



The Identification of an Illustrated Haṭhayoga Manuscript and Its Significance for Traditions of 84 Āsanas in Yoga

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Abstract

This article identifies an illustrated Haṭhayoga manuscript preserved in the British Library (London) and discusses the manuscript's significance in the context of traditions of 84 postures (*āsana*) in Yoga.

Keywords

haṭhayoga, yoga postures, āsana, mudrā, *Goraḥśasataka*, *Sivasambhitā*, *Haṭhapradīpikā*, *Gheraṇḍa-Saṃhitā*, Siddhas, *Haṭharatnāvalī*, *Jogaḥpradīpikā*

Introduction

In two versions of an article published in 1985, Jeremiah Losty describes in some detail an illustrated Haṭhayoga manuscript (Add. 24099) preserved in the British Library. The document was removed from the library of the Rānī of Jhansi in central India in 1858 and donated to the British Library in 1861. It was briefly described for the first time in a manuscript catalogue compiled by Blumhardt in 1899.¹ This manuscript is quite unique in that it contains, in addition to text portions and to several other representations, coloured paintings of 84 Yoga postures (*āsana*) and 24 'seals' (*mudrā*) by an unknown artist. Losty characterises the paintings as executed in the Rājput style with elements of the Kangra idiom. Based on stylistic considerations, he assigns the manuscript to the Panjab and dates it to about 1830.

The document consists of 118 folios measuring 8 1/2 by 4 1/2 inches and includes:

- 1) a painting of Śiva as an ascetic instructing a group of devotees, with Pārvati seated on his left thigh (fol. 1);

¹ Blumhardt 1899, p. 63.

- 2) a painting of a four-armed Gaṇeśa with his consort (fol. 2);
- 3) a text section with 84 paintings, numbered from 1 to 84, illustrating 84 Yoga postures (*āsana*) (fols. 3–86);
- 4) a text section with 24 paintings illustrating 24 ‘seals’ (*mudrā*) (fols. 87–117);
- 5) and a painting of a perfected Yogin (fol. 118) showing the *kuṇḍalinī*, the *cakras* and deities populating his different body parts.

The language of the text can be characterised as a mixed Hindī with Braj Bhāṣā, Kharī Bolī and semi-Sanskritic forms.

The manuscript and its paintings

The coloured paintings depict the Yogins who perform *āsanas* as of bluish complexion, while the practitioners of *mudrās* are yellowish. The Yogins are covered only with a loincloth, have long hair, which is sometimes tied in a knot, and are frequently represented on a tiger or antelope skin, as traditionally recommended for practitioners. They are often accompanied by an attendant of yellowish or reddish complexion, who is either standing by or performing chores. A lotus pond is frequently seen to the front, and a natural landscape with trees and occasionally buildings in the background. The artistic quality of the paintings is high throughout the manuscript.

Several of the manuscript’s 111 paintings have been published by Losty and others, but the manuscript has long remained unidentified.

The context: traditions of 84 āsanas in Yoga

The text with the paintings of the 84 postures allows us to place the manuscript in a tradition which assumes an original corpus of 84 *āsanas* in Yoga, and it is in texts of this tradition that we need to look for clues to identify the text.

The *Goraḁśaśataka* ascribed to Gorakhnāth (also known as Gorakṣanātha) may be the oldest of the sources in this tradition. It is extant in several recensions, the earliest dating perhaps from the thirteenth or fourteenth century. Here we find the statement that Śiva extracted and taught 84 postures from a total number of 84 lakṣas (= 84 times 100,000). Similar statements appear in texts such as the *Śiva-saṁhitā*, dating perhaps from the fifteenth century, the fifteenth- to sixteenth-century *Haṁhapradīpikā* by Svātmārāma, and the *circa* seventeenth- to eighteenth-century *Gheraṁḁa-Saṁhitā*. However, none of these texts describes or even lists 84 postures. The texts describe a much smaller

number of *āsanas* as important, which are said to have been selected from the 84. The number and names of the *āsanas* chosen differ in the texts. From the legendary 84 *āsanas*, the *Gorakṣaśataka* selects only two *āsanas* as important: Siddhāsana and the lotus posture (Kamalāsana). The *Śiva-Saṃhitā* specifies four postures, Siddhāsana, Padmāsana, Ugrāsana (also called Paścimottāna) and Svastikāsana. Are the 84 postures, then, to be found anywhere, or is this number just a fiction?

Not only are the postures in Yoga said to number 84 but so also do those in Kāmaśāstra texts. One encounters this number in other contexts as well. Thus, we find a description of 84 phallic representations (*liṅga*) of Śiva, listings of names of 84 Tantras and so forth. Multiples of the number 84 are also in use. The number 84,000, therefore, is frequent in Buddhist literature and stands for an extraordinary large and complete number: 84,000 *stūpas* are said to have been built by Aśoka, one each for the relics of the Buddha, and there are references to 84,000 kinds of enlightenment through Amitābha. It is apparent that the number 84 is a symbolic number, traditionally signifying completeness, and in some cases, sacredness. What must have been most important and relevant for the Yoga tradition was the tradition of 84 Mahāsiddhas, whose names are recorded in a number of lists, in which they vary considerably. Groups of 84 Siddhas, known to Buddhists and Hindus, are frequently represented in art and occasionally also as having assumed yogic postures.

Underscoring the purely mystical nature of the number 84, Shashibhusan Dasgupta, author of the 1946 publication *Obscure Religious Cults*, remarks: 'As a matter of fact, we do not find even these eighty-four *Āsanas* described anywhere, only a few of them being described in the Yogic and Tāntric literature'.²

The identification of the manuscript

However, Dasgupta's statement can be shown to be inaccurate. I have in fact been able to find two texts, dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, each of which lists one set of 84 postures, and one of which also provides descriptions of these postures. In addition, I have come across sets of paintings and line drawings from Rajasthan and Nepal, without text, in which 84 postures are represented. The sequence of the postures in one of the texts matches that found in the manuscript of the British Library and allowed me to identify the text of the British Library manuscript. It consists of fairly long

² Dasgupta 1946, p. 205.

extracts from two different sections of the *Jogapradīpakā*.³ The *Jogapradīpakā* is a text in mixed Hindī written in 1737. Its author, Jayatarāma, also known as Jaitrāma or Jayatīrāma, informs us that he wrote the work in Vṛndāvana, North India, where he lived, and that he was a disciple of Payaharibābā. One source identifies Payaharibābā with Kṛṣṇadāsa who occupied the seat (*pīṭha*) of his sect in Galta (Jaipur). The *Jogapradīpakā* was edited in 1999 by the late Manohar L. Gharote, on the basis of two incomplete manuscripts. It consists of eight sections, of which section 3 describes *āsanas*.

The place of the *Jogapradīpakā* in the Yogic tradition and its significance

How does the *Jogapradīpakā* fit into the group of texts which assume a corpus of 84 postures? The *Jogapradīpakā* is clearly influenced by Svātmārāma's *Haṭhapradīpikā*, which it acknowledges as one of its sources. But unlike the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, which only refers to 84 postures without listing their names, the *Jogapradīpakā* provides detailed information about them. We do not know whether Jayatarāma compiled the list of the names of the 84 postures and their descriptions himself, using source material at his disposal, or whether he copied them from a single source. His list of postures differs considerably from that found in the *Haṭharatnāvalī*, a seventeenth-century text by Śrīnivāsa from Āndhra, South India, which also provides the names of 84 postures (but describes only 36). Jayatarāma's list of postures is found in the Appendix to this article. It appears to have been compiled—either by Jayatarāma or his predecessor(s)—from disparate sources. A comparatively large number of postures are named after Siddhas (nos. 12, 52–8). Some *āsana* names are Sanskrit, while others are derived from vernaculars. As the editor of the *Jogapradīpakā*, Manohar L. Gharote notes, 70 of the 84 *āsanas* are described similarly in the *Yogāsana-mālā*.⁴ This text was written in 1768, possibly also by Jayatarāma, who would then have authored it after the composition of the *Jogapradīpakā*. As many as 26 of the *āsanas* are also described in manuscript 6756 of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* preserved in the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jodhpur.⁵ The *āsanas* in the *Jogapradīpakā* differ considerably from those in contemporary traditions. Standing postures, quite popular in modern Yoga,

³ The text on fols. 3–86 of the manuscript in the British Library, which describes the 84 *āsanas*, was extracted from chapter 3 of the *Jogapradīpakā* (pp. 7,2–36,2). The text on fols. 87–117 of the manuscript, which describes the 24 *mudrās*, was extracted from chapter 5 of the *Jogapradīpakā* (pp. 53,9–71,14).

⁴ Cf. Gharote's preface to his edition of the *Jogapradīpakā* (Gharote 1999, pp. 2, 3).

⁵ Gharote, *ibid*.

are completely absent. The performance of most *āsanas* is accompanied by the fixation of the gaze (*dr̥ṣṭi*) either on the tip of the nose or in between the eyebrows. Some *āsanas* are combined with *prāṇāyāma* exercises and are held for a long time. Thus Paścimatāṇa āsana (no. 7) is recommended for a period of three to six hours and that of the Kapālī āsana (no. 17), for three hours.

Given the late date of the *Jogapradīpakā*, we cannot assume that it describes an ancient set of postures. Such an ancient tradition of 84 postures is not accessible to us, nor is there any evidence that it ever existed.

As stated before, Losty dates the paintings of the British Library manuscript to about 1830. If he is correct, they were prepared about 100 years after the composition of the *Jogapradīpakā*. They were obviously commissioned to illustrate the descriptions of the *āsanas* and *mudrās* found in two sections of the text of the *Jogapradīpakā*.

The illustrated manuscript in the British Library, which has now been identified, is significant for the following reasons:

- 1) It is the only illustrated manuscript of the *Jogapradīpakā* known so far. Its paintings of Yogic postures and *mudrās* are of high artistic value. Among the sources illustrating sets of 84 postures, this manuscript certainly occupies a foremost position.
- 2) The text of the British Library document represents an additional manuscript source for section 3 and part of section 5 of the *Jogapradīpakā*. This source was unknown to the editor of the published text, who based his edition on two other incomplete manuscripts. For a critical edition and study of the *Jogapradīpakā*, the text and paintings of the British Library manuscript will be important source material which will need to be considered.

The entire set of paintings of the 84 *āsanas* from the manuscript in the British Library is reproduced in my study *Eighty-four Āsanās in Yoga: A Survey of Traditions (with Illustrations)*.⁶

⁶ Published by D. K. Printworld, New Delhi, 2007.

Appendix: The 84 āsanas according to the manuscript of the *Jogapradīpakā* in the British Library (Add. 24099)⁷

(The names are listed as inscribed on the manuscript's paintings. Forms of the names in square brackets are variants appearing in the text section of the manuscript.)

- 1) Svastika [Svastaka] āsana
- 2) Padmāsana
- 3) Netī āsana
- 4) Udara āsana
- 5) Saptariṣi āsana
- 6) Pūrva āsana
- 7) Paścimatāṇa āsana
- 8) Vajrasīṅghāra āsana
- 9) Sūrya āsana
- 10) Gorakhajāli āsana
- 11) Anasuyā [Anusūyā] āsana
- 12) Machendra āsana
- 13) Bhairū āsana
- 14) Mahāmudrā āsana
- 15) Jonimudrā āsana
- 16) Mayūra āsana
- 17) Kapālī āsana
- 18) Siva āsana
- 19) Phodyā āsana
- 20) Mākaḍa āsana
- 21) Para āsana
- 22) Bhadrakorakha āsana
- 23) Ruṇḍa āsana
- 24) Jogapada āsana
- 25) Cakrī āsana
- 26) Ātamārāma [Ātamarāma] āsana
- 27) Mṛtyubhañjika āsana
- 28) Vṛścika āsana
- 29) Viparīta āsana
- 30) Veda āsana

⁷ A detailed list of names and their variants according to the published text of the *Jogapradīpakā* and the manuscript in the British Library is found in my book, *Eighty-four Āsanās in Yoga: A Survey of Traditions (with Illustrations)*.

- 31) Gohī āsana
- 32) Kocika āsana
- 33) Tapakara āsana
- 34) Bhiṇḍoka āsana
- 35) Brahmajurāṅkusa āsana
- 36) Andha āsana
- 37) Miśrikā āsana
- 38) Aghora āsana
- 39) Vijoga āsana
- 40) Joni āsana
- 41) Bodhasoka āsana
- 42) Bhaga āsana
- 43) Rudra āsana
- 44) Baddhapadmā (*sic*) āsana (= Baddhapadmāsana)
- 45) Sivaliṅga āsana
- 46) Machindra āsana (second [*dutiya*] variety)
- 47) Vālamika āsana
- 48) Vyāsa āsana
- 49) Dattadigambara āsana
- 50) Siddhisamādhi āsana
- 51) Carapaṭacauka āsana
- 52) Gvālīpāu [Gvālīpāva] āsana
- 53) Katerīpāu āsana (for Kanerīpāva āsana)
- 54) Hālīpāva āsana
- 55) Mīḍakīpāva āsana
- 56) Jalandharīpāva āsana
- 57) Gopīcanda āsana
- 58) Bharatharī āsana
- 59) Vasīṣṭha āsana
- 60) Citra āsana
- 61) Añjanī āsana
- 62) Sāvitrī āsana
- 63) Garuḍa āsana
- 64) Sukadeva āsana
- 65) Nārada āsana
- 66) Narasiṃgha āsana
- 67) Varāha āsana
- 68) Kapila āsana
- 69) Yatī āsana
- 70) Vṛhaspati (= Bṛhaspati) [Vrahaspati] āsana

- 71) Pārvatī āsana
- 72) Kukkuṭa āsana
- 73) Kākabhuṣuṇḍī āsana
- 74) Siddhaharatālī āsana
- 75) Sumati āsana
- 76) Kalyāna āsana
- 77) Urdhabhava āsana
- 78) Masaka āsana
- 79) Brahma āsana
- 80) Anila āsana
- 81) Kūrmāsana
- 82) Nagna [Nagra] āsana
- 83) Parasarāma āsana
- 84) Siddha āsana

Colour Plates: Paintings of *āsanas* 1–12 from the set of 84 *āsanas* in the manuscript of the *Jogapradīpakā* in the British Library (by permission of the British Library, Add. 24099)

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