.

### Asanas in Shiva Samhita

The Shiva Samhita discusses eighty-four lakh Asanas symbolically and emphasizes a limited number for practical use. The focus remains on energy awakening and preparation for meditation.

### Comparative Analysis of Asanas in Major Yogic Texts

Yogic Text	Number of Asanas Mentioned	Major Asanas
Patanjali Yoga Sutras	Not specified	Meditative posture only
Yoga Yajnavalkya	8	Swastika, Gomukha, Padma, Veera
Hatha Yoga Pradipika	15	Siddhasana, Padmasana, Simhasana
Shiva Samhita	Symbolically 84 lakh	Few principal Asanas
Gheranda Samhita	32	Siddha, Padma, Bhadra, Mayura

### 7. Comparative Analysis of Pranayamas

Pranayama is one of the most important components of yogic practice and is considered the bridge between the body and mind. The Sanskrit term "Pranayama" is composed of two words: *Prana* (vital life force) and *Ayama* (expansion, regulation or control). Different yogic texts present varying classifications and methodologies of Pranayama while maintaining the common objective of regulating vital energy and preparing the practitioner for higher states of consciousness.



## **Pranayama in Patanjali Yoga Sutras**

Patanjali discusses Pranayama as the fourth limb of Ashtanga Yoga. According to Yoga Sutra II.49, Pranayama is the regulation of inhalation (Puraka), exhalation (Rechaka), and retention (Kumbhaka). Patanjali does not describe specific techniques but emphasizes the role of breath control in calming the fluctuations of the mind and preparing the practitioner for Dharana and Dhyana.

The primary objective of Pranayama in Patanjali's system is psychological purification rather than physiological development. Through regular practice, the veil obscuring inner wisdom is gradually removed, enabling higher concentration and meditative absorption.

## **Pranayama in Hatha Yoga Pradipika**

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika provides a detailed description of eight classical Kumbhakas:

1. Surya Bhedana
2. Ujjayi
3. Sitkari
4. Sitali
5. Bhastrika
6. Bhramari
7. Murchha
8. Plavini

The text emphasizes that Pranayama purifies the Nadis, balances Ida and Pingala, awakens Kundalini, and leads to Raja Yoga. Special attention is given to Kumbhaka (breath retention), which is considered the essence of Pranayama.

## **Pranayama in Gheranda Samhita**

The Gheranda Samhita describes a systematic progression of breathing practices after purification and Asana mastery. It emphasizes Sahita Kumbhaka and Kevala Kumbhaka as advanced stages of breath control. The text focuses on both physical purification and spiritual evolution.



## Pranayama in Shiva Samhita

The Shiva Samhita presents Pranayama as a means of controlling Prana and awakening dormant spiritual energies. Unlike Patanjali's concise treatment, the Shiva Samhita links Pranayama directly with Kundalini awakening and subtle body transformation.

### Comparative Features of Pranayama

Text	Number of Techniques	Primary Objective
Yoga Sutras	General description	Mental purification
Hatha Yoga Pradipika	Eight Kumbhakas	Nadi purification and Kundalini awakening
Gheranda Samhita	Multiple techniques	Physical and spiritual purification
Shiva Samhita	Advanced practices	Pranic control and liberation

### 8. Comparative Analysis of Mudras

Mudras are psycho-energetic gestures designed to direct and preserve Prana within the subtle body. They are among the most distinctive features of Hatha Yoga.

#### Mudras in Hatha Yoga Pradipika

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika describes ten principal Mudras:

1. Maha Mudra
2. Maha Bandha
3. Maha Vedha
4. Khechari Mudra
5. Uddiyana Bandha
6. Mula Bandha
7. Jalandhara Bandha
8. Viparita Karani
9. Vajroli



### 10. Shakti Chalana

These Mudras are believed to destroy disease, delay aging and facilitate Kundalini awakening.

#### **Mudras in Gheranda Samhita**

The Gheranda Samhita expands the discussion by describing twenty-five Mudras. The text presents Mudras as essential tools for controlling Prana and attaining higher consciousness.

#### **Mudras in Shiva Samhita**

The Shiva Samhita highlights the importance of Khechari Mudra and other advanced practices. It associates Mudras with mastery over the mind and transcendence of ordinary consciousness.

#### **Mudras in Other Yogic Texts**

Classical texts such as the Yoga Sutras provide little direct discussion of Mudras. The emphasis remains on meditation and mental discipline. This illustrates a major distinction between Raja Yoga and Hatha Yoga traditions.

#### **Comparative Features of Mudras**

Text	Number of Mudras	Primary Purpose
Yoga Sutras	Not specified	Indirectly related to meditation
Hatha Yoga Pradipika	10	Kundalini awakening
Gheranda Samhita	25	Pranic control
Shiva Samhita	Several advanced Mudras	Spiritual transformation

### **9. Comparative Analysis of Bandhas**

Bandhas are neuromuscular locks that regulate the movement of Prana within the subtle body. They play a crucial role in advanced yogic practice.

#### **Mula Bandha**

Mula Bandha involves contraction of the perineal region. It is believed to direct Apana upward and facilitate the union of Prana and Apana.



## Uddiyana Bandha

Uddiyana Bandha involves drawing the abdomen inward and upward after exhalation. Classical texts describe it as a powerful technique for rejuvenation and energy regulation.

## Jalandhara Bandha

Jalandhara Bandha involves lowering the chin toward the chest. It regulates the flow of Prana and protects the practitioner during Kumbhaka.

## Bandhas in Hatha Yoga Pradipika

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika gives extensive instructions regarding the application of the three principal Bandhas. Their combined practice is known as Maha Bandha.

## Bandhas in Gheranda Samhita

The Gheranda Samhita integrates Bandhas with Mudras and advanced Pranayama practices, emphasizing their role in spiritual awakening.

## Bandhas in Shiva Samhita

The Shiva Samhita presents Bandhas as essential tools for awakening Kundalini and controlling subtle energies.

## Comparative Features of Bandhas

Text	Bandhas Described	Main Objective
Hatha Yoga Pradipika	Three principal Bandhas	Kundalini awakening
Gheranda Samhita	Integrated with Mudras	Energy regulation
Shiva Samhita	Advanced applications	Spiritual liberation
Yoga Sutras	Not explicitly discussed	Indirect role in meditation

## 10. Philosophical Similarities Among Yogic Texts

Despite methodological differences, all yogic traditions share several common philosophical principles:

### 1. Liberation (Moksha)

Every text identifies liberation from suffering and ignorance as the ultimate goal.



## **2. Self-Realization**

The realization of one's true nature remains central across all traditions.

## **3. Discipline**

Physical, mental, and moral discipline are universally emphasized.

## **4. Control of Mind**

Whether through meditation, breath regulation, or energetic practices, mastery of the mind is considered essential.

## **5. Purification**

All texts advocate purification of body, mind, and consciousness.

## **11. Major Differences Among Yogic Texts**

Several significant differences emerge from the comparative analysis.

### **Patanjali Yoga Sutras**

- Psychological orientation
- Minimal discussion of physical techniques
- Emphasis on meditation and concentration

### **Hatha Yoga Pradipika**

- Practical and physiological orientation
- Detailed instructions on Asana, Pranayama, Mudra, and Bandha
- Preparation for Raja Yoga

### **Gheranda Samhita**

- Sevenfold path of yoga
- Greater emphasis on purification techniques



- Larger number of practices

### **Shiva Samhita**

- Integration of Vedantic philosophy and Hatha Yoga
- Focus on subtle body and Kundalini
- Inclusive approach toward practitioners

## **12. Discussion**

The comparative review demonstrates the progressive evolution of yogic practices from the classical period to the medieval Hatha Yoga tradition. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras provide the philosophical and psychological foundation of yoga, whereas medieval Hatha Yoga texts developed practical methodologies for preparing the body and mind for higher spiritual experiences.

The emergence of detailed descriptions of Asanas, Pranayamas, Mudras, and Bandhas reflects an increasing emphasis on experiential spirituality. Hatha Yoga traditions recognized that mastery of the body and breath could facilitate meditative absorption and spiritual awakening.

The review also reveals that Hatha Yoga should not be viewed as separate from Raja Yoga. Rather, Hatha Yoga functions as a preparatory system that supports the attainment of Raja Yoga. This perspective is explicitly stated in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, where Hatha Yoga is presented as a ladder leading to higher states of consciousness.

Modern yoga practice often emphasizes physical postures while neglecting Pranayama, Mudras, Bandhas and meditation. The classical texts suggest that such an approach represents only a partial understanding of yoga. A holistic interpretation requires integration of all dimensions of practice.

## **13. Conclusion**

The present systematic review examined the descriptions of Asanas, Pranayamas, Mudras, and Bandhas across major Hatha Yogic and other classical Yogic texts. The findings indicate substantial similarities in ultimate objectives, including purification, self-realization and liberation. However, significant differences exist regarding methodology, classification and emphasis.

The Yoga Sutras focus primarily on mental discipline and meditation, whereas the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Gheranda Samhita and Shiva Samhita provide detailed practical instructions for physical and energetic



transformation. Hatha Yoga traditions expanded earlier yogic concepts and developed sophisticated techniques aimed at awakening Kundalini and facilitating spiritual growth.

The comparative analysis highlights the complementary nature of different yogic systems. Together, they form a comprehensive framework for physical health, mental well-being, spiritual development and self-realization. Future research should investigate the therapeutic applications of these classical practices using modern scientific methodologies.

#### 14. Limitations of the Study

1. Dependence on available translations of Sanskrit texts.
2. Variations in interpretation among commentators.
3. Limited empirical studies on certain Mudras and Bandhas.
4. Historical uncertainties regarding chronology of some texts.

#### 15. Recommendations for Future Research

1. Comparative clinical studies of classical yogic techniques.
2. Neurophysiological investigation of Mudras and Bandhas.
3. Translation and critical analysis of lesser-known yogic manuscripts.
4. Development of evidence-based yoga curricula rooted in classical literature.
5. Interdisciplinary studies combining textual scholarship and modern science.

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