



# YOGA: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE IN TERM OF PRE CLASSICAL, POST CLASSICAL AND MODERN PERIOD OF YOGA

**Mayank Kumar Chaurasiya<sup>1</sup>, Retd. Prof. P.C. Mishra<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, University of Lucknow

<sup>2</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Lucknow

## ABSTRACT

Yoga's history has many places of obscurity and uncertainty due to its oral transmission of sacred texts and the secretive nature of its teachings. The early writings on yoga were transcribed on fragile palm leaves that were easily damaged, destroyed or lost. The development of yoga can be traced back to over 5,000 years ago, but some researchers think that yoga may be up to 10,000 years old. Yoga's long rich history can be divided into four main periods of innovation, practice and development. It began in the Indus-Saraswati civilisation more than 5,000 years ago. The Rig Veda is the first text that mentions the word yoga. It was later streamlined and developed by Brahmin priests and sages and documented in the Upanishads which contain over 200 scriptures. The Upanishads derived the idea of ritual sacrifice and modified it, teaching the sacrifice of the ego through self-knowledge, action (karma yoga) and wisdom (jnana yoga). The Bhagavad Gita, composed around 500 BC, is replete with details about yoga. There are various schools of yoga that are followed. The Yoga Sutras Of Patanjali — written by Patanjali — which became hugely popular in the West, were written in the first half of the first millennium. Hatha yoga, another popular yoga form, came around the 11th century and has its origins in Tantra. The Hatha yoga (which focuses on breathing and calming down the mind), the Vinyasa yoga (which is faster paced and more fitness oriented), the Bikram yoga (founded by Bikram Choudhury, it is a form of hot yoga which is done in a hot environment to mimic the climate of India), the Ashtanga yoga (based on six series' of poses that increase in difficulty, allowing you to work at your own pace) are extremely popular among yoga enthusiasts. Iyengar yoga, developed by BKS Iyengar, the Kundalini yoga — which is mentally and physically challenging — and the Jivamukti yoga (which is a Vinyasa style of yoga) are also popular.

**KEYWORDS:** Yoga, Classical, Modern, Pre, Post etc.

**“A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin, and culture is like a tree without roots.” – Marcus Garvey**

The origins of yoga are shrouded in the mists of time. The ancient wisdom is known as "the supreme science of life" is believed to have been revealed to the great sages of India several thousand years ago. Yoga is an ancient system of physical and mental practices that originated during the Indus Valley civilization in South Asia. The fundamental purpose of yoga is to foster harmony in the body, mind, and environment. **Yoga professes a complete system of physical, mental, social, and spiritual development.** For generations, this philosophy was passed on from the master teacher to the student. The first written records of the practice of yoga appeared around 200 BC in the Yogasutra of Patanjali. The system consisted of the eight-fold path of Ashtanga yoga.

Yoga is so old, that nobody knows exactly when it started. But, it began long ago when people started trying to understand what life was all about. Only a legend can give us an idea about the history of yoga. According to the legend,

Shiva was the first yogi. And many thousands of years ago, Shiva reached enlightenment in a place called Mount Kailash. The story says that he had seven disciples who became known as the seven rishis. They are considered the founders of most spiritual traditions in the world. The word yoga itself first appeared in writing in the ancient and sacred texts of Hinduism – the Vedas. Specifically, yoga first made an appearance in the Rig Veda, the oldest of these scriptures. The word “yoga” itself comes from the root “yuj,” which means “to yoke.” Now this is no longer a word that is commonplace in the English language, so you might not catch its meaning at first glance. Yoking was a practice used to connect and harness two animals. They would be “yoked” together (typically at their necks) to then be able to perform tasks (such as plowing a field). So, essentially, to yoke is to create a *union*, and this is typically how we hear yoga defined today.

Yoga started as a mix of various ideas, beliefs and techniques. Patanjali's Yoga Sutra first gave yoga an order. It describes the Raja yoga which is often referred to as classical yoga which consists of an eight-limbed path that lists a series of steps and stages that lead towards samaadhi or



enlightenment. Tantra yoga was later developed as a series of practices to rejuvenate the body and to prolong life. It comprises radical techniques to cleanse the body and mind. Yoga travelled to the West in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and it all began with Swami Vivekananda's speech at the 1893 Parliament of Religions in Chicago. He spoke mostly about Raja yoga, which is known as the yoga of the mind, which is practiced through meditation techniques and mental discipline. Vivekananda also spoke about the Eight-Limbed Yogic Path which have been described in the Yoga Sutras. These include yamas (restraint), niyamas (observances), asanas (postures), pranayama (breathing techniques), pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation) and samaadhi

### PRE-CLASSICAL YOGA

The beginnings of Yoga were developed by the Indus-Sarasvati civilization in Northern India over 5,000 years ago. The word yoga was first mentioned in the oldest sacred texts, the Rig Veda. The Vedas were a collection of texts containing songs, mantras and rituals to be used by Brahmans, the Vedic priests. Yoga was slowly refined and developed by the Brahmans and Rishis (mystic seers) who documented their

practices and beliefs in the upanishads, a huge work containing over 200 scriptures. The most renowned of the Yogic scriptures is the Bhagavad-Gîtâ, composed around 500 B.C.E. The Upanishads took the idea of ritual sacrifice from the Vedas and internalized it, teaching the sacrifice of the ego through self-knowledge, action (karma yoga) and wisdom (jnana yoga).

### CLASSICAL YOGA

In the pre-classical stage, yoga was a mishmash of various ideas, beliefs and techniques that often conflicted and contradicted each other. The Classical period is defined by Patanjali's Yoga-Sûtras, the first systematic presentation of yoga. Written some time in the second century, this text describes the path of RAJA YOGA, often called "classical yoga". Patanjali organized the practice of yoga into an "eight limbed path" containing the steps and stages towards obtaining Samadhi or enlightenment. Patanjali is often considered the father of yoga and his Yoga-Sûtras still strongly influence most styles of modern yoga. Pantanjali set out the following as a means for living a life of purpose and meaning:

1. Yama – ethical rules relating to conduct towards others or social discipline
2. Niyama – correct conduct towards oneself, a means of aiding personal growth
3. Asana – the practice of physical postures (undoubtedly the most well known of the eight limbs)
4. Pranayama – controlling of the breath
5. Pratyahara – controlling the senses
6. Dharana – concentration, the process of drawing the senses inward
7. Dhyana – meditation'Samadhi – the union of mediation and the subject of meditation, often closely linked with obtaining enlightenment

### POST-CLASSICAL YOGA

A few centuries after Patanjali, yoga masters created a system of practices designed to rejuvenate the body and prolong life. They rejected the teachings of the ancient Vedas and embraced the physical body as the means to achieve enlightenment. They developed Tantra Yoga, with radical techniques to cleanse the body and mind to break the knots that bind us to our physical existence. This exploration of these physical-spiritual connections and body centered practices led to the creation of what we primarily think of yoga in the West: Hatha Yoga. Yoga was introduced to the West in the early 19th century and predictably, many of its Eastern teachings and philosophies steadily became Westernised. It was this period as well that saw many teachers and gurus travel to the West. One such figure was Swami Sivananda who wrote over 200 books on yoga and philosophy and greatly contributed to the post-classical yoga period. Other notable names to rise from this period include Tirumalai Krishnamacharya, one of the most influential yoga teachers of the 20th century who has also been referred to as the father of modern yoga.

Then there's Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, dubbed the 'giggling guru' as he would regularly laugh during TV interviews. Maharishi developed Transcendental Meditation and this may perhaps be one of the things he'll be remembered

for the most. Transcendental Meditation (or simply TM as it is also commonly known), is a technique practised by 5 million people worldwide and amongst its proponents including many notable celebrities.

### MODERN PERIOD

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, yoga masters began to travel to the West, attracting attention and followers. This began at the 1893 Parliament of Religions in Chicago, when Swami Vivekananda wowed the attendees with his lectures on yoga and the universality of the world's religions. In the 1920s and 30s, Hatha Yoga was strongly promoted in India with the work of T. Krishnamacharya, Swami Sivananda and other yogis practicing Hatha Yoga. Krishnamacharya opened the first Hatha Yoga school in Mysore in 1924 and in 1936 Sivananda founded the Divine Life Society on the banks of the holy Ganges River. Krishnamacharya produced three students that would continue his legacy and increase the popularity of Hatha Yoga: B.K.S. Iyengar, T.K.V. Desikachar and Pattabhi Jois. Sivananda was a prolific author, writing over 200 books on yoga, and established nine ashrams and numerous yoga centers located around the world. The importation of yoga to the West still continued at a trickle until Indra Devi opened her yoga studio in Hollywood in 1947. Since then, many more western and Indian teachers have become pioneers,



popularizing hatha yoga and gaining millions of followers. Hatha Yoga now has many different schools or styles, all emphasizing the many different aspects of the practice.

There are also several over prominent styles you may be familiar with or heard of, they include:

1. Hatha
2. Viniyoga
3. Iyengar
4. Ashtanga
5. Sivananda
6. Integral
7. Kundalini
8. Bikram (now more commonly referred to simply as hot yoga)
9. Vinyasa

The Vedic reading of yoga as one's war chariot or rig came to be incorporated into the warrior ideology of ancient India. In the Mahābhārata, India's 200 BCE–400 CE "national epic," we read the earliest narrative accounts of the battlefield apotheosis of heroic chariot warriors. This was, like the Greek Iliad, an epic of battle, and so it was appropriate that the glorification of a warrior who died fighting his enemies be showcased here. What is interesting, for the purposes of the history of the term yoga, is that in these narratives, the warrior who knew he was about to die was said to become yoga-yukta, literally "yoked to yoga," with "yoga" once again meaning a chariot. This time, however, it was not the warrior's own chariot that carried him up to the highest heaven reserved for gods and heroes alone. Rather, it was a celestial "yoga," a divine chariot, that carried him upward in a burst of light to and through the sun, and on to the heaven of gods and heroes. Warriors were not the sole individuals of the Vedic age to have chariots called "yogas." The gods, too, were said to shuttle across heaven, and between earth and heaven on yogas. Furthermore, the Vedic priests who sang the Vedic hymns related their practice to the yoga of the warrior aristocracy who were their patrons. In their hymns, they describe themselves as "yoking" their minds to poetic inspiration and so journeying—if only with their mind's eye or cognitive apparatus—across the metaphorical distance that separated the world of the gods from the words of their hymns. A striking image of their poetic journeys is found in a verse from a late Vedic hymn, in which the poet-priests describe themselves as "hitched up" (yukta) and standing on their chariot shafts as they sally forth on a vision quest across the universe.

## CONCLUSION

Yoga is a consistently evolving practice and form of exercise that could almost be considered organic. It means something different to each style or school and in fact right down to the individuals who practice yoga. Considering the development it has undergone in the past 5,000 years, it's easy to see how it will continue to develop, grow and evolve. Following the Vedic period came the pre-classical period. This era is defined by the creation of the Upanishads, a collection of 200 Vedic texts. Central concepts to these texts are Brahman (the ultimate reality in the universe), Atman (the transcendental self or self), and the relationship between these two ideas. Both the Vedas and Upanishads are said to form the

basis of religious concepts for Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. In classical period -Patanjali's Yoga Sutras have been credited as the very foundation of classic yoga. In the Sutras, guidance is offered to help the reader create peace and achieve fulfilment. A small but important note to make at this stage is that there were several authors by the name of Patanjali and work continues to determine who is the actual author of the Yoga Sutras. Regardless of authorship, it's hard to refute the importance and subsequent popularity of the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. It's for this reason, like the Gita, that it has made it onto our list of essential reading for yogis. One such figure was Swami Sivananda who wrote over 200 books on yoga and philosophy and greatly contributed to the post-classical yoga period. Other notable names to rise from this period include Tirumalai Krishnamacharya, one of the most influential yoga teachers of the 20th century who has also been referred to as the father of modern yoga. In some respects, modern yoga, the form practised in studios, gyms and homes the world over today, can be seen as just as complex as the lineages that have come before it. Many current styles are based on hatha yoga, which was initially introduced in the yoga sutras. Mark Singleton is a modern-day yoga scholar who documents in his recent book *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Yoga Practice* how Krishnamacharya drew inspiration from British Army drills and wrestling moves. These facts are often surprising to many yogis of today who believe that their sequences date back to centuries-old Eastern traditions. Krishnamacharya also incorporated Hindu guidelines for cleansing the body through breath, and thus movement was linked to inhalations and exhalations. Modern Yoga Several schools of yoga exist and use all or some of the eight limbs. The traditional practice of yoga was quite rigorous. A lifelong devotion to the practice and adherence to strict sacrifices was expected. Later-age yoga teachers have modified the techniques, and various paths emerged:

- Bhakti yoga: the path of devotion
- Gyana yoga: the path of knowledge
- Raja yoga: the path of wisdom to self-realization and enlightenment
- Karma yoga: the path of action

Other techniques such as hatha yoga (path of physical self-discipline), mudra yoga (the path of channeling life force), and chakra yoga (the path of energy forces) have also gained popularity.



Today, many schools of yoga have simplified the techniques and made them easy to practice for working people. The system of yoga is in the process of developing as an organized science. Various techniques have developed and become popular throughout the world, particularly in the West, which are, in comparison with the old methods, simpler and less time consuming. Examples of popular systems in the West include kriya yoga and Simplified Kundalini Yoga. Kriya yoga became popular in the West because of the efforts of its founder, Paramhansa Yogananda and the Self-Realization Fellowship in the United States. The word kriya is derived from the Sanskrit root kri meaning "to do," "to act," and "to react." This method involves a psychophysiological method by which human blood is decarbonated and recharged with oxygen. This extra oxygen is converted into life current to rejuvenate the central nervous system, lessen and prevent the decay of tissues, and enhance evolution of the mind. One well-evolved school of yoga is kundalini yoga, or a system of primordial energy unification. The hallmark of this school is that it starts from the seventh step in Asthangayoga that of Dhyana or meditation. In **kundalini yoga**, the fundamental meditation technique involves performing a "formless" contemplation at different points including the pituitary and the hypothalamus glands. In addition to the meditation, selected asanas, breathing techniques, and relaxation geared primarily toward muscular strain reduction, enhancing the vital capacity of the lungs, and balancing the endocrine and central nervous systems are also practiced. With this system of yoga, physical exercises are simplified. The techniques of this school have been popularized by the Universal Peace Sanctuary (Erode, India) established in 1937 and World Community Service Centre (Chennai, India) established in 1958. Both these organizations have several branches all over the world and have taught several thousands of practitioners in these techniques. A recent variation is called **power yoga**, in which practitioners take a more athletic approach and move rapidly from one pose to another.

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