

A Comparative Study of Yogic Techniques in *Gheranda Samhita*, *Siva Samhita*, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, and *Hatha Ratnavali* and Their Benefits

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Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.	<p>The most famous classical hatha yoga texts, written between approximately 1500 and 1700 CE, are the <i>Gheranda Samhita</i>, the <i>Siva Samhita</i>, and the <i>Hatha Yoga Pradipika</i>. Another important text is the <i>Hatha Ratnavali</i>. The purpose of this article is to compare them. The primary research questions are: How is hatha yoga presented in these texts, and what are the differences in how hatha yoga practices and techniques are described? What are the differences in how pranayama is presented? Based on this comparison, it can be concluded that the <i>Gheranda Samhita</i> is the most comprehensive of all these classical hatha yoga texts. It offers seventhfold paths to personal perfection. All topics—purifications, asanas, mudras, pratyahara, pranayama, dhyana, and samadhi—are discussed in great detail in the text. The <i>Gheranda Samhita</i> represents the most comprehensive practical approach to hatha yoga; the <i>Siva Samhita</i> is the most philosophical; The <i>Hatha Yoga Pradipika</i> provides useful, practical guidance, while the <i>Hatha Ratnavali</i> offers a bold new interpretation of all existing yogic knowledge. All texts attempt to integrate physical, mental, and spiritual practices into a holistic body of knowledge for human perfection and a roadmap to self-discovery and spiritual development. All deserve detailed study and the practice of their teachings with discipline and patience.</p>
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Introduction

Several important hatha yoga texts were written between approximately 1500 and 1700 CE. The most well-known are the *Gheranda Samhita*, *Siva Samhita*, and *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, which are considered the three most prominent classical hatha yoga scripts. Another significant text is the *Hatha Ratnavali*. The purpose of this article is to compare the hatha yoga practices and techniques that they describe, particularly with respect to pranayama. The main research questions are: How is hatha yoga presented in these texts and what are the differences in the way hatha yoga practices and techniques are described? What are the differences in presenting pranayama? The growing demand for yoga literacy as a source of spiritual knowledge is a significant phenomenon, given that yoga currently enjoys a significant interest among many individuals and groups in both the East and the West. This article answers to this demand and

contributes to a better understanding of the classical texts of hatha yoga.

Research Method

In this study we use a comparative approach and compare yogic techniques described in these texts, such as shatkarmas, asanas, pranayama, highlighting their differences and adding unique details. This research is supported by relevant scholarly literature. We also use qualitative descriptive methods. The main object of research is to present, analyze and compare the four classical hatha yoga scriptures to understand the practices they introduce and discover their deeper philosophical meaning. The first part of the paper is a general presentation of *Gheranda Samhita*, *Siva Samhita*, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, and *Hatha Ratnavali*. And the second part is the presentation and comparison of the yogic techniques

described in them. Findings are summarized in the conclusion.

Four Classical Hatha Yoga Scriptures

1. *Gheranda Samhita* (gheraṇḍasamhitā, meaning “Gheranda’s collection”) was composed in the late 17th century or early 18th century¹. The text takes the form of a dialogue between the sage Gheranda and his disciple Chandakapali. In this scripture yoga is described as *Ghatasthayoga*, a term that is not found in any other yogic works. The word “ghaṭa” is a Sanskrit term for “pot” or “vessel,” which can be interpreted as symbolizing the body and the mind as vessels that carry and serve the eternal soul (Ātman) as described in Hindu philosophy, particularly Vedanta². It is generally accepted that the system of yoga presented in the *Gheranda Samhita* is hatha yoga, even though the word “hatha” is not mentioned.³ The text is an important manual of yogic practices and has been considered as “the most encyclopedic of all the root texts of hatha yoga.”⁴ Compared to other classical yoga texts, it provides the most complete knowledge. It is organized into seven chapters (lessons) and contains 351 shlokas (verses), presenting 32 asanas and 25 mudras, as well as extensive teaching on yogic philosophy, including paths to spiritual awareness and guidance on reaching ultimate truth and achieving liberation (Moksha).

While yoga is a path to self-understanding and self-realization, and is known for its limbs or stages,⁵ the seven chapters of *Gheranda Samhita* reflect the seven steps of personal perfection.⁶ The first chapter starts with philosophical consideration or karma and rebirth. It then describes *purification* techniques through shatkarma (cleansing practices), as the first step to achieve perfection. The second chapters focuses on *strengthening* the body through the practice of asanas (physical postures). The third chapter describes *steadiness* through the practice of mudras (hand gestures). The fourth chapter introduces the practice

of pratyahara (calming of the mind). The fifth chapter presents the conditions of pranayama (breath control) and describes its practices. The proper conditions include a clean, safe and comfortable place; appropriate time and season for practices (not too cold, not too warm, mid-day or early morning); balanced diet; right position, such as Vajrasana or Padmasana that prioritize an erect spine, relaxed shoulders, and aligned head for focused practice; facing North or East; purification of the nadis (energy channels). Next, eight types of pranayama are described: Sahita, Suryabhedha, Ujjayi, Sitali, Bhastrika, Bhramari, Murccha, and Kevali. Chapter six describes three types of dhyana (meditative practices), and chapter seven introduces six types of samadhi (liberation, union of the individual self with universal consciousness).

In sum, *Gheranda Samhita* presents seven limbs or stages of yoga, and represents a holistic approach, where physical exercise and mental concentration are viewed as integral parts of a person’s spiritual development. Particular attention is given to six basic yogic cleansing techniques, known as Shatkarma, which are designed to purify the body and include Dhauti (stomach cleansing), Basti (intestinal cleansing), Neti (nase cleansing), Trataka (gazing and concentrating), Nauli (abdominal massage), and Kapalbhati (focused breathing to cleanse the respiratory system and nasal passages). In the chapter seven, verse 7.44 there is an assertion that “I am Brahman and nothing else,”⁷ which may suggest that the author was inspired by Advaita Vedanta⁸.

2. *Shiva Samhita* (śivasamhitā, meaning "Shiva's Compendium") is considered one of the most comprehensive and important classical texts on hatha yoga, alongside the *Gheranda Samhita* and *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, known for its detailed guidance on yogic practices.⁹ Its author and the date of composition is unknown. Some scholars date it as the 17th-century, while others consider it as much earlier, probably between 1300 and 1500 CE.¹⁰ The text is presented as a dialogue in which

¹ *Gheranda Samhita*, ed. Swami Digambarji, M. L. Gharote (Lonavia: Kaivalyadham, 1997), p. xiv.

² I. Widya Sena et al., “Metaphysics of Yoga in the Gheranda Samhita Scripture,” *Journal SMART* (Studi Masyarakat, Religi, dan Tradisi), 10.1 (2024), p. 64. <https://doi.org/10.18784/smart.v10i1.2181>

³ Roshen Dalal, *Hinduism: An Alphabetical Guide* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), p. 157

⁴ See “Introduction” to *The Gheranda Samhita. The Original Sanskrit and an English Translation*, transl. James Mallinson (Woodstock NY: YogaVidya.com, 2004), p. ix.

⁵ Yoga can be understood as the process of human self-realization through its structured path famously detailed by Patanjali as the *Ashtanga* (Eight Limbs), with the following stages: ethical restraints (Yama), personal observations (Niyama), physical postures (Asana), breath control (Pranayama), sense withdrawal (Pratyahara), concentration (Dharana), meditation (Dhyana), and finally enlightenment (Samadhi).

⁶ *Gheranda Samhita*, ed. Swami Digambarji, M. L. Gharote, op. cit., pp. 1-162.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁸ “Tat Tvam Asi (That thou art)” (in *Chandogya Upanishad*, 6. 8. 7); “Aham Brahmasmi (I am Brahman)” (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 1. 4. 10). These foundational Upanishadic texts proclaim the profound truth that the individual soul (Ātman) is identical with ultimate reality (Brahman), revealing nonduality and the state of liberation in which finite consciousness realizes its oneness with the universal consciousness. They constitute the foundation of Advaita Vedanta, based on the following principles: a) “Brahman is reality” b) “The world is an illusion” and, c) “The individual Self is nothing but Brahman.”

⁹ *The Shiva Samhita. A Critical Edition and An English Translation*, transl. James Mallison (Woodstock NY: YogaVidya.com, 2007).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. x.

the god Shiva imparts profound yogic knowledge, consisting of asanas, mudras, pranayama asanas, and Hindu philosophy to his divine consort, Parvati. It is a blend of philosophical concepts and practical guidance on yoga, and encompasses the path to liberation, the subtle energies of the body (nadi, prana), and tantric practices for spiritual development. It consists of five chapters.

The first chapter is a philosophical discussion that starts with the statement about “one eternal true knowledge, without beginning or end”¹¹ and the diversity of many opinions that ultimately disappears when one attains enlightenment (1.1-17).¹² The conclusion is that the path to true knowledge can be found only through yoga. By yogic practice, a person in one’s “own spirit seeks the Universal Spirit by the self [thought oneself]” (1.62).¹³ While the first chapter discusses Hindu philosophy, the next two chapters focus on the human body from a yogic perspective. The second chapter makes analogies between external world phenomena related to energy and internal processes inside one’s body. It establishes that the human body is a microcosm of the universe, directly mapping external cosmic energies to internal bodily processes. It emphasizes that the same principles governing the macrocosm—such as the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, space)—are found within the body, which the yogi must understand and control to achieve spiritual liberation. It describes the concept of nadis (energy channels) and chakras (energy centers) and their role in the flow of prana (energy). It emphasizes the importance of purifying nadis for spiritual awakening. Of 35000 nadis, fourteen are important and only three are vital. These are Ida, Pingala and Sushumna (2.13-15). In the body there is jiva (vital principle) that leads a person to pleasure or misery, depending on one’s karma. The third chapter covers several topics. It explains the importance of the Guru (teacher) in yoga, presents some of the conditions for success in yoga, such as faith and perseverance, proper nutrition and body position, and introduces the four asanas, as well as kumbhakas (breath retention practices) and alternate nasal breathing as part of pranayama (3.22-32). It highlights their benefits for

physical and mental health and for obtaining extraordinary powers, such as prophecy, clairvoyance, and levitation (3.54). The fourth chapter introduces eleven mudras. It presents techniques that can lead to special siddhis (powers), as well as to awakening of the Kundalini (inner dormant energy) and leading it through the chakras to the crown of the head, resulting in enlightenment (4.53-58). The final, fifth chapter is the longest and repeats some topics introduced earlier. It discusses various obstacles spiritual practice, four types of yoga (Mantra Yoga, Laya Yoga, Hatha Yoga, Raja Yoga), the nature of liberation (moksha) and the paths to achieving it, types of students, inner energies and sounds, and a theory of chakras.

Shiva Samhita presents a complex philosophy and physiology of yoga. Although it lists 84 different asanas, it describes only four: *Siddhasana*, *Padmasana*, *Paschimottanasana*, and *Swastikasana*. It introduces four stages of pranayama - 1: Arambha-avastha (the state of beginning); 2: Ghata-avastha (the state of co-operation of Self and Higher Self); 3: Parichaya-avastha (knowledge); 4: Nishpattiavastha (the final consummation). It also discusses mudras, tantric practices, and meditation.

3. *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (haṭhayogapradīpikā, meaning Light on Hatha Yoga), authored by Svātmārāma in the 15th century, is a foundational Sanskrit text compiling earlier teachings to illuminate hatha yoga¹⁴. Several works of early hatha yoga that may have contributed to the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* have been identified.¹⁵ The work is dedicated to The First Lord (Ādinātha), one of the names of Śiva¹⁶. It is the basic text that has been used to study yoga alongside classical texts on such as Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*. Less emphasis is placed in it on yama and niyama, or ethical restraints and personal observations¹⁷, which constitute the two branches of Patanjali’s system. The premise is that to purify the mind, the entire body must undergo a purification process that begins with shatkarma, then progresses to asana and pranayama practice, and culminates in deeper meditation practices. Hatha yoga is practiced as a preparation for raja yoga, but from the beginning it should be practiced in view of higher yoga stages. As this is

¹¹ Ibid., p. 1.

¹² This interpretation is suggested by the translation given by Srisa Chandura Vasu. See *The Shiva Samhita*, transl. Srisa Chandura Vasu (Bahakurganj: Bhuvaneswari Asrama 1914), pp. 1-3 (1.1-17). References in parentheses to this text will therefore follow the standard format: the chapter number and paragraph number.

¹³ If carefully interpreted, the first chapter of *Shiva Samhita* describes the core goal of Yoga: using yogic practices to transcend individual limitations, uniting the personal consciousness (Jiva) with the Universal Consciousness (Brahman) to realize oneness, leading to eternal knowledge (Moksha/Enlightenment) where the seer and the seen become one, realizing all existence as an expression of that single, divine reality. Described metaphorically, it is the spiritual journey from being like a small drop (limited consciousness) to

realizing that a person is one with the entire ocean (Universal Consciousness).

¹⁴ Svatmarama, *The Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, transl. Pancham Sinh (New Delhi: Dev Publishers & Distributors, 2013).

¹⁵ James Mallinson, “Hathayoga’s Philosophy: A Fortuitous Union of Non-Dualities.” *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 42.1 (2014), pp. 225-47.

¹⁶ Svatmarama, *The Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, op. cit., Chapter 1, Verse 1 (1.1). References in parentheses to this text will therefore follow the standard format: the chapter number and verse number.

¹⁷ Yamas include the principles of non-violence, truth, non-stealing, energy conservation, non-possessiveness, and Niyamas refer to purity, contentment, discipline, self-study, surrender to God.

explained: “No success in Rāja Yoga without Hatha Yoga, and no success in Hatha Yoga without Rāja Yoga. One should, therefore, practice both of these well, till complete success is gained” (2.76).

Hatha Yoga Pradipika consists of 389 shlokas (verses) in four chapters. In the first chapter the topics *satkarma* (purification) and *asana* (posture) are discussed, but without giving detailed description. Svātmārāma informs the reader about foods to be avoided, encourages solitude and open mindedness, introduces fifteen asanas, and explains four of them: *Siddhasana* (adept’s pose), *Padmasana* (lotus pose), *Simhasana* (lion’s pose), *Bhadrasana* (gracious pose) (1.17-54). After learning basic asanas, *pranayama* can be practiced. The second chapter focuses on *pranayama* techniques. Controlling the breath is essential for controlling the mind. Svātmārāma introduces alternate nostril breathing, which helps purify the *nodi*, and eight types of *kumbhakas* (breath-holding practices), which lead to *siddhi* (various psychic powers) (2.18). *Kevala Kumbhaka* is the effortless cessation of breath considered the ultimate goal of *pranayama*, achieved after mastering *Sahita Kumbhaka* (breath retention). The practice of *Kevala Kumbhaka* signifies a complete stillness where the gross movements of breath cease, purifies the energy channels (*nadis*) and stimulates the awakening of the *Kundalini*. Svātmārāma writes that those purified through breathing exercises will experience significant bodily changes (2.78). Their bodies will become slimmer, their eyes will become brighter, and their faces will become radiant. The third chapter introduces the ten mudras and their benefits. They prevent bodies from aging and produce *siddhis* (3.6-8). Also, *Kundalini* is discussed and described as the key to liberation (3.104-120). The final, fourth chapter discusses meditation and *samadhi* as a path to personal spiritual development. *Samadhi* symbolizes the unity of the self and universal consciousness. It is natural when *Kundalini* is awakened (4.11) and the *Atman* is centered in *Brahman* (4.55). *Samadhi* is the ultimate path to freedom and happiness.

Hatha Yoga Pradipika provides much information on asanas, *pranayamas*, mudras and other practices. Yet, instruction is often given in a deliberately vague language. Hence, it seems that this text can be used to learn yogic practices only under guidance. Svātmārāma makes frequent remarks throughout the work about the need for the yogi practices to be kept secret. “A Yogi desirous of success should keep the knowledge of Hatha Yoga secret; for it becomes potent by concealing, and impotent by exposing” (1.11). The work is one of the most influential scriptures on

hatha yoga, offering a detailed guide to the physical and mental yogic practices. Its teachings emphasize the importance of discipline, regular practice, and gradual progression through the stages of yoga.

4. *Hatha Ratnavali* (*haṭharatnāvalī*) is a *hatha yoga* text written in the 17th century by Śrīnivāsa¹⁸. There are many misconceptions about the traditional concept and practices of *yoga*. Srinivasa seeks to dispel these misunderstandings and present a clear exposition of yogic science, giving it a new interpretation. The text is divided into four chapters.

In the first chapter, Śrīnivāsa provides various definitions of *yoga* and describes its four types: *Mantra yoga* (based on the unification of *manas*—mind—and *prana*); *Laya yoga* (based on the concentration of the mind, *Saketa*, which occurs at the back of the head, at the level of the center of the eyebrows); *Raja yoga* (in which *prana* is drawn upward and accumulates in the *akash* lotus in the head); and *Hatha yoga*. As in Svātmārāma’s *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, for Śrīnivāsa *hatha yoga* forms the foundation of *raja yoga*. He expands the traditional six purification practices known as *shatkarma* (*Neti*, *Dhauti*, *Nauli*, *Basti*, *Kapalabhati*, *Trataka*) used for preparing the body for meditation and *samadhi*. Instead he proposes *astakarma*—eight practices, adding *Cakri* (churning/abdominal rotation) and *Gajakarani* (elevating abdominal vitality up to the throat) to the traditional six. He criticizes Svātmārāma for omitting these and emphasizes *Cakri* as a core technique that allows the yogi to gain control over all the body’s channels. The goal of these practices is not only to improve physical fitness of the body but also to clean the six chakras and provide a foundation for *pranayama*. The chapter covers many additional topics: the place to practice *yoga*, recommended and prohibited foods, and *siddhis* that can be achieved through *hatha yoga*. In the second chapter to the eight *kumbhakas* types presented in *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* one more is added. Śrīnivāsa describes it by the name of *Bhujangikarana*. He also discusses ten mudras. The third chapter introduces eighty four asanas. But Śrīnivāsa explains thirty six of them in details. In this chapter *pranayama* is also discussed. Chapter four deals with *samadhi*, four stages of progress in *yoga*: *arambha*, *ghata*, *pahcaya* and *nispatti*, and experiences during each of these states.

Hatha Ratnavali represents an ambitious project to clarify and systematize earlier classical works on *hatha yoga*, and particularly *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. It covers many topics including *kriyas* (purification techniques), mudras (gestures), *pranayama* (breath control), eighty four asanas

¹⁸ See M. L. Gharote, Parimal Devmath, Vijay Kant Jha, *Hatharatnāvalī (a treatise on Hathayoga) of Śrīnivāsayogī* (Lonavla : Lonavla Yoga Institute, 2002).

(poses), meditation and samadhi. He also explains the term “hatha yoga,” where „ha“ represents the sun and „tha“ represents the moon that represent nadis: pigala nadi and ida nadi. In Śrīnivāsa’s interpretation, hatha yoga helps to balance these solar and lunar energies, leading to spiritual union (Hatha means force or union). Hatha yoga focuses on preparing the body to awaken Sushumna Nadi, the central energy channel, and achieving balance and higher consciousness. Hence, he clearly presents the scope and content of hatha yoga, more precisely than other classical texts, even if *Hatha Ratnavali* seems unfinished because the last chapter is hurriedly and abruptly ended.¹⁹

The Classical Hatha Yoga Scriptures, Yogic Practices and Pranayama

Similar practices are described in all the classical hatha yoga texts presented above. These are the first kriyas (purification practices), not mentioned only in the *Shiva Samhita*. *Gheranda Samhita* lists six cleansing practices known as shatkarmas (or shatkriyas), which purify the body, balance energy (doshas), and prepare for deeper yoga: Dhauti (internal cleansing), Basti (yogic enema/lower colon cleanse), Neti (nasal cleansing), Nauli/Lauliki (abdominal massage), Trataka (steady gazing), and Kapalbhati (respiratory/frontal brain cleanse). In a detailed presentation, Dhauti are further divided into (1) *Antardhauti* (Internal Cleansing), which includes Vatasara (Wind Passing), Varisara (Water Passing), Agnisara (Fire/Heat Passing), Bahishkrita (External/Blowing Out); (2) *Dantadhauti* (Dental/Mouth Cleansing); (3) *Hridhauti* (Heart/Chest Cleansing), which is cleansing with a stick (Danda Dhauti), vomiting (Vamana Dhauti) and cloth (Vastra Dhauti); and (4) *Mulasodhana* (Anus Cleansing). In *Gheranda Samhita* Basti (or Vasti) are colon cleansing practices, with the two main types being Jala Basti (Water Basti) and Sthala Basti (Dry Basti). Kapalabhati has three types mentioned in the text: Vatakrama (Wind Cleaning – forceful exhalations, passive inhalations, like breath of fire), Vyutkrama (Sinus Cleaning – sniffing water through nostrils and expelling from mouth), and Sitkrama (Mucus Cleaning – drinking water through mouth and expelling from nostrils), all aimed at cleansing the respiratory passages and skull region. Also, *Shiva Samhita* lists similar six cleansing practices, which are likewise called shatkarmas, but they are not divided into types and subtypes. However, *Hatha Ratnavali* brings about a change.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. xvii.

²⁰ Monika Sharma, Rricha Harivedi, S. Unnikrishnan, “Critical Anatomical Review of Siddhasana,” *Journal of Ayurveda and Integrated Medical Sciences*, 10.9 (2025), pp.164-170. <https://jaims.in/jaims/article/view/4762/>

²¹ See Yogita Hiray, Onkar Shinde, “Comparative Analysis of Mudras in Hatha Pradipika and Gheranda Samhita: A Systematic

It expands on traditional shatkarma (six practices or actions) to ashta karmas (eight actions), adding Cakri Karma (rectal cleaning/dilation) and Gaja Karani (a type of vomiting/expulsion from stomach/esophagus) to the standard six outlined in *Gheranda Samhita* in for an enhanced body purification. This emphasizes on internal cleansing for spiritual progress makes the *Hatha Ratnavali* distinct because of its broader scope of yogic purification techniques.

After kriyas, the next practice is asanas. Again, the classical hatha yoga texts differ in their presentation. *Shiva Samhita* highlights four key meditative poses, listing Siddhasana (Perfect/Adept’s Pose, which is often considered the best for meditation²⁰), Padmasana (Lotus Pose), Ugrasana/Simhasana (Lion’s Pose), and Svastikasana (Auspicious Pose), as fundamental, though it mentions eighty four total, while the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* describes fifteen asanas, emphasizing seated postures: Svastikasana (Auspicious Pose), Gomukhasana (Cow Face Pose), Virasana (Hero Pose), Kurmasana (Turtle Pose), Kukkutasana (Cock Pose), Uttana-kurmasana (Stretched Turtle Pose), Dhanurasana (Bow Pose), Matsyasana (Fish Pose), Pascimatana (Seated Forward Bend), Mayurasana (Peacock Pose), Savasana (Corpse Pose), Siddhasana (Perfect Pose), Padmasana (Lotus Pose), Simhasana (Lion Pose), Bhadrasana (Gracious Pose). However, according to some scholars the *Gheranda Samhita* provides a more detailed description of hatha yoga than *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*²¹ and describes 32 asanas: Siddhasana, Padmasana, Bhadrasana, Muktasana, Vajrasana, Svastikasana, Simhasana, Gomukhasana, Virasana, Dhanurasana, Mritisana, Guptasana, Matsyasana, Matsyendrasana, Paschimottanasana, Gorakshasana, Utkatasana, Sankatasana, Mayurasana, Kukkutasana, Kurmasana, Uttana-kurmasana, Mandukasana, Uttanamandukasana, Vrikshasana, Garudasana, Vrishasana, Salabhasana, Makarasana, Ushtrasana, Bhujangasana, Yogasana²². The *Hatha Ratnavali* also describes 32 asanas and mentions 84 of them.

Yoga is a spiritual process divided in stages, whose goal is self-realization and understanding oneself completely in the union with the universal consciousness. Kriyas (bodily and mental purifications) and asanas (right postures) are yoga’s preliminary stages that prepare us for pranayama, dyan (meditation), and samadhi. These stages are expressed in

Review,” *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)*, 14.4 (2025), 803-809. <https://www.ijsr.net/getabstract.php?paperid=SR25408001822>

²² For more details see Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Gheranda Samhita*, op. cit.

the phrase *Karo Asana evam Pranayama*, which means “Do Asanas and Pranayama” and refers to the combination of physical postures and breathing exercises central to yogic practice for calming the mind, increasing life force (prana), and improving health²³. Pranayama can be broadly described as “yogic breathing” or “breath control,” but as Swami Vivekananda and some other scholars have emphasized, pranayama has a wider meaning²⁴. In the Vedas, pranayama is regarded as a “holy science” leading to spiritual development. “Prāṇāyāma means the control over prāṇa”²⁵. However, prāṇa is more than mere breath. It signifies energy or force and can be applied to all forms of energy. In the Sāṃkhya philosophy to which Vivekananda refers, prāṇa is described as “the infinite, omnipresent manifesting power of the universe”²⁶. As I have noted elsewhere, although all forms of energy are prāṇa, yet the “highest and most powerful of all is our thought, which is manifested as the light of understanding.”²⁷ Hence, in Vivekananda’s words: “The science of breathing is the working through the body to reach the mind”²⁸. Thus, pranayama (science of breathing) refers to an extremely powerful technique, not only of breathing, but also of mental control. It ultimately refers leads to samadhi, the highest stage of yoga, which Vivekananda describes as the state of super-consciousness.

The *Gheranda Samhita* lists eight main pranayama breath controlling practices (also called kumbhaka), including Sahita (intentional breath retention linked with inhalation and exhalation), Suryabheda (inhalation through the right nostril, exhalation through the left), Ujjayi (breathing with a characteristic sound in the throat), Sitali or Sheetali (inhalation through a folded tongue), Bhastrika (forced breathing, like a blacksmith’s bellows), Bhramari (breathing like a buzzing bee), Murcha (retention of breath and conscious daze), and Kevali (natural and effortless breathing, based on spontaneous retention)²⁹. These practices build lung capacity, calm the mind, strengthen the nervous system, and enhance mind concentration through timed holds after inhaling (Antara) or exhaling (Bhya).

²³ See Sushim Dubey, *Karo Asana evam Pranayama* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass), 2019.

²⁴ Adam Korab-Karpowicz. “Vivekananda on the Theory and Practice of Prāṇāyāma.” *UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* (UKRJAHS), 1.10 (2025), pp. 12–18. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17818876>

²⁵ Swami Vivikananda, *Raja Yoga* (Leeds: Celephaïs Press, 2003), p. 26.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Adam Korab-Karpowicz, “Vivekananda on the Theory and Practice of Prāṇāyāma,” op. cit., p. 15.

²⁸ See Swami Vivekananda, “Concentration and Breathing,” in *Lectures and Discourses*, Vol. 6, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*.

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* lists similar techniques, but instead of Kevali, it lists Plavini (floating, like a boat), and sometimes instead of Sitala, it lists Sitkari (breathing through clenched teeth). In the *Shiva Samhita* pranayama is only briefly discussed in Chapter 3 in which a few different topics are introduced. It is said that to practice the breath control the yogi should be in a padmasana posture. Twenty kumbhakas (breath retentions) need to be practiced four times a day: early morning, mid-day, sunset and midnight.³⁰ It is the Nadi Shodhana Pranayama technique of alternate nostril breathing for successive respiratory cycle which has a beneficial effect for mind calming³¹. It is described in the *Shiva Samhita* as closing the right nostril with the thumb and inhale through the left, retaining the breath as long as possible and then breathing out through the right nostril slowly. Then the same practice with drawing the breath through the right nostril, retaining it and exhaling gently through the left nostril should be repeated.

In the *Hatha Ratnavali*, as in the *Gheranda Samhita* and the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, eight classical pranayama techniques (kumbhakas) are mentioned in detail: Bhastrika (forced breathing), Bhramari (buzzing bee), Suryabheda (inhalation through the right nostril, exhalation through the left), Ujjayi (creating a vibration in the throat), Sitali (inhalation through a folded tongue), Murcha (retention of breath and conscious daze), Sitkari (inhalation with clenched teeth), and Kevala (effortless, natural retention of breath). The last ninth technique Bhujangikaranam (serpentine movement) is added by Srinivasa. Although usually not listed among the classical “Eight Kumbhakas,” Bhujangikaranam is an important practice for activating energy in the body, often associated with Kundalini. All these key pranayama types aim to purify the body (Shatkarma), awakening spiral energy (Kundalini), and balancing the doshas, involving rapid, forceful inhalations and exhalations to generate internal heat and cleanse energy channels (nadis). By allowing to control the energy (prana) that animates the body and the mind, they help practitioners to reach higher states of consciousness. As the *Shiva*

https://www.ramakrishnavivekananda.info/vivekananda/complete_works.htm

²⁹ Satyanarayan Mishra, Subash Chandra Dash, “An Overview of Hatha Yogic Practices in Hatha yoga Pradipika, Gheranda Samhita and Shiva Samhita,” *Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8.3 (2017), pp. 354-366.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 363.

³¹ Techniques such as Nadi Shodhana (alternate nostril breathing) aim to purify the Ida and Pingala, the two primary energy channels (nadis) in yogic tradition, so that prana can enter the Sushumna Nadi (central energy channel along the spine). For recent research on medical implications of Nadi Shodhana, see Avichal Verma, Sandeep Singh, “The Impact of Nadi Shodhan and Pranakarshan Pranayama on α-EEG among College Going Students,” *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology*, 13.2 (2022), pp. 1-5.

Samhita describes, if the cleansing practice is done properly, nadis will be purified in three months. After the initial purification the yogi enters the first stage of pranayama known as Aarambavastha (beginning stage). The next stages are Ghata Avastha (breath control unites Prana/Apana, powers attained), Parichaya Avastha (prana enters Sushumna³²), and Nishpatti Avastha (liberation, immortality, Samadhi attained). Pranayama, as a disciplined practice, recognizes the intimate connection between breath and consciousness. The rhythmic regulation of breath becomes a transformative tool, leading the practitioner from initial purification to complete spiritual mastery and liberation (moksha).

Conclusion

The additional, upper level practices of yoga that are discussed in the four classical hatha yoga scriptures are mudras (hand gestures that lead to steadiness), pratyaharas (techniques of sensory withdrawal), dharana (focusing the mind of a single point: mantra, external or internal object), dhyana (meditation), Samadhi (self-knowledge and self-realization). Each classical text has its benefits, but also shortcomings. For example, the *Hatha Ratnavali* describes in details kriyas (purification practices) and expands them to ashtakarmas (eight practices). It provides an elaborate description of the asanas, which makes it distinct from other hatha yoga texts, and adds Bhujangikaranam to the classical "eight kumbhakas." However, it also misses some important details and seems "hurriedly finished."³³

On the basis of the comparison between the classical hatha yoga texts, it is possible to conclude that the *Gheranda Samhita* is the most comprehensive of all of them. It looks at yoga holistically and does not reduce hatha yoga to bodily exercises or a means for mental well-being, but regards it as a way of the knowledge of Ultimate Reality. It offers a seventhfold path to personal perfection. It describes yoga as six limbed, which means that it considers its six stages. While samadhi is the seventh perfect stage, the seven chapters of the *Gheranda Samhita* correspond to the seven steps in the ladder to perfect a person. All subjects: purifications, asanas, mudras, pratyahara, pranayama, dhyana, samadhi are treated in great details. Not only various types of shatkarmas, thirty two asanas, eight pranayama types and twenty five mudras are described, as in no other classical work, but also five meditation techniques (dhyana), which are discussed in details: Parthivi, Ambhasi, Agni, Vayavi, Akasi, as well as six

techniques of samadhi: Dhyanyoga, Nadayoga, Rasananda, Layasiddhi, Bhaktiyoga, Rajayoga.

There are thus differences between the classical hatha yoga texts. The *Gheranda Samhita* represents perhaps the most comprehensive approach; the *Shiva Samhita* is the most philosophical one, offering the access to the depth of the ancient Hindu mind; the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* provides a useful practical guidance, and the *Hatha Ratnavali* offers a new bold interpretation all previous knowledge. All texts are an attempt to integrate physical, mental, and spiritual practices into a holistic knowledge serving human perfection and offering a roadmap for the journey of self-discovery and spiritual growth. All of them deserve studying them in details and practicing their lessons with discipline and patience.

Appendix. Summary of Pranayama in the Classical Hatha Yoga works

Gheranda Samhita. Practices on Pranayama are described in the fifth chapter, which begins with the words of Sage Gheranda "Now I shall tell thee the rules of Pranayama or regulation of breath. By its practice man becomes like a god."

There are eight kumbhakas (retensions of breath): Sahita, Surya-bheda, Ujjayi, Śitali, Bhastrika, Bhramari, Murchha, Kevali. The Sahita Kumbhaka is divided on two sorts: Sagarbha, which is performed with repetition of Bija Mantra and Nirgarbha, which is done without such repetition. Sahita Kumbhaka is divided into two types based on the use of mantras. Samhita. Sagarbha Kumbhaka is performed with the mental repetition of Bija Mantras during inhalation, retention, and exhalation. Nirgarbha (or Nigarbha) Kumbhaka is done without these mantras. Alternate nostril breathing is used. Pranayama should be performed by sitting in Sukhasana asana and facing North or East.

Practicing pranayama leads to extraordinary effects, such as levitation. It helps to calm the mind, maintain good health, cure diseases and stimulate mental powers, such as clairvoyance. Ujjayi Kumbhaka destroys decay and death. But the most perfect one is Kevali Kumbhaka. Having performed it led a person withdraw from all objects and have attention focused on the space between two eye brows. According Sage Gheranda, the person who "knows Pranayama and Kevali is a real Yogi."

Siva Samhita. The practice of pranayama is described in third chapter entitled *On Yoga Practice. The Vayus*. There is description of alternate breathing. The pingala (right nostril) should be closed and inspire the air through the Ida (the left nostril) and keep the air confined as long as he can,

which is the ultimate goal of meditation, as the energy moves from the left (Ida) and right (Pingala) channels to the central.

³² When prana enters the Sushumna Nadi (central energy channel along the spine) during yoga practice, a profound spiritual transformation occurs. The Kundalini energy awakens and rises through the chakras, bringing peace, balance and enlightenment,

³³ M. L. Gharote, Parimal Devmath, Vijay Kant Jha, *Hatharatnāvalī*, op. cit., pp. xix-xxxii.

and afterwards breath out slowly through the right nostril. The practitioner should repeat the same exercise by changing the side and inspiring air through the right nostril and expelling through the left. This practice should be combined with twenty kumbhakas (retention of breath) practiced four times a day: in the morning, mid-day, sunset, mid-night.

After the regular practice for three months, the nadis (energy channels) of the body will be purified and simultaneously all the defects are destroyed. Then the practitioner can enter the first stage in the practice of pranayama called Arambha-avastha, which is focused on breath, leading to physical signs like perspiration, trembling, or involuntary movements (like a frog jumping) as the body adjusts. In the next stage, Ghata-avastha (Pot Stage), a connection between breath (prana/apana), mind (manas/buddhi), and spirit (Jivatman/Paramatman), occurs, signifying a stable, mental state. The Parichaya-avastha (Familiarization Stage) involves deeper integration and mastery, moving beyond the initial physical manifestations of breath. Nishpatti-avastha (Perfection Stage) is the final stage of mastery of pranayama.

However, *Siva Samhita* does not provide a detailed description of these four stages of pranayama. Their further explanation is left to the guru's guidance, focusing on their initial physical signs. These stages involve subtle internal shifts in energy (prana) and consciousness, making them hard to describe. While the scripture outlines a general path, the lived understanding requires a guide to interpret the inner phenomena, as highlighted in texts like the *Siva Samhita*.

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika. Pranayama is described in the second chapter, which starts with admonition that it should be practiced as instructed by the guru. The exercises of breath control should be done in Padmasana posture. The air should be inhaled through the left nostril (Ida/Moon), then holding breath (Kumbhakam), and exhaling right (Pingala/Sun). By practicing in this way, through the right and left nostril alternatively, nadis become clean. This should be practiced four times a day (morning, noon, evening and midnight), with the goal of eighty kumbhakas per one time.

When pranayama is practiced properly, it cures all diseases; when wrongly it can lead to illness. Therefore, a proper guidance is important. The air should be expelled with proper tact and should be filled in skillfully. There are various kinds of kumbhakas (breath retention exercises) aimed at obtaining different siddhis (yogic powers). *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* lists them as: Suryabhedha (Sun-Piercing Breath, inhaling through the right nostril, cooling and heating the energy), Ujjayi (Victorious Breath, a gentle constriction in the throat, creating a soft oceanic sound, promoting calm), Sitkari (Hissing Breath, inhaling with the tongue between the teeth, making a

hissing sound, cooling the body), Sitali Sitali (Cooling Breath, inhaling with the tongue rolled, cooling the system), Bhastrika (Bellows Breath, powerful, rapid inhalation and exhalation, generating heat and energy), Bhramari (Humming Bee Breath, inhaling and exhaling with a humming sound, calming the mind), Murccha (Fainting Breath, retention and tilting the head back, leading to a trance-like state), Plavini (Floating Breath, swallowing air, giving a feeling of lightness). These practices focus on breath control for physical and energetic benefits, leading to profound meditative states and abilities, influencing well-being, energy levels, and consciousness.

Pranayama is of three types Puraka (inhalation), Kumbhaka (retention), Rechaka (exhalation). The practice of Kumbhaka starts from Sahita (retention assisted by inhalation Puraka and exhalation Recaka, in which breath is held between these activities) to Kevala (spontaneous retention that occurs naturally without them). Kevala Kumbhaka signifies a profound state where the breath stops spontaneously, allowing the mind to withdraw from distractions and achieve deep concentration. Mastering it is crucial in Hatha Yoga, leading to Kundalini arousal and unobstructed Sushumna (central energy channel), ultimately paving the way for Raja Yoga by quieting the yogi's mind.

Hatha Ratnavali. Pranayama is described in chapter three. After removing impurities through kriyas (purification techniques) and having mastered basic asanas, those who are self-restrained and moderate, particularly regarding food can undertake the practice of pranayama. Again, a similar technique as in other classical works is prescribed. The practitioner should sit in Padmasana, and then engage in a yogic breathing technique, which is a combination of Surya Bhedana (Right Nostril Breathing), Chandra Bhedana (Left Nostril Breathing), and Nadi Shodhana (Alternate Nostril Breathing), focusing on purifying energy channels (nadis) by alternating inhalation and exhalation through specific nostrils (Ida - left/moon; Pingala - right/sun) while holding breath (Kumbhaka), leading to deep purification and balance of energies over time. The number of eighty rounds of this exercise should be practiced gradually increasing four times a day, in the morning, noon, evening, and midnight. The yogis get purification of the nadis after three months. In the text is also described the technique of smarta pranayama which is practiced accompanied with the recitation of om (Pranava), vyarti, gayatri and śiras. Pranayama purifies all morbidities. A lower stage of pranayama generates perspiration, medium causes tremors, higher develops siddhis and makes the yogi levitate during its practice. The part of the chapter dedicated to pranayama ends with the following words: *According to Siva — A yogi, who is devoted to the practice of pränäyäma is like visnu and mahesvara. Such a yogi is a representation of all the gods. One should not disrespect such a yogi.*