

Svastikāsana And Siddhāsana In The Odia Bhāgavata: A Comparative Study Of Yogic Posture Within The Haṭha–Rāja Yoga Framework

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Abstract

Classical yogic literature accords foundational importance to seated postures (*āsana*) as prerequisites for meditative absorption and higher yogic realization. While Sanskrit Haṭha Yoga texts such as the *Haṭhapradīpikā* and *Gheraṇḍa Saṁhitā* systematically codify *āsanas*, vernacular devotional texts have received comparatively little attention as sources of yogic praxis. The Odia *Bhāgavata*, a major regional adaptation of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, preserves detailed instructions on yogic posture, silence, breath regulation, and contemplative absorption embedded within a Vaiṣṇava devotional framework. This paper undertakes a comparative textual analysis of *Svāstikāsana* and *Siddhāsana* as described in the Odia *Bhāgavata*, correlating vernacular verses with classical Sanskrit yogic literature. Through verse-specific comparison and functional analysis, the study demonstrates that the Odia *Bhāgavata* reflects a coherent hierarchy of *āsanas* consistent with Haṭha–Rāja Yoga synthesis. Further, by integrating yogic physiology—*nāḍī*, *prāṇa*, and psychophysical stabilization—the paper argues that the Odia *Bhāgavata* functions as an applied yogic text wherein bodily discipline facilitates meditative devotion. The findings underscore the relevance of vernacular *bhakti* literature to the historical transmission of classical yoga.

Keywords: Odia *Bhāgavata*, *Svāstikāsana*, *Siddhāsana*, Haṭha Yoga, Rāja Yoga, Yogic Physiology, *Nāḍī*, *Prāṇa*

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I. Introduction

The seated posture (*āsana*) occupies a central position in classical yoga as the bodily foundation for meditative discipline. From the *Yoga Sūtra*'s succinct definition of *āsana* as *sthira-sukham* ("steady and comfortable") to the elaborate prescriptions of Haṭha Yoga manuals, the stabilization of the body is repeatedly emphasized as a prerequisite for mental restraint and contemplative absorption.¹ While Sanskrit yogic treatises have been extensively studied, vernacular devotional texts—particularly those emerging from regional *bhakti* movements—have not been adequately examined for their contribution to yogic praxis.

The Odia *Bhāgavata* represents a significant yet underexplored source in this regard. Though primarily framed as a Vaiṣṇava devotional work, it contains systematic references to yogic discipline, including posture, breath, silence, solitude, and sustained meditation. The present study focuses on two seated postures—*Svāstikāsana* and *Siddhāsana*—whose descriptions in the Odia *Bhāgavata* reveal close conceptual alignment with classical Haṭha Yoga literature.

This paper seeks to demonstrate that the Odia *Bhāgavata* preserves not merely incidental yogic imagery but a functional yogic pedagogy consistent with Haṭha–Rāja Yoga synthesis. By examining verse-specific descriptions and situating them within classical yogic theory and physiology, the study aims to reposition the Odia *Bhāgavata* as an important witness to the lived transmission of yoga in a devotional milieu.

II. The Odia Bhāgavata As A Source For Yogic Praxis

The Odia *Bhāgavata* emerges within a cultural context in which devotional religiosity and yogic discipline were not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing. Unlike ascetic yoga manuals addressed primarily to renunciants, the Odia *Bhāgavata* addresses a broader devotional audience while retaining technical yogic precision. Its repeated injunctions concerning purity of place (*śuci deśa*), solitude (*ekānta*), bodily immobility (*niścala*), and mental restraint (*mauna*) echo the foundational conditions laid down in classical Haṭha Yoga texts.²

The pedagogical style of the Odia *Bhāgavata* is noteworthy. Rather than enumerating yogic limbs in a systematic sequence, the text integrates yogic discipline organically within devotional narrative. Instructions regarding posture and meditation are framed as preparatory acts for sustained remembrance of Viṣṇu, thereby

aligning bodily discipline with *bhakti*-oriented contemplation. This mode of presentation reflects an applied understanding of yoga, wherein technique is subordinated to contemplative purpose without sacrificing technical integrity.

The presence of specific anatomical references—such as the placement of the foot at the *guhyadvāra* and the straightening of the *merudaṇḍa*—demonstrates familiarity with yogic physiology. These elements suggest that the Odia *Bhāgavata* did not merely borrow yogic terminology but transmitted embodied knowledge adapted to its devotional context.

III. Svāstikāsana In The Odia Bhāgavata And Classical Yoga Texts

Svāstikāsana occupies a preparatory yet indispensable position within classical yogic literature. The *Gheraṇḍa Samhitā* defines it as a balanced seated posture conducive to steadiness and prolonged sitting, emphasizing bodily symmetry and ease. The Odia *Bhāgavata* explicitly names *Svāstikāsana* and associates it with joyful yogic practice (*ānande joga abhyāsibā*), as evidenced in the primary verse reproduced in **Appendix A.2**.

The affective dimension highlighted in the Odia text is significant. Whereas Sanskrit manuals focus primarily on anatomical alignment, the Odia *Bhāgavata* emphasizes experiential comfort and mental readiness. This shift does not contradict classical yoga theory but complements it, reflecting the understanding that bodily ease facilitates sustained practice and mental composure.³

Functionally, *Svastikāsana* in the Odia *Bhāgavata* serves as a stabilizing posture suitable for practitioners at the threshold of meditative discipline (see the Odia verse and Sanskrit parallel in **Appendix A.2 and A.2.a**). Its role aligns with Haṭha Yoga's recognition of preparatory *āsana*s that cultivate steadiness without intense energetic manipulation. Thus, *Svastikāsana* functions as an entry point into yogic praxis within the devotional framework of the text.

IV. Siddhāsana: Description And Meditative Centrality

Siddhāsana occupies a privileged position in classical Haṭha Yoga literature, repeatedly described as the most efficacious posture for meditation. The *Haṭhapradīpikā* asserts that mastery of *Siddhāsana* alone may lead to yogic accomplishment, underscoring its centrality in meditative praxis.⁴

In the Odia *Bhāgavata*, *Siddhāsana* is not named explicitly but is described with anatomical precision (see the Odia text and translation in **Appendix A.1**). The placement of the left foot at the *guhyadvāra*, the positioning of the other foot above it, the straightening of the spinal column (*merudaṇḍa*), and the resting of the hands on the knees correspond precisely with classical definitions of *Siddhāsana* (cf. **Appendix A.1** with the Sanskrit parallel in **Appendix A.1.a**). This descriptive mode suggests an intention to convey embodied knowledge without reliance on technical nomenclature.

The textual context in which this posture appears further reinforces its meditative significance. *Siddhāsana* is consistently associated with silence (*mauna*), bodily stillness, and unwavering contemplation of Viṣṇu. These associations align with the classical view that *Siddhāsana* facilitates mental absorption and serves as a gateway to Rāja Yoga.

V. Comparative Hierarchy Of Svāstikāsana And Siddhāsana

Classical Haṭha Yoga literature establishes a functional hierarchy among seated postures, privileging those that facilitate prāṇic stability and mental concentration. *Svāstikāsana* and *Siddhāsana* occupy distinct positions within this hierarchy, a distinction that is preserved in the Odia *Bhāgavata* and schematically summarized in **Appendix B**.

Svāstikāsana functions as a posture of stabilization, cultivating bodily ease and mental readiness. *Siddhāsana*, by contrast, is associated with energetic containment and meditative depth. The Odia *Bhāgavata* reflects this hierarchy implicitly through contextual placement and functional association rather than explicit ranking.

This progression exemplifies a Haṭha–Rāja Yoga synthesis in which bodily discipline prepares the ground for mental absorption. The Odia *Bhāgavata* thus preserves classical yogic logic while integrating it into a devotional contemplative framework.

VI. Yogic Physiology: Nāḍī, Prāṇa, And Postural Function

A crucial dimension of Haṭha Yoga theory lies in its understanding of yogic physiology, particularly the regulation of *prāṇa* through *nāḍīs*. Although the Odia *Bhāgavata* does not explicitly elaborate *nāḍī* theory, its postural instructions presuppose an embodied understanding of psychophysiological stabilization.

Siddhāsana is classically associated with the regulation of *apāna* and the containment of *prāṇa* at the pelvic center (see the physiological explanation and textual parallels in **Appendix C** and **Appendix A.1.a**). The placement of the foot at the *guhyadvāra* exerts subtle pressure conducive to energetic stability, facilitating the

upward movement of *prāṇa* through the central channel.⁵ The emphasis on spinal alignment (*merudaṇḍa*) further supports the unobstructed flow of *prāṇa* along the axial pathway.

Svastikāsana, while less intensive, supports balanced circulation of *prāṇa* by maintaining bodily symmetry and minimizing muscular strain. Its association with comfort and joy reflects the understanding that relaxed stability prevents prāṇic disturbance and supports sustained practice.

The Odia *Bhāgavata*'s insistence on bodily immobility (*nīścala*) and silence (*mauna*) further reinforces this physiological logic. Stillness of the body and speech corresponds to the stabilization of *prāṇa* and the attenuation of sensory turbulence, facilitating inward attention. Thus, even in the absence of explicit *nāḍī* terminology, the text reflects a sophisticated understanding of yogic physiology embedded within devotional practice.

VII. Haṭha–Rāja Yoga Synthesis In The Odia Bhāgavata

The integration of bodily discipline and contemplative absorption in the Odia *Bhāgavata* exemplifies the classical synthesis of Haṭha and Rāja Yoga. Haṭha techniques—posture, stillness, and bodily alignment—are employed not as ends in themselves but as means to mental restraint and devotional contemplation.

The text's consistent orientation toward sustained meditation on Viṣṇu demonstrates that yogic technique is subordinated to contemplative purpose. This synthesis reflects a broader trend within classical yoga, wherein physical discipline supports meditative realization rather than competing with it.⁶

VIII. Conclusion

The comparative analysis of *Svastikāsana* and *Siddhāsana* in the Odia *Bhāgavata* reveals a coherent yogic pedagogy embedded within vernacular devotional literature. Far from being incidental, the text's postural instructions reflect classical Haṭha Yoga theory, functional hierarchy, and implicit yogic physiology.

By integrating bodily discipline with contemplative devotion, the Odia *Bhāgavata* exemplifies a lived Haṭha–Rāja Yoga synthesis. Its verses preserve valuable evidence of how yogic knowledge was transmitted, adapted, and practiced within a devotional milieu. The study thus underscores the importance of vernacular *bhakti* texts as sources for the historical and practical understanding of classical yoga, with the Odia *Bhāgavata* providing direct postural evidence through its primary verses and their classical counterparts (see **Appendix A–C**).

Endnotes

1. Patañjali's definition of *āsana* as *sthira-sukham* (*Yoga Sūtra* 2.46) establishes bodily stability and comfort as the physiological basis for meditative practice. Medieval Haṭha Yoga texts expand this aphorism into detailed postural prescriptions, explicitly linking bodily steadiness to breath regulation and mental absorption (Feuerstein, 2008; Mallinson & Singleton, 2017).
2. The conditions of *śuci deśa* (pure place), *ekānta* (seclusion), *mauna* (silence), and bodily immobility (*nīścala*) appear in early Haṭha Yoga manuals as prerequisites for practice (e.g., *Haṭhapradīpikā* 1.12–15; *Gheraṇḍa Samhitā* 5.1–3). Their recurrence in the Odia *Bhāgavata* suggests a shared ascetico-meditative vocabulary across Sanskrit technical literature and vernacular *bhakti* traditions (Birch, 2019).
3. The Odia expression *ānande joga abhyāsibā* (“to practice yoga with joy”) introduces an affective dimension largely absent from classical Haṭha manuals, which emphasize technique and discipline over emotion. This devotional framing does not contradict yogic theory; rather, it aligns with the broader *bhakti* tendency to integrate embodied practice with experiential devotion (Hardy, 1983; Rosen, 2012).
4. The *Haṭhapradīpikā* (1.35–36) elevates *Siddhāsana* as uniquely efficacious, even suggesting that its mastery alone can lead to yogic accomplishment. Commentarial traditions interpret this claim in functional terms: *Siddhāsana* minimizes bodily disturbance, restrains the senses, and supports prolonged meditation, thereby serving as an optimal seat for contemplative absorption (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017).
5. Classical Haṭha Yoga physiology associates pressure at the *guhyaadvāra* (perineal region) with the regulation of *apāna* and the redirection of *prāṇa* into the central channel (*suṣumṇā*), facilitating meditative stability (White, 2012). Although the Odia *Bhāgavata* does not explicitly employ *nāḍī* terminology, its anatomical precision mirrors this functional logic, indicating an implicit transmission of embodied yogic knowledge.
6. The expression “Haṭha–Rāja Yoga synthesis” denotes the integration of physical disciplines (*āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *bandha*) with meditative techniques aimed at mental restraint (*citta-nirodha*). Texts such as the *Haṭhapradīpikā* consistently frame Haṭha methods as preparatory for higher meditative realization rather than as an autonomous soteriology (Feuerstein, 2008; Birch, 2019).

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