Unit 3.2. Texts with special reference to Hatha Yoga

Theoretical Subject 1: Basics of Yoga

Unit 3: Foundations of Haṭha Yoga — Texts, Principles, and Practice

Unit 3.2: Texts with Special Reference to Haṭha Yoga

3.2.1 Orientation: why study the Haṭha corpus

Haṭha Yoga did not appear as a single book or school but as a **stream of manuals** composed over several centuries. These works share a practical aim: **stabilize and refine the body–breath–mind system so that meditation becomes natural**. They teach cleansing procedures (*śatkarman*), postures (*āsana*), breath regulations (*prāṇāyāma*), neuro-myofascial locks and seals (*bandha–mudrā*), and inner sound/absorption (*nāda, laya*). Each text addresses similar goals with distinct emphases, audiences, and pedagogic sequences. Reading them comparatively helps students understand **what to practice, when, and why**, and how Haṭha methods function as a **physiological bridge to the psychological stillness** of Rājayoga.

3.2.2 The major Haṭha Yoga texts at a glance

Text (approx. century)	Authorship (tradition)	Structure	Signature emphases	Audience tone
Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā (HYP) (15th)	Svātmārāma	4 chapters	āsana; prāṇāyāma & **śatkarman**; **mudrā-bandha & kuṇḍalinī**; **nāda–laya**	Practitioner's handbook; bridge to Rājayoga
Gheraṇḍa Saṁhitā (GS) (17th)	Sage Gheraṇḍa to Canda Kapālī	7 "limbs"	**Śatkarman-first** pedagogy; wide repertoire of kriyās; graded programs	Systematic, instructional
Śiva Saṁhitā (SS) (14th–17th)	Śaiva dialogic text	5 chapters (var.)	Subtle anatomy (nāḍī–cakra), mantra & meditation, householder eligibility	Inclusive, philosophical-practical
Gorakṣaśataka / Gorakṣapaddhati (11th–13th)	Gorakṣanātha lineage	Verses/sections	Early **bandha–mudrā** focus, suṣumnā, kuṇḍalinī	Concise, technical seeds
Haṭha Ratnāvalī (HR) (17th)	Śrīnivāsa	Thematic lists	Cataloguing of **āsanas (84+)**, prāṇāyāma variants, practice notes	Referential, enumerative
Dattātreya Yoga Śāstra (DYS) (12th–13th)	Dialogue with Dattātreya	Mixed	Integrates Haṭha with mantra, laya, and rāja perspectives	Synthetic, ecumenical
Siddha-Siddhānta Paddhati (SSP) (medieval)	Gorakṣanātha (trad.)	Aphoristic	Siddha doctrine, body as microcosm, praxis rationale	Philosophical scaffolding
Yoga Yājñavalkya (early medieval)	Yājñavalkya–Gārgī dialogue	Prose/verses	āsana, prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhyāna; not strictly "Haṭha", yet formative	Bridge between classical & Haṭha

Śaṭkarman locus classicus (HYP 2.23)
"धौतिर्बस्तिस्तथा नेतिस्त्राटकं नौलिका तथा ।

कपालभातिश्चैतानि षटकर्माणि प्रचक्षते ॥"

Dhauti, basti, neti, trāṭaka, naulī and kapālabhāti are known as the six purificatory acts.

3.2.3 Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā (HYP): the core manual

Pedagogic arc. HYP proceeds from **stability (āsana)** to **breath-clearing (prāṇāyāma & śatkarman)**, then to **pressure and prāṇa direction (bandha–mudrā)**, culminating in **nāda-anusandhāna** (inner sound attention) and **laya** (absorption). Svātmārāma repeatedly frames Haṭha as a **means to Rājayoga**, underscoring that the ultimate fruit is **meditative stillness**, not physical display.

Practice character. Movement and stillness are married to **mildness, regularity, and non-injury**. Even when terms like "haṭha" are glossed as "force," the intended force is **steadfast discipline**, not aggression.

Sanskrit anchors.

- **HYP 2.23** (śaṭkarman list) — quoted above.
- Guidance throughout that **measured diet (mithāhāra)**, **cleanliness (śauca)**, and **company of the wise** protect the practice.

3.2.4 Gheraṇḍa Saṁhitā (GS): sapta-aṅga pedagogy

Seven-limb scheme. GS arranges training as **śatkarman → āsana → mudrā → pratyāhāra → prāṇāyāma → dhyāna → samādhi**. Beginning with cleansing highlights **hygiene, readiness, and safety** before deep breathwork. The text offers numerous **kriyās** with practical instructions and **graded sequences**, making it valuable when designing semester curricula.

Pedagogic contribution. By placing **mudrā** as an independent limb (not just an adjunct), GS brings **bandha–mudrā** to the center of Haṭha method, preparing the substrate for interiorization.

3.2.5 Śiva Saṁhitā (SS): householder-friendly subtle anatomy

Scope. SS treats **nāḍī, cakra, prāṇa**, mantra and meditation with **explicit inclusion of householders** as eligible practitioners. Its **philosophical tolerance** allows multiple entry points—devotion, mantra, breath, and posture—while elaborating the **microcosm–macrocosm** imagination typical of the medieval yoga milieu.

Use for learners. SS helps students **contextualize** techniques within a larger **energetic map** without making advanced physiology a prerequisite for beginning practice.

3.2.6 Gorakṣa corpus: the bandha–mudrā seedbed

The **Gorakṣaśataka** and related texts are compact verse collections that concentrate on **mūla, uḍḍīyāna, jālandhara bandha**, **mahā-mudrā/mahā-bandha/mahā-vedha**, and **suṣumnā activation**. They provide terse definitions whose **spirit** is amplified by later manuals. For modern students, these works clarify **why** bandha–mudrā are not ornaments but **functional levers** for pressure regulation and prāṇa direction.

3.2.7 Haṭha Ratnāvalī (HR): catalogues and codifications

HR is known for **enumerations**—notably **84 āsanas**, breath variants, and practical cautions. While less discursive, such catalogues are useful when **mapping the terrain** and understanding how later lineages compiled and transmitted **practice lists**.

3.2.8 Dattātreya Yoga Śāstra (DYS): an integrative voice

DYS presents a **broad synthesis**: mantra, laya, rāja, and haṭha all converge on **stability of mind**. The text explicitly validates **multiple routes**—a reminder that Haṭha is not sectarian but **complementary** to other paths. For first-semester learners, DYS legitimizes **mantra and bhakti** alongside posture and breath as **equal gateways** to the same summit.

3.2.9 Siddha-Siddhānta Paddhati (SSP): the siddha rationale

SSP offers **doctrinal scaffolding** from the Nātha tradition: the **body as a perfected field**, **breath as a vehicle**, and **inner fire** as transformative. While philosophical, its import for practice is clear: **discipline refines embodiment** until **clarity** shines through the very processes that once bound attention.

3.2.10 Yoga Yājñavalkya: an early bridge

Although not a Haṭha manual in the narrow sense, **Yoga Yājñavalkya** integrates **āsana, prāṇāyāma (with ratios), pratyāhāra, and meditation** in a dialogic format. It demonstrates that **somatic–respiratory training** pre-dates the medieval Haṭha compendia and stands in **continuity** with classical concerns.

3.2.11 Comparative focus: what each text contributes to a modern syllabus

Syllabus function	Primary sources	What the text adds
Safe cleansing foundations	HYP ch. 2; GS limb 1	Definitions, indications, cautions (e.g., jala-neti, trāṭaka)
Stability via āsana	HYP ch. 1; HR lists	Families of postures, alignment cues, sequencing ideas
Breath regulation	HYP ch. 2; GS limb 5; YY sections	Gentle baselines (dīrgha, nāḍī-śodhana), ratio logic, progressions
Bandha–mudrā literacy	Gorakṣa corpus; HYP ch. 3; GS limb 3	Mechanisms (pressure/prāṇa), safety, role in suṣumnā-oriented practice
Meditation & inner sound	HYP ch. 4; SS chapters; DYS	From attention placement to **nāda-anusandhāna** and **laya**
Philosophical horizon	SS; SSP; DYS	Householder eligibility, siddha doctrine, non-sectarian synthesis

3.2.12 Classical lines worth remembering (with simple sense)

- **HYP 2.23** — śaṭkarman list (quoted above).
- **Yoga Sūtra 2.46** — "स्थिरसुखमासनम् ।" *Āsana is steady and easeful* (Haṭha adopts this ethos even while expanding the toolset).

PDF generated on 04 Feb 2026, 06:32 pm IST

- **Yoga Sūtra 1.27–28** — "तस्य वाचकः प्रणवः । तज्जपस्तदर्थभावनम् ।" *Oṁ is the expression of Īśvara; repeat it and reflect on its meaning* (connects Haṭha with mantra/laya emphasis).

3.2.13 How to read Haṭha texts responsibly (student perspective)

1. **Context before technique.** Many procedures presume **ethical restraint, measured diet, adequate sleep**, and **gradualism**.
2. **Safety filters.** Strong **kumbhaka**, **naulī**, and internal **dhauti/basti** are **specialized**; modern curricula appropriately prioritize **gentle, supervised** variants.
3. **Aim clarity.** The endpoint is **equanimity and absorption**, not extreme contortion. If a method **inflames** restlessness or pain, the **dose or choice** is wrong.
4. **Continuity with Rājayoga.** Haṭha is **physiology in service of psychology**; it does not replace **dhyāna**, it **enables** it.

Unit Summary

The Haṭha corpus is a family of practical manuals converging on a single aim: **make meditation natural by refining body, breath, and prāṇa**. **Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā** offers a compact four-chapter curriculum; **Gheraṇḍa Saṁhitā** begins with cleansing in a seven-limb sequence; **Śiva Saṁhitā** grants householder access and a rich energetic map; the **Gorakṣa** works seed the **bandha–mudrā** tradition; **Haṭha Ratnāvalī** catalogues techniques; **Dattātreya Yoga Śāstra** integrates multiple yogas; **Siddha-Siddhānta Paddhati** supplies doctrinal rationale; **Yoga Yājñavalkya** shows earlier continuity between somatic and contemplative training. Studying them together gives the student a **coherent picture of method, safety, and purpose** within Haṭha Yoga.

Key Terms

- **Ṣaṭkarman** — six cleansings: *dhauti, basti, neti, trāṭaka, naulī, kapālabhāti*
- **Bandha / Mudrā** — locks/seals regulating pressure and prāṇa direction
- **Suṣumnā** — central channel emphasized for interiorization
- **Nāda-anusandhāna / Laya** — inner sound attention / absorption
- **Mithāhāra** — measured diet supporting practice
- **Sapta-aṅga (GS)** — seven-limb scheme beginning with cleansing
- **Pradīpikā** — "lamp/illumination," as in *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā*

Self-Assessment

MCQs

1. Which text most systematically integrates **mudrā–bandha** with **kuṇḍalinī** orientation?
   a) Haṭha Ratnāvalī   b) Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā   c) Nyāya Sūtra   d) Puruṣa Sūkta
2. The **seven-limb** approach beginning with **ṣaṭkarman** is presented in:
   a) Gheraṇḍa Saṁhitā   b) Śiva Saṁhitā   c) Dattātreya Yoga Śāstra   d) Yoga Yājñavalkya
3. A text noted for **householder eligibility** and **subtle anatomy** is:
   a) Śiva Saṁhitā   b) Gorakṣaśataka   c) Sāṅkhya Kārikā   d) Vedānta Sūtra
4. The classical **ṣaṭkarman** list occurs verbatim in:
   a) Yoga Sūtra 2.29   b) Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā 2.23   c) Gītā 6.23   d) Haṭha Ratnāvalī preface
5. The statement "Haṭha as a **means to Rājayoga**" is most explicitly modeled by the structure of:

---

a) Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā   b) Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī   c) Caraka Saṁhitā   d) Manu Smṛti

Answer key: 1-b, 2-a, 3-a, 4-b, 5-a

Short Answer

1. Compare the pedagogic sequences of **HYP** and **GS**. How would each influence the order of techniques in a semester plan?
2. Explain, in 5–7 sentences, how **bandha–mudrā** serve as functional levers for directing **prāṇa** toward **suṣumnā**.
3. What does **Dattātreya Yoga Śāstra** contribute to an inclusive understanding of practice pathways?

Reflective Prompt

Choose one week to study with the **lens of a single text** (e.g., HYP or SS). Note one **practice emphasis** you selected from that text and one **inner quality** you observed (e.g., steadier breath, quieter self-talk, ease at rest). Reflect on how that week changed your appreciation of Haṭha's purpose.

End of Unit 3.2: Texts with Special Reference to Haṭha Yoga

PDF generated on 04 Feb 2026, 06:32 pm IST