

# Hatha Yoga

The word *haṭha* (lit. force) denotes a system of physical techniques supplementary to *yoga* more broadly conceived; Hatha Yoga is *yoga* that uses the techniques of *haṭha*. Hatha Yoga is first referred to by name in Sanskrit texts dating to around the 11th century CE, but some of its techniques can be traced back at least a thousand years earlier, to the epics and the Pali canon. Why these techniques were called *haṭha* is not stated in the texts that teach them, but it seems likely that, originally at least, they were called thus because, like → *tapas* (asceticism), with which they were associated, they were difficult and forced their results to happen.

In this article, only those aspects of Hatha Yoga that set it apart from other techniques of *yoga* shall be discussed in detail. Important principles and practices that are shared with other methods of *yoga*, such as subtle physiology, *dhāraṇā* (fixation [of the elements]), and *nāḍānusandhāna* (concentration on the [internal] sound), are not analyzed. Furthermore, although ethnographic data is adduced to shed light on some of the practices of Hatha Yoga and to trace its development, these have in the main been drawn from fieldwork among ascetic practitioners of traditional forms of Hatha Yoga; its modern manifestations, both Indian and transnational, have not been considered (on these, see Alter, 2004; Michelis, 2004; Singleton, 2010; see also below). It should also be noted that the modern “Hatha Yoga” taught by B.K.S. Iyengar is not the same as traditional Hatha Yoga.

In its earliest formulations, *haṭha* was used to raise and conserve the physical essence of life, identified in men as *bindu* (semen), which is otherwise constantly dripping downward from a store in the head and being expended. (The female equivalent, mentioned only occasionally in our sources, is *rajas*, menstrual fluid.) The preservation and sublimation of semen was associated with *tapas* (asceticism) from at least the time of the epics, and some of the techniques of early Hatha Yoga are likely to have developed as part of ascetic practice. The techniques of early Hatha Yoga work in two ways: mechanically, in practices such as *viparītakaraṇi*, “the reverser,” in which by standing on one’s head one uses gravity to keep

*bindu* in the head; or by making the breath enter the central channel of the body, which runs from the base of the spine to the top of the head, thereby forcing *bindu* upward. In later formulations of Hatha Yoga, the Kaula system (see → Tantra) of the visualization of the serpent goddess Kuṇḍalinī rising as *kuṇḍalinī* energy through a system of *cakras*, usually six or seven, is overlaid onto the *bindu*-oriented system. The same techniques, together with some specifically *kuṇḍalinī*-oriented ones, are said to effect *kuṇḍalinī*’s rise up the central channel (which is called the *suṣumnā* in these traditions) to a store of *amṛta* (the nectar of immortality) situated in the head, with which *kuṇḍalinī* then floods the body, rejuvenating it and rendering it immortal.

The aims and results of Hatha Yoga are the same as those of other varieties of *yoga* practice: *siddhis* (both mundane benefits and magical powers) and *mukti* (→ liberation), the latter often understood as being attained in a body immortalized by Hatha Yoga practices. In keeping with the physical orientation of Hatha Yoga practices, its *siddhis* are predominantly physical, ranging from the loss of wrinkles and grey hair to divine sight or the ability to levitate. In common with earlier formulations of *yoga*, in particular Kaula ones, the techniques of Hatha Yoga can be used to effect *kālavañcana* (cheating death), *utkrānti* (yogic suicide), or *parakāyapraveśa* (entering another’s body). As in Patañjali’s *Yogasūtra*, *siddhis* are usually said to be a hindrance to or distraction from Hatha Yoga’s ultimate aim – liberation – but in some Kaula-influenced texts, the pursuit of specific *siddhis* through specific techniques is taught (Mallinson, 2011a).

Hatha Yoga is sometimes distinguished from other types of *yoga*, in particular *mantrayoga*, *layayoga*, and *rājayoga*. Swami → Vivekananda (1863–1902) identified Rāja Yoga with the “mental” *yoga* taught in Patañjali’s *Yogasūtra* and said that other *yogas*, in particular Hatha, or “physical,” Yoga, were inferior to it (Michelis, 2004, 178–180). This understanding of Rāja Yoga has become widespread, but it is not what it means in Sanskrit texts, wherein it is simply the ultimate aim of *yoga* (which is usually *samādhi*) and not a means of attaining it. There is no opposition

between Patañjali's *yoga* and the techniques of Haṭha Yoga in early Haṭha Yoga texts; the practices of Haṭha Yoga are supplementary to those of *aṣṭāṅgayoga* (eightfold yoga, i.e. Pātañjala Yoga). (The *Vivekamārtaṇḍa*, in keeping with its Śaiva Mantramārga tradition, teaches a sixfold *yoga* without Patañjali's *yama* and *niyama* [ethical and behavioral observances] but does not call it Haṭha.) By the 17th century, Haṭha Yoga had become an integral part of most formulations of *yoga*, including those based on Patañjali's *Yogasūtra*, as evinced by the creation of a corpus of Yoga Upaniṣads, whose texts borrowed widely from works that teach Haṭha Yoga (Bouy, 1994). The 18th-century Gujarati scholar Haṃsamitṭhu equated Pātañjala Yoga with Haṭha Yoga (and for him, Rāja Yoga came about through the sexual practices of a Śākta interpretation of the *rāsālilā* [→ *lilā*]; see Vasudeva, 2011). The modern *yoga* widely practiced around the world today is derivative of Haṭha Yoga, although it places a greater emphasis on → *āsana* (physical postures) than is found in traditional Haṭha Yoga and includes under the *āsana* rubric innovations from Indian and foreign sources (Singleton, 2010) that are not to be found in traditional teachings on Haṭha Yoga.

## Texts

For the early period of Haṭha Yoga prior to the composition of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* (which is often called the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* in secondary literature; c. 1450 CE), Sanskrit texts are our only sources for the practice of Haṭha Yoga. (Two vernacular sources that are said to predate the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, the Marathi *Jñāneśvarī* and the Tamil *Tirumantiram*, do describe Haṭha Yoga techniques, but without further text-critical studies of these works, we cannot be sure of the age of the passages that include those teachings.) A handful of travelers' descriptions of *yoga* practice from this period do survive, but they do not provide any details of specific Haṭha Yoga techniques. The same is true of later travelers' reports, which, while useful for determining the social history of *yoga* and *yogīs*, add little to our understanding of Haṭha Yoga. Ethnography is very useful for understanding the mechanics and practical details of Haṭha Yoga techniques but less so for understanding their history or that of the principles underlying

ing them, because practitioners' reports of both may be skewed by sectarian interpretations and other vicissitudes.

## Early Haṭha Yoga

The earliest text to teach a systematized Haṭha Yoga and call it such is the (\*)*Dattātreyayogaśāstra*, which was probably composed in the 13th century CE. In its section on Haṭha Yoga, after teaching a traditional eightfold *yoga* that it attributes to Yājñavalkya and others, it describes ten Haṭha Yoga practices that it says were undertaken by the → *ṛṣi* Kapila and other *ṛṣis* in addition to those of Yājñavalkya (*DYŚa.* 52–61). These practices, which will be examined in more detail below, are of the variety that came to be known collectively as *mudrās* (lit. seals, a variety of physical techniques for controlling vital energies, including *kuṇḍalinī*, breath, and *bindu*) in later Haṭha Yoga texts and that constitute the techniques of early Haṭha Yoga. The (\*)*Dattātreyayogaśāstra* teaches the following such *mudrās*: *mahāmudrā*, *mahābandha*, *khecarīmudrā*, the three *bandhas* (lit. locks; *jālandharabandha*, *uḍḍiyāṇabandha*, and *mūlabandha*), *viparītakarāṇī*, *vajrolī*, *amarolī*, and *sahajolī*. Other texts that predate the *Haṭhapradīpikā* and describe Haṭha Yoga *mudrās* (without teaching Haṭha Yoga as such) include the \**Amṛtasiddhi*, which dates to the 11th century CE and teaches *mahābandha*, *mahāmudrā*, and *mahāvedha*; the *Vivekamārtaṇḍa*, which is contemporaneous with the (\*)*Dattātreyayogaśāstra* and teaches *mahāmudrā*, *nabhomudrā* (i.e. *khecarīmudrā*), the three *bandhas*, and *viparītakarāṇī*; the (\*)*Goraḥṣaśataka*, which is also contemporaneous with the (\*)*Dattātreyayogaśāstra*, teaches the three *bandhas* and *śakticālanīmudrā*; and the *Khecarīvidyā*, which teaches only *khecarīmudrā*. None of these texts calls its techniques Haṭha Yoga. The practices of the \**Amṛtasiddhi* and (\*)*Dattātreyayogaśāstra* are used to raise *bindu* or prevent it from falling; the *mudrās* of the (\*)*Vivekamārtaṇḍa* work on *bindu*, not *kuṇḍalinī*, even though raising it is an important part of the *yoga* it teaches; and those of the (\*)*Goraḥṣaśataka* and *Khecarīvidyā* are used to raise *kuṇḍalinī* (they mention *bindu* only in passing).

The only other texts older than the *Haṭhapradīpikā* to teach Haṭha Yoga *mudrās* are the *Śivasamhitā*, *Yogabīja*, *Amaraughaprabodha*,

and *Śārṅgadharapaddhati*. Each of these texts, which are likely to postdate all those described above, mentions Haṭha Yoga by name. The *Śārṅgadharapaddhati* is an anthology of verses on a wide range of subjects compiled in 1363 CE, which in its description of Haṭha Yoga includes the (\*)*Dattātreyayogaśāstra*'s teachings on five *mudrās*. In his somewhat confused analysis of Haṭha Yoga and Rāja Yoga, Śārṅgadharā says that Haṭha Yoga is of two sorts, one practiced by Gorakṣa (also known as Gorakhnāth; → Nāth Sampradāya) and others, and one by the ṛṣi Mārkaṇḍeya and others. He then equates it with the six limbs of *yoga* taught in Gorakṣa's (\*)*Vivekamārtaṇḍa* (*āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyaṇa*, and *samādhi*), which he explains using verses from the (\*)*Dattātreyayogaśāstra*, including those on *mudrā*. The second variety of Haṭha Yoga, that of Mārkaṇḍeya, is a Pātāñjala *aṣṭāṅgayoga* (adding *yama* and *niyama* to the limbs of Gorakṣa's *yoga*) taught in verses mainly taken from the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāna*. In its extensive treatment of *yoga*, the *Śivasamhitā* teaches the ten *mudrās* found in the (\*)*Dattātreyayogaśāstra* and three more (*mahāvedha*, *yonimudrā*, and *śakticālānī*), but, despite mentioning it in three places, does not explicitly define Haṭha Yoga. Some of its *mudrās* work on *bindu*, some on *kuṇḍalinī*, and some on both. The *Yogabīja* (148–149) gives an esoteric definition of the word *haṭha* that is much repeated in later texts, commentaries, and secondary literature: *ha* means the sun, *ṭha* means the moon, and Haṭha Yoga is their union (*yoga*). In this context, the sun and moon can be variously interpreted as meaning the upper and lower breaths (*prāṇa* and *apāna*; \**Amṛtasiddhi* 6.11–13), the *piṅgalā* and *iḍā nāḍīs* (*ViM.* 32), Śakti and Śiva as menstrual blood and semen (*ViM.* 74–76), or the tip of the tongue and the forehead (*KhVid.* 2.72–74). The *Yogabīja* teaches the raising of Kuṇḍalinī by means of breath retention and the *mudrās* taught in the (\*)*Gorakṣasāta*: the three *bandhas* (*jālandhara-bandha*, *mūlabandha*, and *uḍḍiyānabandha*) and *śakticālānī mudrā*. The *Amarauḅhaprabodha* (4–5) says that Haṭha Yoga involves techniques that use the breath and *bindu* and then, using verses that it shares with the \**Amṛtasiddhi*, equates Haṭha Yoga with the triad of practices that forms the basis of the *yoga* in the \**Amṛtasiddhi*: the *mahāmudrā*, *mahābandha*, and *mahāvedha* (*AmPrab.* 29–43).

## The Haṭhapradīpikā and Classical Haṭha Yoga

### The Haṭhapradīpikā

The *Haṭhapradīpikā* was composed by Svātmārāma in the 15th century CE (Bouy, 1994, 85). It is for the most part a compilation: it includes verses from all eight texts mentioned above and at least twelve more. Noteworthy among the latter are the *Amanaskayoga*, *Vasiṣṭhasamhitā*, and *Candrāvalokana*. The *Haṭhapradīpikā* is the first text that explicitly sets out to teach Haṭha Yoga above other methods of *yoga*. In addition to all the *mudrās* taught in earlier works, it names *āsana* (posture), *kumbhaka* (breath retention), and *nādānusandhāna* (concentration on the internal sound) as Haṭha Yoga's constituents (*HP.* 1.56). These four types of practice are found in most subsequent descriptions of Haṭha Yoga. Together with the cleansing practices that also became emblematic of Haṭha Yoga and that are taught in the *Haṭhapradīpikā* without specifically being said to constitute part of Haṭha Yoga, they constitute what is termed herein "classical Haṭha Yoga." The *Haṭhapradīpikā* became the root text of Haṭha Yoga: all subsequent Sanskrit Haṭha Yoga anthologies and commentaries refer to it, and most take its definition of the practices of Haṭha Yoga to be authoritative.

The *Haṭhapradīpikā* is the first text on *yoga* to include *āsana* among the techniques of Haṭha Yoga. It teaches 15 *āsanas*. Eight are varieties of sitting (or lying) positions suitable for meditation, and seven are nonseated positions. The verses describing seated *āsanas* are taken from a variety of earlier texts, including the (\*)*Dattātreyayogaśāstra*, *Vivekamārtaṇḍa*, *Vasiṣṭhasamhitā*, *Yogayājñavalkya*, and *Śivasamhitā*. The descriptions of three of the nonseated *āsanas* (*mayūrāsana*, *kūrmāsana*, and *kukkuṭāsana*; see below) are taken (with metrical modifications) from the *Vasiṣṭhasamhitā* but can also be found in earlier → Pāñcarātra and → Vaikhānasa Samhitās, including the circa 10th-century *Vimānārcaṇākalpa*, the *Pādmasamhitā*, and the *Ahīrbudhnyāsamhitā* (see also → Vaiṣṇava Samhitās). The verses teaching *paścimatānāsana* (back stretch posture) are taken (again with metrical modifications) from the *Śivasamhitā*. No source text has yet been identified for three of the *Haṭhapradīpikā*'s nonseated *āsanas*: *uttānakūrmāsana* (upside-down tortoise), *dhanu-*

*rāsana* (bow), and *matsyendrāsana* (Matsyendra’s pose: for Matsyendra, see → Nāth Sampradāya).

The *Haṭhapradīpikā* teaches eight varieties of *kumbhaka* (breath retention; see below). The verses describing four of these (*sūryā*, *śītālī*, *bhastrīkā*, and *ujjāyī*) are taken from the (\*)*Goraḥṣaśataka*; source texts have not been identified for the remaining four (*sītākārī*, *bhrāmārī*, *mūrcchā*, and *plāvīnī*).

The *Haṭhapradīpikā* teaches the ten *mudrās* found in the (\*)*Dattātreyayogaśāstra*, supplemented by *mahāvedha* and *śakticālanī* (it also mentions *yonimudrā* in passing). Its verses on *mudrā* are taken from the (\*)*Dattātreyayogaśāstra*, *Vivekamārtaṇḍa*, (\*)*Goraḥṣaśataka*, *Khecarīvidyā*, and *Amaraughaprabodha*.

No source text has been identified for the *Haṭhapradīpikā*’s verses on *nādānusandhāna*, which are said to have been taught by Gorakṣa (HP. 4.65). This practice, which involves putting one’s fingers in one’s ears and listening to a succession of internal sounds (*nādas*), is said to be a technique of *laya* (dissolution). As noted above, in earlier texts *laya* was taught, along with *mantra* and *haṭha*, as a distinct method of achieving Rāja Yoga. Svātmārāma used verses from texts that made this distinction to compile the *Haṭhapradīpikā* and emphasized the complementarity of Haṭha and Rāja Yoga, but he ignored *mantrayoga* altogether (the *Haṭhapradīpikā* makes no mention of any *mantras*) and subsumed within Haṭha Yoga many of the techniques of *layayoga*, including, besides *nādānusandhāna*, the raising of *kuṇḍalinī*, *śavāsana*, *śāmbhavamudrā* (using verses taken from the *Amanaskayoga* and *Candrāvalokana*), a nonphysical variety of *khecarīmudrā*, and meditation on the point between the eyebrows.

The cleansing practices known as *ṣaṭ karmāṇi*, “the six acts,” which became emblematic of Haṭha Yoga, are taught in the *Haṭhapradīpikā* in verses that have not been found in earlier works (HP. 2.21–36); in fact, no earlier texts that teach these practices have yet been identified. The vacuum in the abdomen created by one of the cleansing techniques, *nauli*, is used in *bastī* and *vajrolīmudrā* to suck liquids through the anus and penis, respectively. We can thus infer that *nauli* was practiced at least as early as the 13th century, the time of writing of the (\*)*Dattātreyayogaśāstra*, the first text to teach *vajrolīmudrā*.

## Post-Haṭhapradīpikā Texts on Classical Haṭha Yoga

Over the centuries following the composition of the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, many more texts teaching the techniques of Haṭha Yoga were composed. An exhaustive review of all of them is beyond the scope of this article. Most are derivative of the teachings of the *Haṭhapradīpikā*. The brief survey below mentions only the more innovative or idiosyncratic among them and omits such influential texts as the *Haṭhasaṃketacandrikā*, the *Yogacintāmaṇi*, the *Haṭhatattvakaumudī* and *Yogabīja* anthologies, the Yoga Upaniṣads, and Brahmānanda’s *Jyotsnā* commentary on the *Haṭhapradīpikā*.

### Amarauḥṣaśāsana

This text has been published on the basis of a single Sharada manuscript that was copied in 1525 CE. It teaches various Haṭha Yoga techniques, in particular *khecarīmudrā*, calling them *sāraṇās*. The text is for the most part a compilation. It shares some verses with the *Netratantra* and also with the *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* but not with any texts of the Haṭha Yoga corpus. These shared verses, the text’s isolation, its script, its idiosyncrasies, and the one other (fragmented) manuscript of the text having been found at Subashi, near Kuqa in Xinjiang, suggest that a tradition of Haṭha Yoga flourished in the northwest of the subcontinent independently of that found elsewhere.

### Haṭharatnāvalī

This text was composed in the mid- to late 17th century by Śrīnivāsa. It cites several earlier texts, sometimes critically, and defines Haṭha Yoga as “the ten *mudrās* beginning with *mahāmudrā*, the eight [cleansing] techniques, the [nine] *kumbhakas* and the 84 *āsanas*” (HRat. 1.18), substituting the *Haṭhapradīpikā*’s *nādānusandhāna* with the cleansing techniques (it teaches *nāda* as part of *laya*). Śrīnivāsa describes several techniques not taught in other texts and supplements them with detailed practical insights.

### \*Brhatkhecarīprakāśa

An unedited commentary on the *Khecarīvidyā* by Ballāla probably composed in the 18th century, this text draws on a wide range of sources to clarify its root text, and Ballāla supplements the textual commentary with practical insights.

### The Long Recension of the *Haṭhapradīpikā*

This unedited text (a single manuscript of it, dated 1708 CE, has been identified) calls itself the \**Haṭhapradīpikā Siddhāntamuktāvalī* and is an expansion of the better known *Haṭhapradīpikā*, which has four *upadeśas* (chapters) and 385 verses, into six *upadeśas* and 1553 verses. It adds a wealth of textual citations and practical insights to the original text.

### Gorakhbānī

The Hindi verses ascribed to Gorakhnāth, while forming a heterogeneous whole (some of its verses dismiss the practices of Haṭha Yoga), include some terse mentions of Haṭha Yoga techniques.

### Gheraṇḍasamhitā

A dialogue between the sage Gheraṇḍa and Caṇḍakāpālīn, this 18th-century text teaches *ghaṭasthayoga*, which is achieved through seven means. These include 6 cleansing techniques, 32 *āsanas*, 25 *mudrās*, and 10 *prāṇāyāmas*.

### Jogpradīpakā

This text is a Brajbhasha manual of *yoga* (which it does not call Haṭha Yoga) composed by the Rāmānandī Jayatarāma in 1737 CE. In it are taught 84 *āsanas*, 6 cleansing techniques, 8 *kumbhakas*, and 24 *mudrās*.

## The Principles of Haṭha Yoga

As noted above, in the earliest formulations, the purpose of Haṭha Yoga was to raise and preserve *bindu*, semen, by means of the Haṭha Yoga *mudrās*. Onto its techniques those of *layayoga*, in particular the raising of *kuṇḍalinī*, were subsequently superimposed. The *Haṭhapradīpikā* says that the purpose of the Haṭha Yoga *mudrās* is to raise *kuṇḍalinī* (HP. 3.5).

This resulted in some conflicts. In the visualizations taught in texts of the Paścimāmnāya lineage of Kaula Śaivism, *kuṇḍalinī*, on reaching the store of *amṛta* located in the head, returns to the *ādihāra* (base) at the bottom of the spine from which it came, flooding the body with *amṛta* as it goes. This is what it does as a result of the Haṭha Yoga *khecarīmudrā* taught in the *Khecarīvidyā*. The purpose of *bindu*-oriented Haṭha Yoga practices is to keep *bindu* in the head. Thus in the *Vivekāmārtaṇḍa*, which is the earliest text to syn-

thesize the two paradigms, *khecarīmudrā* is said to seal the uvula and prevent *bindu* from falling (ViM. 51), but later in the text, the same technique (although not named *khecarīmudrā*) is said to result in the body being flooded with *amṛta* (ViM. 127–131). In the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, these verses are found together in the description of *khecarīmudrā* (HP. 3.31–53).

The *Haṭhapradīpikā*'s synthesis of a broad range of practices results in some ingenious assimilations and reinterpretations of earlier practice, a process that continues to this day. *Vajrolīmudrā* is first taught in the (\*)*Dattātreyayogaśāstra* as a method of achieving *siddhi* (success) while not observing the *niyamas* (restrictions) of *yoga*. He or she who knows the technique of sucking liquids up the urethra can resorb his *bindu* or her *rajas* after sexual intercourse and thereby not suffer from its loss. This technique was hard to assimilate with *kuṇḍalinīyoga*, but it was open to a Śākta reinterpretation: verses from the (\*)*Dattātreyayogaśāstra* are used in the *Haṭhapradīpikā* to describe *vajrolī*, but in addition it is said that absolute success (*sarvasiddhi*) results from combining *bindu* and *rajas* in one's own body. In contrast, a doggedly celibate → Daśanāmī *saṃnyāsī* practitioner of Haṭha Yoga living in Gangotri in 2006 reported that *vajrolī* needs to be mastered in order to resorb semen, in case it is spontaneously ejaculated when *Kuṇḍalinī* reaches the *svādhiṣṭhāna cakra* (the *cakra* located in the genital region).

The techniques of Haṭha Yoga, and their development, reflect the ongoing interplay of practice and theory, to which might be added exegesis. The *śakticālanī mudrā*, for example, originally involved wrapping the tongue in a cloth and tugging it in order to awaken *kuṇḍalinī*. Its method was forgotten in certain lineages, but its description was preserved in their texts. Textual corruption obscured the location in the body of where the cloth is to be applied, and now those who teach it, perhaps influenced by the physical location of its benefits (and, of course, their own practical research), say that it is to be done by using *nauli*, "churning the stomach" (Mallinson, 2011b).

The *Haṭhapradīpikā*'s success ensured that the raising of *kuṇḍalinī* became the rationale for many of the practices of Haṭha Yoga. With *kuṇḍalinī* came a variety of other practices and aims, and when trying to understand the sometimes contradictory notions of Haṭha Yoga, it is

useful to bear in mind other oppositions parallel to that of *bindu* and *kunḍalinī*: *mukti* (liberation) and *siddhis* (powers), *tapas* (asceticism) and *bhoga* (enjoyment), and *haṭha* (force[d]) and *sahaja* (natural). While, as we shall see below, their sectarian manifestations differ, these different paradigms of the practice of *yoga*, and *yoga*'s conceptual heterogeneity, mirror what A. Sanderson has said of Śaivism:

Śaivism in its great internal diversity is the result of the interplay of two fundamental orientations, a liberation-seeking asceticism embodied in the Atimārga and a power-seeking asceticism of → Kāpālika character within the Mantramārga. (Sanderson, 1993, 57)

## The Practices of Classical Haṭha Yoga

The practices specific to classical Haṭha Yoga will now be summarized. (*Nādānusandhāna*, although part of the *Haṭhapradīpikā*'s definition of Haṭha Yoga, is not included here, as it is taught in earlier formulations of *yoga* [see Vasudeva, 2004, 272–280].)

More detailed descriptions of these techniques and instructions on how to perform them can be found in the corpus of texts on Haṭha Yoga and in the publications of modern schools of *yoga*. With reference to the latter, see in particular those of Swami Satyananda's Bihar School of Yoga, B.K.S. Iyengar, and, for nonsectarian teachings, Yogani.

### Preparation

In addition to the practices of Haṭha Yoga, many Haṭha Yoga texts also describe the hut suited to the *yogī*'s or *yoginī*'s practice and the diet he or she should subsist on. The former is to be small, well made, and isolated. The latter consists of food that is mildly flavored, sweet, unctuous, nourishing, tasty, and eaten in small quantities.

### Cleansing Techniques

Some of the Haṭha Yoga cleansing techniques first taught in the *Haṭhapradīpikā* resemble ayurvedic therapies (→ Āyurveda), but there are no direct parallels. They are known as *ṣaṭ karmāṇi*, "the six actions," a somewhat surprising name in the light of their number: to a group of six the *Haṭhapradīpikā* adds a seventh, *gajakaraṇī* (and this number is increased to eight in the *Haṭharatnāvalī* and *Haṭhatattvakaumudī*). It

may be that Svātmārāma, having eliminated *mantrayoga* from his formulation of the techniques of Haṭha Yoga, was reinventing it as a physical practice: the maleficent aims of tantric *mantra* practice are also known as the *ṣaṭ karmāṇi*.

In the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, these techniques are used for nothing more than cleansing the body and balancing its *doṣas* (humors) in order to prepare it for the practice of *yoga* (*HP*. 2.23); Svātmārāma adds that some teachers say that *prāṇāyāma* alone will suffice for this purpose (*HP*. 2.38). In the *Haṭharatnāvalī*, the cleansing practices are said also to cleanse the six *cakras* (*HRat*. 1.61), and some later commentators, seeking to impute a directly soteriological value to all Haṭha Yoga practices, say that they directly facilitate various methods of reaching *samādhi*.

Brief descriptions of the techniques follow. In later works, in particular the *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* and *Ṣaṭkarmasaṃgraha*, multiple variations of some of them are taught.

(1) *Dhauti* – Clean the intestines by swallowing a length of cloth while holding onto one end and then slowly extracting it.

(2) *Basti* – Squat in water, draw it in through the anus, and then expel it.

(3) *Neti* – Insert a cotton thread into the nostril, pull it out of the mouth, and draw it back and forth in order to cleanse the nasal passages.

(4) *Trāṭaka* – Stare at a small object until tears come to the eyes.

(5) *Nauli* – Tense the muscles in the abdomen in such a way as to force it into a vertical column, then make it roll from side to side. This is said to be the best of the cleansing techniques.

(6) *Kapālabhātī* – Breathe in and out forcefully through the nose, like a pair of bellows.

(7) *Gajakaraṇī* – Clean the stomach by drinking water and then regurgitating it.

(8) *Cakri* – Insert a finger into the anus and rotate it until the muscles of the anus become relaxed.

### Āsana

Complicated physical postures are first included among the techniques of Haṭha Yoga in the *Haṭhapradīpikā*. The earliest textual reference to nonseated *āsanas* is in the circa 10th-century *Vimānārcanakaḷpa*, a Pāñcarātra work, and it seems likely that the practice of nonseated *āsanas* developed within a Pāñcarātrika milieu. The 13th-century *Matsyendrasaṃhitā*, the earliest

text associated with the Nāth tradition to teach a variety of *āsanas*, describes 13 seated *āsanas*, including three named after animals: *mayūrāsana* (peacock), *kukkuṭāsana* (cock), and *kūrmāsana* (tortoise). *Āsanas* by these names are taught in Vaiṣṇava works such as the *Vimānārcanakaḥ*, the *Ahīrbudhnyāsaṃhitā*, and the *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā*, but in those texts they are nonseated poses, quite different from their namesakes in the *Matsyendrasaṃhitā*. The use of the word *āsana* to describe any sort of physical posture appears to have become widespread by the early 14th century, when the Maithili *Rasaratnākara* used it (along with *bandha*) as a term to describe positions for sexual intercourse. The circa 13th-century (\*)*Dattātreya yogaśāstra* and (\*)*Vivekamārtaṇḍa* both say that there are 84 *lākh āsanas*, but the former teaches only *padmāsana* (lotus posture), to which the latter adds *siddhāsana* (adepts' posture). Both of these are taught in earlier texts, in particular in Śaiva works, although *siddhāsana* is known in the latter as *svastikāsana* (auspicious posture; Goodall, 2004, 349n730; the *svastikāsana* of later Haṭha Yoga works is a slightly different posture).

The *Haṭhapradīpikā* teaches 15 *āsanas*, of which seven are not seated postures, and marks the beginning of the proliferation and importance of such postures in the practice of *yoga*. It is also in the *Haṭhapradīpikā* that practices that were originally not conceived of as *āsanas* first come to be included under its rubric. Thus *śavāsana*, “the corpse pose,” which is taught as one of the methods of *layayoga* in the (\*)*Dattātreya yogaśāstra*, becomes an *āsana* in the *Haṭhapradīpikā*. In later texts Śaiva *kaṛaṇas* (physical practices taught in Śaiva → Tantras, which are similar to the *mudrās* of Haṭha Yoga), Haṭha Yoga *mudrās*, ascetic mortifications, Sufi practices, wrestling exercises, and Western bodybuilding and gymnastic poses all become *āsanas*. The benefits of *āsanas* vary accordingly. In the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, *āsana* is said to lead to steadiness, health, and suppleness (aims not dissimilar from those of modern *yoga*); certain individual *āsanas* are said therein and in other texts to awaken *kuṇḍalinī*, destroy disease, make the breath enter the central channel, and increase the digestive fire.

The 17th-century *Haṭharatnāvalī* is the first text to teach 84 individual *āsanas*. Descriptions of 84 *āsanas* are also found in the 18th-century *Āsanayogagrantha* (Gharote, 2006, lxiii) and *Jogpradīpakā*, and the early 19th-century

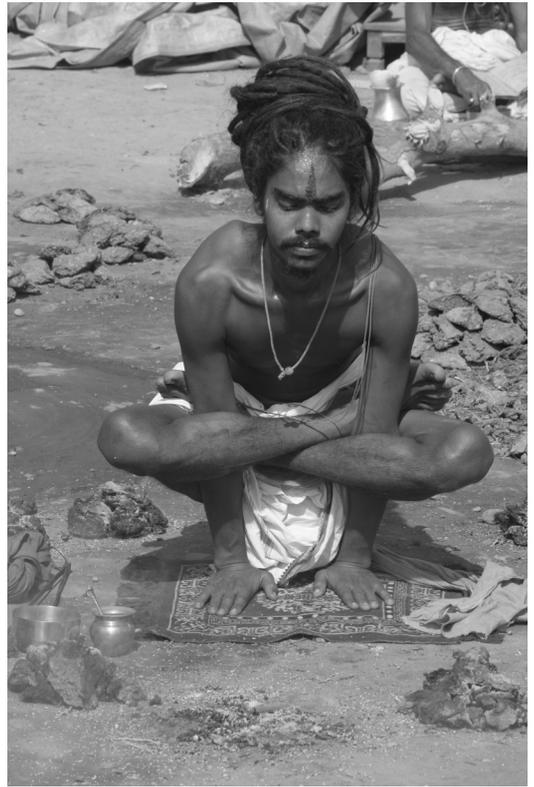


Fig. 1: *Kukkuṭāsana* (photo by James Mallinson).

Mahāmandir in Jodhpur (now commonly known as the Udaī Mandir) has a frieze depicting 84 *āsanas*. To this day, traditional *yoga* practitioners will claim to know 84 *āsanas*. From the 18th century onward, the number of *āsanas* taught in texts and in oral traditions has increased beyond 84. The six-chapter *Haṭhapradīpikā* teaches over 100 *āsanas*, the *Śrītattvanidhi* describes 122 (Sjoman, 1996), and B.K.S. Iyengar's *Light on Yoga* teaches over 200.

### **Kumbhaka**

The practice of breath control in Haṭha Yoga has three sources:

- (1) an ancient (and not specifically *yoga*) tradition of regulated breathing, or *prāṇāyāma*, that is thought to get rid of → *karma* and physical impurity;
- (2) a *yoga* principle that links the breath, the mind, and semen – by stopping one, the others are also stopped; and
- (3) specific methods of inhalation and exhalation known as *kumbhakas* (somewhat paradoxically, since *kumbhaka* in fact means the holding



Fig. 2: *Mayūrāsana* (photo by James Mallinson).

of the breath), which work on both the gross and the subtle bodies.

Many Haṭha Yoga works teach a simple *prāṇāyāma* in which the *yogī* is to inhale through the left nostril, hold the breath, exhale through the right nostril, inhale through the right nostril, hold the breath, and exhale through the left nostril. Different ratios of the lengths of each stage and different numbers of repetitions of the cycle are taught in different texts. Through this practice, the *nāḍīs*, or subtle channels of the body, are cleansed, enabling the breath and/or *kuṇḍalinī* to rise up the central channel and the mind to be stilled. For these latter benefits, the practice of *kumbhaka*, breath retention, is enjoined.

*Kumbhaka* is of two varieties, *sahita* (accompanied) and *kevala* (unaccompanied). It is *sahita* when it is accompanied by inhalation and exhalation, and *kevala* when not. The first text in which the *sahita kumbhakas* are taught is the (\*)*Goraḥṣaśataka*, which teaches the four described below. The benefits of the first three are purely physical (they remove imbalances of the *vāta*, *kapha*, and *pitta doṣas*, respectively; see → Āyurveda); *bhastrī* is also said to awaken *Kuṇḍalinī* and pierce the three *granthis* or “knots.”

(1) *Sūryā* – Inhale through the solar, or right, nostril, hold the breath, and then exhale through the lunar, or left, nostril.

(2) *Ujjāyī* – Inhale through both nostrils while making a rasping sound with the palate and epiglottis, hold the breath, and then exhale through the left nostril.

(3) *Śītalī* – Inhale through the rolled tongue and exhale through both nostrils.

(4) *Bhastrī* – Breathe in and out repeatedly and rapidly through both nostrils before slowly inhaling through the right nostril, holding the breath, and exhaling through the left nostril.

The (\*)*Goraḥṣaśataka*'s verses on *kumbhaka* are found in the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, which adds brief descriptions of the following four *kumbhakas*, whose benefits are more subtle.

(5) *Śītkārī* – Make a whistling sound while inhaling through the mouth. Exhale through the nostrils. The *yogī* becomes like a second god of love.

(6) *Bhrāmārī* – Make a buzzing sound while inhaling and exhaling; this brings about bliss.

(7) *Mūrcchā* – At the end of inhalation, apply *jālandhara bandha* (see below) and then breathe out slowly, bringing oneself to the point of fainting.

(8) *Plāvīnī* – Fill up the abdomen with air in order to float on water.

Once these *sahita kumbhakas* have been mastered, the *yoga* practitioner can perform *kevala kumbhaka*, the retention of the breath for as long as is wished, without inhalation or exhalation. The *yoga* practitioner can then accomplish anything he or she wants and has mastered Haṭha Yoga.

### **Mudrā**

In the earliest systematized textual treatment, Haṭha Yoga is identified with ten practices that assist in the preservation and raising of *bindu*, the essence of life, either through mechanical means or through the raising of the breath through the central channel. In Haṭha Yoga's classical synthesis in the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, two of these practices, *amarolī* and *sahajolī*, were subsumed under the heading of another, *vajrolī*. To the resulting eight practices, which in the *Haṭhapradīpikā* are all classified as *mudrās*, were added three more: *mahāvedha*, *śakticālānī*, and *yonimudrā*, making a total of eleven. The purpose of *śakticālānī* and *yonimudrā* has always been to awaken *kuṇḍalīnī* and make her rise up the central channel. In the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, this is said to be the aim of all *mudrās*.

(1) *Mahāmudrā* – Press the perineum with the heel of the left foot, stretch out the right foot, and hold it with both hands. Draw up the abdomen, put the chin on the chest, and inhale. After exhaling, swap the position of the feet and repeat the process.

(2) *Mahāvedha* – This *mudrā*, which makes the breath enter the central channel, is first taught in the \**Amṛtasiddhi*. Its technique therein has the *yoga* practitioner sitting with the soles of the feet pressed together, and the heels pressing the perineum. In later texts, the practitioners sit with one foot under the perineum, lift themselves up with their hands, and then drop their perineum onto their heel.

(3) *Mahābandha* – In its earliest Haṭha Yoga formulation, in the \**Amṛtasiddhi*, this *mudrā* is the same as the *mūlabandha* (on which see below). In later texts, to assume *mahābandha*, the *yoga* practitioner, after assuming the *mahāmudrā* position, puts the outstretched foot onto the opposite thigh.

(4) *Khecarīmudrā* – The tongue is lengthened, so that it can be turned back and inserted into the cavity above the soft palate in order to seal *bindu* in the head, taste *amṛta*, or make *kuṇḍalīnī* rise. In this latter aim, it is a practice similar to *śakticālānī*

*mudrā*. (For a detailed study of *khecarīmudrā*, see Mallinson, 2007b.)

(5) *Jālandharabandha* – Place the chin on the chest.

(6) *Uḍḍīyānabandha* – Draw up the abdomen.

(7) *Mūlabandha* – Contract the perineum region. This and the two preceding techniques are often grouped together as “the three *bandhas*.” They are to be practiced while holding the breath, and they are also sometimes prescribed, without being named, as adjuncts to other techniques, such as *padmāsana*.

(8) *Vīparītakaraṇī* – The *yoga* practitioner inverts himself or herself, usually by assuming either a headstand or a shoulderstand.

(9) *Vajrolī* – After ejaculation, semen or the commingled products of sexual intercourse are drawn upward through the urethra. *Vajrolī* is often grouped with the practices of *sahajolī* and *amarolī*, whose techniques are not always specified and, when they are, are taught differently in different texts. *Sahajolī* usually involves smearing the body with ash after intercourse; *amarolī* is the drinking or nasal application of one's own urine.

(10) *Śakticālānī* – The tongue is wrapped in a cloth and pulled in order to stimulate *kuṇḍalīnī* (as indicated by the name of the practice: “[the *mudrā*] that stimulates *śakti*”).

(11) *Yonimudrā* – This practice, which is usually mentioned in passing in texts rather than explicitly taught, is the same as *mūlabandha* but is specifically oriented toward raising *kuṇḍalīnī*.

### **Practitioners**

Haṭha Yoga, like other methods of *yoga*, can be practiced by all, regardless of sex, caste, class, or creed. Many texts explicitly state that it is practice alone that leads to success. Sectarian affiliation and philosophical inclination are of no importance. The texts of Haṭha Yoga, with some exceptions, do not include teachings on metaphysics or sect-specific practices. To speak of “*yoga* philosophy” is to miss the point: *yoga* is a practical discipline aimed at attaining liberation. If duly practiced, it will work, irrespective of the practitioner's beliefs. The lack of sectarianism in texts on *yoga* has made them readily adoptable by traditions other than those of their authors. Thus texts composed in a Nāth milieu could be used to compile the later Yoga Upaniṣads, and others were translated into Persian to satisfy Mughal interest in *yoga*. *Yoga's*



Fig. 3: *Viparītakaraṇī mudrā* (photo by James Mallinson).

lack of sectarianism has also enabled its spread around the world today.

The intended audience of the texts of Haṭha Yoga was most probably Brahman men, as is the nature of Sanskrit texts. There are, however, references to women practitioners within the texts. In some texts, householders as well as renunciates are said to be able to practice Haṭha Yoga, but the difficulty of many of its practices and the time required to master them, as well as the nature of their goal, liberation, meant that they were for the most part practiced by members of renunciate orders.

The ancient tradition of the *ūrdhvaretās tapasvī* (the ascetic whose seed is [turned] upwards),

which is closely associated with the practice of *yoga* in texts such as the *Mahābhārata*, is likely to be the source of early Haṭha Yoga, in which the preservation of *bindu* is paramount. This relatively orthodox tradition has survived in ascetic orders such as the Daśanāmī *saṃnyāsīs* and the Rāmānandīs. Onto the *bindu*-oriented Haṭha Yoga was overlaid the *layayoga* of a Kaula tradition associated with *siddhas* such as Matsyendra and Gorakṣa, which came to be known as that of the Nāths. Its members practiced Śaiva magical arts such as alchemy (→ *rasāyana*) and the worship of goddesses known as → *yoginīs* as well as *kuṇḍalinīyoga* and the other techniques of *layayoga*. The synthesis of the *bindu*- and

*kuṇḍalinī*-oriented paradigms of *yoga* had its first truly systematic manifestation in Svātmārāma's *Haṭhapradīpikā*, which was so successful that it became the root text of Haṭha Yoga for all traditions. The early Nāth *yogīs*' willful adoption of *bindu*-oriented *yoga* was paralleled by their formation into a celibate ascetic order despite their origins in the rather less abstemious Kaula Tantrism.

Early texts associated with the more orthodox Haṭha Yoga-practicing ascetic orders include the \**Amṛtasiddhi*, (\*)*Dattātreyayogaśāstra*, and *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā*. Those of the Nāth tradition include the *Vivekamārtaṇḍa*, (\*)*Goraḥṣaṣataka*, \**Candrāvalokana*, *Khecarīvidyā*, *Matsyendrasaṃhitā*, and *Jñāneśvarī*. None of the early texts of the Nāth tradition calls its *yoga* Haṭha Yoga – this name was adopted from the texts of the *bindu* tradition. Of the texts more or less contemporaneous with the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, the *Śivasāṃhitā* was the product of forerunners of the Daśanāmī *saṃnyāsī* tradition, while the *Amaraughaprabodha*, *Yogabīja*, and *Amaraughasāsana* were products of forerunners of the Nāths.

After the 16th century, which is when the Nāths began to coalesce into an order, they produced no texts that teach Haṭha Yoga. Meanwhile scholars of the Daśanāmī *saṃnyāsī* and Rāmānandī traditions continued to produce manuals, anthologies, and commentaries. These include the *Yoga Upaniṣads*, *Yogacintāmaṇi*, *Yogasiddhāntacandrikā*, *Jogpradīpakā*, and *Haṭhapradīpikājyotsnā*.

Many of today's better-known schools of Haṭha Yoga, such as Swami Satyananda's Bihar School of Yoga and Swami → Sivananda's Divine Life Society, were established by *gurus* affiliated, albeit tenuously, with the Daśanāmī *saṃnyāsī* order. The teachings on *yoga* of three students of T. Krishnamacharya, namely his son T.K.V. Desikachar, K. Pattabhi Jois, and B.K.S. Iyengar, have had the greatest influence on modern *yoga*. Their lineage, that of → Śrīvaiṣṇavism, is closely connected to the lineages of the first text to teach the Haṭha Yoga *mudrās* (the [\*]*Dattātreyayogaśāstra*) as well as the first texts to teach nonseated *āsanas* (Pāñcarātra *Samhitās* such as the *Vimānārcanākalpa* and *Ahīrbudhnyasaṃhitā*, and the *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā*). Practice of Haṭha Yoga among the Nāths is today almost nonexistent (Bouillier, 2008, 128).

## Further Reading

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, three Sanskrit texts on Haṭha Yoga – the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, *Śivasāṃhitā*, and *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* – were uncritically edited and translated into English. These texts, arbitrarily selected, have formed the Haṭha Yoga canon ever since, and studies of Haṭha Yoga have been hindered by this limited view of the tradition.

Since the 1970s, a handful of critical editions of texts that teach the practices of Haṭha Yoga have been published. Among the early works, one finds only the *Khecarīvidyā* and *Śivasāṃhitā*. The \**Amṛtasiddhi* has not been edited. The (\*)*Vivekamārtaṇḍa* has been edited (as the [\*]*Goraḥṣaṣataka* – the names of these two texts became confused) from just four of the hundreds of manuscripts available, and those of its earliest recensions were not consulted. The (\*)*Dattātreyayogaśāstra*, *Yogabīja*, *Amaraughaprabodha*, and *Amaraughasāsana* have been published as transcripts of single codices. A translation of the (\*)*Goraḥṣaṣataka* based on a single manuscript has recently been published.

The Kaivalyadhama institute in Lonavla, Maharashtra, has produced editions of important works on Haṭha Yoga, including the *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā*, *Haṭhapradīpikā*, *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā*, and Brahmānanda's 19th-century *Jyotsnā* commentary on the *Haṭhapradīpikā*. Its offshoot, the Lonavla Yoga Institute, has also published editions of a number of important works on Haṭha Yoga, including the *Śivasāṃhitā*, the ten-chapter *Haṭhapradīpikā*, the *Haṭharatnāvalī*, the *Yogabīja*, and the *Haṭhatattvakaumudī*.

Critical editions of two works, the *Śivasāṃhitā* and *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā*, have been published with translations but without apparatus in the Yoga Vidya series (see <http://www.yogavidya.com>).

While guides to the practice of Haṭha Yoga are legion, scholarly secondary literature is rare. Exceptions are C. Bouy (1994) on the relationship between Haṭha Yoga texts and the Yoga Upaniṣads; S. Vasudeva (2004), which concentrates on Śaiva tantric *yoga* but is useful for understanding the context of Haṭha Yoga; C. Kiss (2009) on the *yoga* of the early Nāths; D.G. White (1996) on the alchemist *siddha* tradition; the many encyclopedic works on Haṭha Yoga practices published by the Lonavla institutes; the introduction to the

*Khecarīvidyā* (Mallinson, 2007b); J. Mallinson's articles on *siddhi* in Haṭha Yoga (2011a) and the (\*)*Goraḥṣaṣataka* (2011b); and J. Birch (2011) on the meaning of *haṭha*.

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JAMES MALLINSON