

## A Timeline of Yoga History with Primary Texts

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### *What is Yoga?*

Yoga, from the Sanskrit root *Yuj*, to connect or yoke, has been an integral part of Indian spiritual and cultural life for over 3000 years. The word has been used variously to refer to meditative exercises, religious contemplations, states of body and mind, and to the understanding, or wisdom, that results from spiritual practice and experience. For much of its history, from its first appearances in the *Upaniṣads* through the radical contemplative rituals of medieval *Tantra*, yoga referred primarily to meditation techniques and contemplations done in stillness. As yoga evolved, physical practices increased in popularity, coming to prominence with the Haṭha Yoga movement. The practices of *Haṭha Yoga*, especially *āsana* (postures) and *prāṇāyāma* (breath control), were joined with athletic standing poses influenced by European calisthenics and contortion to form the backbone of the 20th century yoga revival.

Since its revival in Mysore in the 1930s, the physical practices of yoga have spread throughout the world, and are practiced by people of every religion and culture, both as a spiritual practice and simply as an exercise and wellness regime. As yoga has spread, elements of Indian spiritual culture have accompanied it, including study of Sanskrit texts, veneration of Hindu deities (even by people who do not consider themselves Hindu), chanting, mantra repetition, and Indian philosophical concepts from many Indian traditions from the *Veda* to *Advaita Vedānta*. Yoga as practiced in Indian culture, both in India itself and throughout Indian immigrant culture in many countries often differs substantially from its practice among convert communities, and the adoption of yoga by the western middle class is central to yoga's current dramatic transformation and reinvention.

The evolution of yoga in India can be traced through its appearance in a series of important texts, which are our clearest record of the practices being done in each era. Each era's practices build on those that have come before, with focused attention (*samādhi*) central to all of them. Yoga arises first in a period of rich spiritual invention in India, as the ancient ritual practices described in the four *Veda* begin to transform into internal practices to be performed by individual seekers. In a reform movement similar in some ways to the Protestant Reformation in European Christianity, which created new means of worship that did not rely on the figure of the priest as the necessary intercessor between the seeker and God, a movement known as *Śramaṇa*, referring to the practice of austerities. *Śramaṇa* were men who left home to wander in the wilderness, turning away from the religious life that was focused on,

and controlled by, Brahmin priests, who were necessary for the performance of the *yajña* or *homa*, the ritual sacrifice. Rejecting the control of the priests, they began to develop methods for cultivating the mind and body independently of the sacrificial ritual. These seekers took the metaphor of the fire sacrifice and turned it inward, claiming that the body itself was the sacrificial altar, the breath and internal energy the fire, and the intentions and prayers of the seeker the offerings. The sacrificial fire became an inner fire (*tapas*), and the ascetic (*tapasvin*) developed into the practitioner of yoga, the *yogi*. These new practices, which centered on the practitioner's relationship to the senses and to their own mind and body, were first described in detail in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (1000-500 BCE), and would become the roots of the great tree of yoga, branching off into the Buddhist and Jain revelations and into many different schools of yogic thought and practice.<sup>1</sup>

### *Yoga's Early Roots: The Kaṭha Upaniṣad*

The word *yoga* first appears in the *Rg Veda* (possibly 2000+ BCE),<sup>2</sup> but the first systematic descriptions of yoga as a method of inner cultivation appears in the *Upaniṣads* and refers to *pratyāhāra*, or withdrawal of the practitioner's attention from the objects of the physical senses. The practice of *pratyāhāra*, an inward-turning, would become the basis of the central yogic practice of meditation. Meditation in Classical Yoga refers to the stabilizing of the practitioner's attention on a single continuous experience like the breath or the quality of awareness itself, and through that extraordinary stillness seeing the nature of the self (*atmān*) clearly. The path of yoga was to seek the end of suffering through discovering the true nature of the self. The *Upaniṣadic* revelation, central to the independence-oriented practice of the *Śramaṇa*, was to realize that the individual self was not different, or separate, from the Great Self, known as *Brahman*, or God. The practices that could lead to this realization are yoga.

The path of the seeker is mythologized in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (1000+ BCE), which consists of a story about a young man, Naciketas, who travels to the home of the Lord of Death (*Yama*) after a dispute with his father over what should be considered a proper sacrifice to the Gods. Death is away when he arrives, and Naciketas has to wait three days, symbolizing individual solitary practice. When Death returns, he apologizes for offending his guest by keeping him waiting without food, and offers him three wishes, or "boons". Naciketas asks first for forgiveness by his father, then for the secrets of the sacrificial fire, and finally for the secret of what happens after death. Death grants him the first two boons, but tries to dissuade him from the last, offering wealth, power, and long life, but Naciketas persists. Death then teaches him the practice of yoga: *pratyāhāra* (sense-restraint) leading to *dhāranā* (concentration) and union with the True Self, or *puruṣa*. The *Kaṭha* calls this Path *Adhyātma Yoga*, "Yoga of the Deep Self".

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<sup>1</sup> Georg Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition* (Prescott: Hohm Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Wendy Doniger, *The Rig Veda*, trans. Wendy Doniger (London: Penguin, 1981).

In Naciketas's story we can see the beginnings of individual yogic practice: questioning the efficacy of ritual and the intention behind it, leaving home in search of the truth, purificatory practice, encounter with the reality of death, and the path to freedom. That path can be described in relation to Naciketas's three wishes: first seeking forgiveness for past faults and caring for our family and community relationships, then purification, as the sacrificial fire is internalized and cultivated, and finally deep inquiry into the nature of the self, using focused attention, renunciation of preference, and sense-restraint as meditative tools. The practices taught in the *Kaṭha* are meditative in nature, drawing the practitioner's awareness inward, away from engagement with the phenomenal world. This inward meditative stance is supported by an understanding of the nature of the self that focuses on our tendency to prefer pleasant experience over unpleasant, described using a metaphor of a fountain in the cave of the heart from which sweet and bitter liquid flows. The separate self prefers the sweet over the bitter, but the supreme Self drinks both without preference. This instruction to disidentify with preference both supports the renunciate *Śramaṇa* through the discomforts of wilderness life and is the foundation for the inward-turning of *pratyāhāra*. Training himself to let go of preferences, the yogi is able to ignore the habitual demands of the body and mind for comfort, food, and entertainment, devoting himself fully to the task of meditation and inquiry. Yoga is both the cultivation of this powerful meditative state, and the culmination of meditation in states of extraordinary stillness.

Primary text: verses from the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (ca. 1000 BCE)<sup>3</sup>

In the secret cave of the heart, two are seated by life's fountain. The separate ego drinks of the sweet and bitter stuff, liking the sweet, disliking the bitter, while the supreme Self drinks sweet and bitter, neither liking this nor disliking that. The ego gropes in darkness, while the Self lives in light. (I.3.1)

When the five senses are stilled, when the mind is stilled, when the intellect is stilled, that is called the highest state by the wise. They say yoga is this complete stillness in which one enters the unitive state, never to become separate again. (II.3.10-11)

Know thou the soul as riding in a chariot, the body as the chariot. Know thou the intellect as the chariot-driver, and the mind as the reins. The senses are the horses; the objects of sense, what they range over. The self combined with senses and mind wise men call "the enjoyer".

He who has not understanding, whose mind is not constantly held firm – his senses are uncontrolled, like the vicious horses of a chariot-driver. He, however, who has understanding, whose mind is constantly held firm – his senses are under control, like the good horses of a chariot-driver.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Olivelle, *Upaniṣads: A New Translation* (NY: Oxford, 1996).

He, however, who has not understanding, who is unmindful and ever impure, reaches not the goal, but goes on to reincarnation. He, however, who has understanding, who is mindful and ever pure, reaches the goal from which he is born no more. He, however, who has the understanding of a chariot-driver, a man who reins in his mind – he reaches the end of his journey, the highest place of Viṣṇu.

Higher than the senses are the objects of the sense. Higher than the objects of sense is the mind, and higher than the mind is the intellect. Higher than the intellect is the Great Self. Higher than the Great is the Unmanifest. Higher than the Unmanifest is the Person [*puruṣa*]. Higher than the Person there is nothing at all. That is the goal. That is the highest course. (III. 3-11)

“This they consider to be Yoga: the steady holding of the senses.” (II.3.11)

### *Mindfulness & Inquiry: The Buddha’s Revolution*

Siddhartha Gotama (possibly 563-483 BCE), who came to be known as the Buddha, lived in the fertile intellectual and spiritual period of the *Upaniṣads*, and embodied its creative and passionate spiritual ethos. He was a member of the Sakyan clan, a ruling family in what is now North-central India. After experiencing distress upon seeing an old person, a sick person, and a corpse, he left home to seek the deathless. He practiced meditative concentration under two prominent yoga teachers, then asceticism on his own, finally reaching his goal through what he called “The Middle Way” between sensory indulgence and self-mortification, and profound insight into the cause of suffering. After realization, he was called “Buddha”, meaning “awake”, or Tathāgatha (“One Thus Gone”). The Buddha taught a detailed yoga based on cultivating focused attention (*samādhi*) and mindfulness rooted in ethical action and embodied inquiry. His core understanding is expressed in the teaching called *The Four Noble Truths*, and the practice outlined in *The Eightfold Path*.

### *The Four Noble Truths*

1. The truth of suffering (stress, unsatisfactoriness: Pāli/Sanskrit: *dukkha/duḥkha*).
2. The truth of the cause of suffering: grasping (*tanha/trṣṇa*) rooted in ignorance (*avidya*).
3. The truth of the cessation (*nirodha*) of suffering through the cessation of its cause.
4. The truth of the path (*magga/marga*) to the cessation of suffering, called *The Noble Eightfold Path* (*ariya atthangika magga/arya aṣṭanga marga*):

Wise (or Right) View: understanding our experience in light of the Four Noble Truths

Wise Intention: toward non-harming (*ahimsa*), kindness (*mettā/maitri*), renunciation (*vairagya*)

Wise Speech: refraining from lying, divisive, abusive, and idle speech

Wise Action: refraining from killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct

Wise Livelihood: cultivating honest and non-harmful economic relationships

Wise Effort: decreasing unskillful body-mind states, cultivating skillful states

Wise Mindfulness: focused inquiry into body, feelings (+/-), conscious states, qualities of mind

Wise Concentration: unification of mind (*samādhi*) through meditative states (*jhāna/dhyāna*)

The Buddha's yoga integrated the practices of *samadhi* that were prevalent in his day with a quality of present-moment inquiry called mindfulness (Pāli: *sati*, Sanskrit: *smṛti*). Mindfulness is a detailed inquiry practice that uses focus and stability of attention to attend closely to the arising sensory information of each moment, revealing three fundamental characteristics of every experience, known as the Three Marks (*tilakkhana*): impermanence (*annicca*), the quality of instability, revealing that everything is constantly arising and passing with changing conditions; suffering (*dukkha*), the recognition that nothing can be held on to as a reliable or constant source of ease or happiness; and not-self (*anatta/anātman*), the realization that nothing stable can be found to call "I, me, mine, myself", not even consciousness.

The difficult teaching of not-self set the Buddha apart from Hindu *Vedānta*, which held that there is an individual self, or soul (*ātman*), even as it held that the ultimate nature of that self was impersonal and not different from Brahman. The distinction is subtle. When asked by the seeker Vachagotta whether there is a self or not, the Buddha famously refused to answer. *Anatta* points to the insubstantiality of our habitual sense of self and how the feeling of separateness, along with the clinging that is the habit of the mind, creates suffering and stress. As Buddhist practice communities developed, it grew to include a vast array of methods, all designed to accomplish the task of uprooting the causes of suffering in the heart. As Buddhism spread through Asia, the central practices of focused attention and inquiry were influenced by local traditions, beginning a process of cultural evolution that led to distinct forms of Buddhist yoga developing in each of the countries it took root in.

In the contemporary west, seekers who want to learn to meditate and work with the mind tend to find their way to Buddhist practice, while seekers who want to work with the body find their way to yoga. This is an artificial separation based on social trends in the west rather than the traditions themselves. Buddhist traditions contain many physical practices similar to *āsana*, and Hindu yoga has been primarily a collection of meditation practices for most of its history. As many yogis are now discovering, the practices of *āsana* and meditation are deeply compatible, and the support that Buddhist communities and teachers can give to yoga practitioners who want to explore the mind in more depth than most *āsana*-based lineages offer can be extraordinary.

Primary text: The Discourse on Loving-kindness (c. 100 BCE)<sup>4</sup>

This is what should be done by one who is skilled in goodness and who knows the path of peace:

Let them be able and upright, straightforward and gentle in speech, humble and not conceited, contented and easily satisfied, unburdened with duties and frugal in their ways.

Peaceful and calm, and wise and skillful, not proud and demanding in nature. Let them not do the slightest thing that the wise would later reprove, wishing: In gladness and in safety, may all beings be at ease.

Whatever living beings there may be, whether they are weak or strong, omitting none, the great or the mighty, medium, short, or small, the seen and the unseen, those living near and far away, those born and to be born, may all beings be at ease.

Let none deceive another or despise any being in any state. Let none through anger or ill-will wish harm upon another.

Even as a mother protects with her life her child, her only child, so with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings, radiating kindness over the entire world: spreading upwards to the skies and downwards to the depths, outwards and unbounded, freed from hatred and ill-will.

Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down, free from drowsiness, one should sustain this recollection. This is said to be the sublime abiding.

By not holding to fixed views, the pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision, being freed from all sense-desires, is not born again into this world.

*Liberating Awareness: Patañjali's Yoga Sūtra*

The *Yoga-Sūtra* is one of the most deeply influential texts on yoga, and is used in many modern yoga lineages as the primary philosophical text. It was written or compiled by a sage named Patañjali between 200 BCE and 200 CE, about whom no concrete biographical information is known. The author of the *Yoga-Sūtra* appears to be distinct from a grammarian named Patañjali, who wrote a treatise on grammar around the same time, though they are considered to be the same person in a devotional

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<sup>4</sup> *karaniya mettā sutta* (Sutta Nipata 1.8), translation used by Amaravati community, Thai forest tradition.

tradition that persists in the streams of modern yoga descended from Krishnamacharya of Mysore. Western yoga's embrace of the *Yoga-Sūtra* is rooted in Krishnamacharya's veneration of it, along with Swami Vivekananda's, who published the first wide-spread English translation as *Raja Yoga* in 1896.

Yoga in the *Yoga-Sūtra* refers to the stilling or “cessation” (*nirodha*) of thought patterns, sometimes translated as “fluctuations of consciousness” (*citta-vṛtti*). This stilling allows awareness (*puruṣa*) to “rest in its true nature” as a pure or unconditioned knowing, understood as separate from, and therefore not bound by, the objects of which it is aware. The meditative process outlined in the *Yoga-Sūtra*, which focuses on understanding the independent nature of awareness through the cultivation of profound mental stillness, uproots the practitioner's habitual identification with concepts, and undoes attachment to “the opposites”: pleasure and pain, gain and loss, life and death, self and other. The *Yoga-Sūtra* codified the yogic meditative discipline into a program of practice known as the Eight Limb, or *Aṣṭāṅga* system, mirroring the earlier Eightfold Path of the Buddha. The *Yoga-Sūtra* includes practices and quotations from Buddhist and Upaniṣadic sources, held within a philosophical framework borrowed from the dualist Sāṃkhya school. Patañjali's Eight Limbs chart a path of increasing subtlety of contemplative object, beginning with ethical principles and practices for personal purification through a breath-oriented meditative practice that culminates in extraordinary unification of mind.

### *The Eight Limbs of Yoga*

1. Yama: five ethical practices that clarify the yogi's relationship with external community.

Ahimsa: non-harming

Satya: truthfulness

Asteya: non-stealing

Brahmacarya: celibacy, impeccable conduct

Aparigraha: non-acquisitiveness

2. Niyama: five purificatory practices that clarify the yogi's intention and practice

Śauca: cleanliness

Samtoṣa: contentment

Tapas: discipline

Svādhyāya: self-study, both of sacred texts and the inner self

Īśvara-praṇidhāna: surrender to the Divine, or to the paradigm of pure Awareness

3. Āsana: the “seat” or posture of meditation. Guidelines: stable (*sthira*) & easeful (*sukha*)

4. Prāṇāyāma: cultivation of the breath as a stable, relaxed, and spacious meditative Focus

5. Pratyāhāra: withdrawal of the senses from attachment to their objects

6. Dhāraṇā: the practice of concentration leading to one-pointedness of mind

7. Dhyāna: one-pointed meditative absorption that arises as *dhāraṇā* matures

8. Samādhi: “bringing together”, the profound unification of mind in meditative stillness

Patañjali's yoga, like the Buddha's, is meditative, focusing on cultivating states of profound unification of mind (*samadhi*, or *samyama*: the combination of the last three limbs of *dharana*, *dhyana*, and *samadhi*) in postures of physical and mental stillness. This stillness is used as the basis for the cultivation of various supernatural powers (*siddhi*), and for the inquiry into the relationship of Pure Awareness (*puruṣa*) and sense objects (*prakṛiti*), or consciousness and matter. Patañjali's core insight is into the illusion of continuity. The mind in *samyama* is stable enough to see experience as constantly in flux, and through this clear-seeing deconstructs every phenomenal object, including the sense of self, to reveal Pure Awareness as independent (*kaivalya*) of its objects, external conditions. This independence, which was always true but veiled by ignorance (*avidyā*) and mental instability, undoes the habitual entanglement created by the clinging mind, and is synonymous with *mokṣa*, or Liberation.

The power of the *Yoga-sutra* as a meditative guide is extraordinary. Many modern yogis descended from the great teacher Krishnamacharya also use this text as a guide for *āsana* practice and yogic life in general, blending the *Rāja Yoga* of the text with the *Hat̥ha Yoga* of postures and breath work. This blending is the source of some controversy in contemporary yoga circles, as the text's focus on meditative stillness is becoming more fully understood. Patañjali's emphasis on the separate activities of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* also has led to its being rejected by some Tantric schools as being dualistic. Nevertheless, it is considered by many schools to be a broadly applicable guide to yogic life, and is still the most commonly required source text for modern yoga.

Primary text: verses from Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* (-200 BCE - 200 CE), with selective Sanskrit<sup>5</sup>

1.2 *yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ*

*Yoga* is to still the patterning of consciousness.

1.3 *tadā draṣṭuḥ svarūpe 'vasthānam*

Then, pure awareness can abide in its very nature.

1.4 *vṛtti-sārūpyam itaratra*

Otherwise, awareness takes itself to be the patterns of consciousness.

2.46 *sthira-sukham āsanam*

The postures of meditation should embody steadiness and ease.

2.47 This occurs as all effort relaxes and coalescence arises, revealing that the body and the infinite universe are indivisible.

2.48 Then, one is no longer disturbed by the play of opposites.

2.49 With effort relaxing, the flow of inhalation and exhalation can be brought to a standstill; this is called breath regulation.

2.50 As the movement patterns of each breath—inhalation, exhalation, lull—are observed as to

<sup>5</sup> Chip Hartranft, *The Yoga-Sūtra of Patañjali* (Boston: Shambhala, 2003).



duration, number, and area of focus, breath becomes spacious and subtle.

2.51 As realization dawns, the distinction between breathing in and out falls away.

2.52 Then the veil lifts from the mind's luminosity.

2.53 And the mind's potential for concentration is realized.

3.53 Focusing with perfect discipline on the succession of moments in time yields insight born of discrimination.

3.54 This insight allows one to tell things apart which, through similarities of origin, feature, or position, had seemed continuous.

3.55 In this way, discriminative insight deconstructs all of the phenomenal world's objects and conditions, setting them apart from pure awareness.

3.56 Once the luminosity and transparency of consciousness have become as distilled as pure awareness, they can reflect the freedom of awareness back to itself.

4.31 Once all the layers and imperfections concealing truth have been washed away, insight is boundless, with little left to know.

4.32 Then the seamless flow of reality, its transformations colored by the fundamental qualities, begins to break down, fulfilling the true mission of consciousness.

4.33 One can see that the flow is actually a series of discrete events, each corresponding to the merest instant of time, in which one form becomes another.

4.34 Freedom is at hand when the fundamental qualities of nature, each of their transformations witnessed at the moment of its inception, are recognized as irrelevant to pure awareness; it stands alone, grounded in its very nature, the power of pure seeing. That is all.

### *Action & Devotion: The Bhagavad Gītā*

In the *Bhagavad Gītā* (~200 CE), "The Blessed Song", perhaps India's most beloved spiritual text, the god Kṛṣṇa teaches yoga to the warrior Arjuna on the battlefield before the devastating battle that is the centerpiece of the epic *Mahābhārata*. Kṛṣṇa, an incarnation of Viṣṇu, who in the devotional literature is said to manifest in the world to sustain *Dharma* when necessary, describes for Arjuna three kinds of yoga practice, synthesizing Buddhist, *Upaniṣadic*, and *Vedānta* influences, and emphasizing the practice of devotion (*bhakti*).

*Karma Yoga*: renunciation of the fruits of action

*Jñāna Yoga*: inquiry into the nature of the self through study and investigation

*Bhakti Yoga*: union with the Divine through devotional love and surrender

The influential Hindu teacher Vivekānanda, emphasizing the meditative aspect of both Patañjali and the *Gītā*, added a fourth “yoga” to the list, *Rāja Yoga*: the unification of the mind in meditation.

These three (or four) approaches to yoga, understood as describing different types of practitioner, outlined not just a personal approach to spiritual life, but would weave through mainstream Hindu practice as the *Gītā* became one of the primary sacred texts of the religion. Yoga, by the time it appears in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, is no longer the young reform tradition that resisted the Brahmanic religion, but had become central to the understanding of spirituality throughout Indian religion, describing the pathway by which one is liberated from *karma* and the round of endless birth (*saṃsāra*).

The *Bhagavad Gītā* begins with the challenging teaching of *Karma Yoga*, the renunciation practice of letting go of attachment to the fruit of one’s actions. This letting go is predicated on the same balanced attitude toward preferences that was the centerpiece of yoga in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, and leads to the balanced mind state of equanimity. In the *Gītā*, this equanimity is particularly directed toward thoughts of success and failure, and is the first teaching offered to Arjuna, who has reflected on the death and pain that will be caused by the war and decided that he does not want to take part. The teachings of Kṛṣṇa begin with his urging Arjuna to fight, and continue into teachings on the nature of the self, its relationship to the divine, and the yogic practices that lead the seeker to realize his true nature. Yoga in the *Gītā* is again meditative, emphasizing the stabilization of attention through *pratyāhāra* (sense-restraint) leading to *dhāranā/dhyāna* (concentration/absorption) and *śamādhi* (unification). This ancient yogic method is now held within the frame of renunciation (*vairagya*) and devotion (*bhakti*): letting go of attachment to the fruits of action, supported by a powerful vision of the Divine, and insight into *karma* as the endless cycle of birth and death. Meditative concentration in the *Gītā* is called *Rāja Yoga*, the “royal path”, and the practice described is similar to that in Patañjali’s *Yoga-Sūtra*, one-pointed concentration based in *pratyāhāra* and leading to *śamādhi*. Study of spiritual texts and inquiry into the nature of the self is called *Jñāna Yoga*, the path of knowledge, understood both as “external” philosophical study, and “internal” contemplative investigation.

*Bhakti Yoga*, described in the *Gītā* as the most accessible and powerful of the yogas, grew into a widespread reformation movement of its own. The path of surrender to the Divine through devotion and passionate worship, *Bhakti* is praised in the *Gītā* as easier than either meditation or study. It would become the preeminent religious practice in India, influencing all of the major Indian religious traditions, including Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, and Muslim/Sufi streams of practice, both classical and Tantric. Hindu *Bhakti* schools came to be divided into three primary lineages, based on which deity the lineage worshipped as primary.

*Vaiṣṇava* — worshipping Viṣṇu (most often as Kṛṣṇa) as the primary deity

*Śaiva* — worshipping Śiva as the primary deity

*Śakta* — worshipping Śakti, or *Devi* (Goddess), as the primary deity

Seen as describing a single broad yogic path, the *Bhagavad Gītā* taught a yoga oriented to householders that emphasized fulfilling one's caste duties and cultivating the discipline of *vairagya*, renunciation of the fruits of action, or *Karma Yoga*. This discipline, which supports both meditation and inquiry, and which leads to equanimity and union with the Divine, is supported by the powerful internal foundation of devotion, either to the figure of Kṛṣṇa or one's chosen deity. *Bhakti Yoga* would become one of the foundations for the powerful Tantric revolution that transforms Indian yoga between the 5th and 13th centuries.

Primary text: verses from the *Bhagavad Gītā*<sup>6</sup>

"The superior man is he whose mind can control his senses; with no attachment to results, he engages in the yoga of action... Craving and aversion arise when the senses encounter sense-objects. Do not fall prey to these two brigands blocking your path... Men say that the senses are strong. But the mind is stronger than the senses; the understanding is stronger than the mind; and strongest is the Self. Knowing the Self, sustaining the self by the Self, Arjuna, kill the difficult-to-conquer enemy called desire." (ch. 3 — *pratyāhāra* as primary training)

"He who can see inaction in the midst of action, and action in the midst of inaction, is wise and can act in the spirit of yoga. With no desire for success, no anxiety about failure, indifferent to results, he burns up his actions in the fire of wisdom... When a man has let go of attachments, when his mind is rooted in wisdom, everything he does is worship and his actions all melt away." (ch. 4 — *Karma Yoga*)

"Constantly mastering his mind, the man of yoga grows peaceful, attains supreme liberation, and vanishes into my bliss. ...'A lamp sheltered from the wind which does not flicker'—to this is compared the true man of yoga whose mind has vanished into the Self. When his mind has become serene by the practice of meditation, he sees the Self through the self and rests in the Self, rejoicing... Attaining this state, he knows that there is no higher attainment; he is rooted there, unshaken by even the deepest sorrow. This is true yoga: the unbinding of the bonds of sorrow. Practice this yoga with determination and with a courageous heart." (ch. 6 — *Jñāna Yoga*)

"Closing the nine gates of the body, keeping the attention in the heart, drawing the breath to the forehead, with the mind absorbed, one-pointed, uttering the sacred Ōm, which itself is freedom, focused on me as you leave the body, you attain the ultimate goal." (ch. 8 — *Rāja Yoga*)

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Mitchell, *Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation* (NY: Three Rivers Press, 2000). ; for literal translation & deeper study, see Winthrop Sargeant, *The Bhagavad Gita* (New York: SUNY Press, 2009).

Concentrate every thought on me alone; with a mind fully absorbed, one-pointed, you will live within me, forever. If you find that you are unable to center your thoughts on me, strengthen your mind by the steady practice of concentration. If this is beyond your powers, dedicate yourself to me; performing all actions for my sake, you will surely achieve success. If even this is beyond you, rely on my basic teaching: act always without attachment, surrendering your action's fruits." (ch. 12 — *Bhakti Yoga*)

### *Tantra: The Heart of Recognition*

Tantra (500-1300 CE) arose as a radicalization of the classical yogas of inner fire, devotion, concentration, and the subtle body, replacing silent meditative concentration with ritual, visualization, mantra, guru yoga, and energetic practices to cultivate power (*siddhi*) and unfold a non-dual path leading to *jivanmukti*, "living liberation". Tantric texts began to appear in the 4th and 5th centuries, and spread rapidly, taking root in Kashmir in the far north, and in Tamil Nadu in the south of India. It was largely a householder lineage, not dependent on monasticism, solitude, or celibacy, and became very widespread, with public temples, substantial patronage, and lineages of prolific and visionary teachers. Tantra in Kashmir focused on Śiva, and is known as Śaiva Tantra, centered on the writing of the great sages Vasugupta (860-925), Abhinavagupta, and Kṣemarāja. Tantra spread throughout India into diverse schools, among them the Śrī Vidyā tradition focusing on the worship of *Devī*, the Goddess. Tantra thrived until the Mughal conquest of India between 900 and 1300 CE, during which it was almost completely destroyed, with lineages lost, temples destroyed, and oral traditions going underground.

Tantric yoga focused on cultivation of psychophysical energy (*prāṇa* or *śakti*), and developed complex maps of the subtle (*sūkṣma*) or energetic body commonly used in modern yoga in which *prāṇa* moves through channels (*nadi*) and swirls at energy centers called wheels (*cakra*). The Tantric vision of energetic movement through the body is the root of what would evolve into *Haṭha Yoga*, and works to awaken *śakti* that is visualized as sleeping coiled at the base of the spine. Named after the coiled shape, *kuṇḍalinī* once awoken is directed upward through the central column of the subtle body, known as *suṣumnā nāḍī*. Energy in Tantra is awoken through several primary practices: initiation, mantra, ritual, visualization, and energetic gestures known as *mudrā*. Initiation (*dīkṣā*) comes through the grace of a guru, one who had realized liberation and had the power to invoke *śakti* or a vision of the Divine in the sincere seeker. Initiation from a guru is the beginning of the Tantric path, followed by spiritual disciplines such as mantra, visualization, and ritual.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Georg Feuerstein, *Tantra: The Path of Ecstasy* (Boston: Shambhala, 1998).

### 3 primary channels (*nadi*) through which energy (*śakti*, or *prana*) moves

*ida*, the moon channel, which governs the left side of the body and is receptive, cooling, and feminine.

*piṅgala*, the sun channel, which governs the right side of the body and is active, heating, and masculine.

*suṣumṇā*, the central column, which passes through the midline of the body and is the channel through which energy — conceived as the Goddess *Śakti*, or *kuṇḍalinī*, “the coiled one”, ascends.

Along *suṣumṇā nadi*, places where energy could be focused (called *cakra*, “wheel”) were identified, each with elements and related qualities. A standard *Hatha Yoga* map of 7 *cakra* is given here, though many *tantric* schools used a map of only 5 *cakra*. Many Western yoga schools understand these *cakra* to have a series of psychological or emotional qualities that students can connect with as a valuable map of practice. [The interpretation of *cakra* as qualities does not appear to have deep roots in the Indian tradition, and may be a Western invention, but the teaching is included here because of its current ubiquity.]

<i>cakra</i>	location	color	element	(quality)	<i>bija mantra</i>
<i>sahasrāra</i>	crown	white	[none]	<i>bliss</i>	<i>ōm</i> or silence
<i>ajña</i>	center of head	indigo/violet	[none]	<i>consciousness</i>	<i>kṣam</i> or <i>ōm</i>
<i>viṣuddhi</i>	throat	blue	space	<i>communication</i>	<i>ham</i>
<i>anāhata</i>	heart	green	air	<i>love/compassion</i>	<i>yam</i>
<i>manipura</i>	navel/solar plexus	yellow	fire	<i>will/power</i>	<i>ram</i>
<i>svādhīsthāna</i>	pelvic center	orange	water	<i>self/sex</i>	<i>vam</i>
<i>muladhāra</i>	perineum	red	earth	<i>root/ground</i>	<i>lam</i>

One of the most socially radical manifestations of the Tantric revelation was a reawakening of the veneration of the feminine Divine, known as *Śakti*, or the Goddess of Divine Energy. Hindu cosmology teaches that we are in an era of darkness that began with the death of *Kṛṣṇa* at the end of the *Mahābhārata*, where people are unable to access the skills and purity of heart necessary to reach the Divine using the ancient methods. Our “contentious” age is called the *Kali-yuga*, and requires its own radical methods of meditation and purification. Like both the Buddha and *Kṛṣṇa* in the *Gītā*, Tantric sages rebelled against the Brahmin priests and the caste system. The Tantric vision is non-dual (*advaita*), viewing relative and absolute reality as not separate from each other. This doctrine led to the radical vision that purity and impurity were fundamentally illusory, or *māyā*, as were all dualistic ideas. Rebelling against the purity-oriented strictures of the caste system, Tantric practitioners (*tantrikas*) brought into their rituals five taboo substances/acts, called the “Five M’s” (*pañcamakara*): fish (*matsya*),

meat (*māṃsa*), wine (*madya*), parched grain (*mudrā*), and sexual intercourse or sexual fluids (*maithuna*). These substances/acts, forbidden by the orthodox religious establishment, were invoked in order to assert the radical non-duality at the heart of the Tantric vision. Most often they were invoked metaphorically, or visualized, in the course of Tantric ritual practice, but there are reports of *tantrikas* also imbibing them literally. The literal use of forbidden substances may have been a remnant of Tantra's origin in medieval Indian alchemy.

Tantra developed in two parallel paths, called Right-handed (*dakṣiṇācāra*) and Left-handed (*vāmācāra*) Paths. The "Left-handed" practitioners, engaging literally in the taboo "Five M's", especially ritual sexuality, were never mainstream, and were the source of constant and continuing criticism from the orthodox establishment. The much more widespread Right-handed path understood the taboo acts as metaphor, and uses only symbolic versions of them in ritual (*pūjā*) and visualization practices. They became symbols for aspects of the process of *kuṇḍalinī* awakening, seen as referring secretly to manifestations of energy and to practices revealed only through transmission by the guru.

#### *The Tantric "Five M's" as esoteric/somatic metaphor*

*Madya* ("liquor") refers to the heavenly *Amṛta* (nectar) that drips down the throat in *khechari mudra*

*Māṃsa* ("meat") refers to swallowing the tongue ("eating meat") in *khechari mudra*

*Matsya* ("fish") refers to *ida* and *pingala nāḍī*, the moon and sun channels

*Mudrā* ("grain") are the gestures the hands and body take when the *kuṇḍalinī* is awakened

*Maithuna* ("sex") is the union of *Śakti* (Absolute Energy) with *Śiva* (Absolute Consciousness)

Tantric philosophy is rich and complex, centering on the nature of consciousness and the activities of manifestation. Through Tantric yoga practice, the *tantrika* learns to perceive all forms of reality as Divine, excluding nothing from the vision of a single unified activity, perceived as vibration, or *spanda*. Śaiva Tantra describes the Five Activities of the Divine (*pañca-kṛtya*) as creation (*sṛṣṭi*), maintenance (*sthiti*), dissolution (*samhāra*), concealing (*tirodhāna*), and revealing (*anugraha*). Reality is veiled from ordinary perception through three fundamental impurities (*mala*) that describe patterns of habitual consciousness:

1. Individuality, fundamental contraction (*āṇava-mala*), the primary cause of suffering (*duḥkha*).
2. Differentiation or limitation (*māyīya-mala*), which gives rise to the feeling of separateness.
3. Action (*kārma-mala*), the bondage of karma via grasping and aversion.<sup>8</sup>

With its roots in the vast view of non-dual Tantra, yoga in the Tantric systems consisted primarily of breath and energy practices within a framework of ritual visualizations and mantra. From the stillness-oriented meditations of early Classical Yoga, Tantra evolved into dynamic imaginative practices that

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<sup>8</sup> Christopher Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated* (The Woodlands: Anusara, 2012).

themselves became the seeds of the even more physically dynamic practices of *Haṭha Yoga*. Though many of the lineages of Tantra were lost through the centuries of Muslim rule, a few survived into the twentieth century, and through new translation and practice are being revived. It is important to recognize that Tantra based in medieval Indian texts and non-dual tradition is distinct from contemporary New Age teachings that use the word Tantra to refer to practices of sacred sexuality and a life-embracing ethos. While such new schools may have much to offer the modern seeker, they often are only tangentially connected to historical Tantra, and their teachings cannot be considered traditional or ancient. While Tantric ritual largely was sublimated into the physical practices of *Haṭha Yoga*, its understanding of the profound interconnection and non-separateness of the individual self with the Divine Self, or Supreme Consciousness, affirming the ancient non-dual understanding of *Advaita Vedānta*, would remain the quintessential statement of Indian metaphysics. Śaiva Tantra would enunciate this realization as “Śivoham”, “I am Śiva, Infinite Consciousness.”

Primary text: verses from *The Heart of the Doctrine of Recognition (Pratyabhijñā-hṛdayam)*<sup>9</sup>

1. Awareness, free and independent, is the cause of the performance of everything.
2. She unfolds the universe through Her own Will and on the canvas which is Herself.
3. It is diverse because it is divided into mutually adapted subjects and objects.
4. The individual conscious being also, as a contraction of universal Awareness, embodies the entire universe in a microcosmic form.
5. Awareness descends from her wholly Self-aware and expanded state and becomes contracted in order to perceive an object: this is the mind.
13. When there is full realization of that, the mind turns within and ascends to its wholly self-aware and expanded state, and thus is [realized as] Awareness.
14. The Fire of Awareness, though obscured in its descended state, still consumes the kindling of knowable objects to some extent.
15. Upon attaining one's strength, one can absorb anything into oneself; [in this way,] one makes the whole universe one's own.
16. When one discovers this Bliss of Awareness, and firmly fixes the realization that the body etc. are one with that Awareness—so that it persists even when they are still perceivable—this is *jīvanmukti*: embodied liberation.

<sup>9</sup> Kṣemarāja (d. 1025, disciple of Abhināvagupta), *The Heart of the Doctrine of Recognition (Pratyabhijñā-hṛdayam)*, (tr. Wallis, unpublished)

*Body, Breath, & Energy: Haṭha Yoga*

*Haṭha Yoga* arose in the 13<sup>th</sup> century as a simplification of *Śaiva Tantra*, omitting ritual, mantra, and guru, but retaining and developing the physical and energetic practices. The word *Haṭha*, literally “forceful”, and later given the esoteric interpretation “sun-moon”, began to refer to systems of practice that used the arousal of energy in the body as the pathway to *samādhi* and realization. Possibly originating in Tibetan Tantric exercises, *Haṭha Yoga* used breath and posture to awaken *kuṇḍalinī*, metaphorically “forcing” her to travel upward through the central channel, *suṣumṇā*. Several practice manuals from early *Haṭha Yoga* survive, among them *Gorakṣa Paddhātī*, *Gheranda Saṁhita*, and *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā*. Svātmanāma’s *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā* (“Light on *Haṭha Yoga*”, 1350 CE) is one of the most comprehensive, describing the practices of posture, breath, gesture, sexual energy control, and meditation that were common among his lineage, the Nāṭha Yogis.<sup>10</sup> The practices of early *Haṭha Yoga* are the most immediate historical root of Modern Postural Yoga (MPY), emphasizing the use of poses and breath work leading to states of physical and energetic mastery.

Yoga in the *Pradīpikā* begins with ethical practices and individual disciplines, in a clear parallel to the first two limbs of Patañjali’s *Aṣṭāṅga* system, *yama* and *niyama*, though each category has ten qualities in it rather than the five that Patañjali named. The text continues with bodily purifications called *śatkarma*, intended to cleanse the physical body from excess mucus and obstruction. The *śatkarma* include *jala* and *sutra neti*, cleaning the nasal passages with either water or string, *basti*, “yogic enema” and induced vomiting to clean the digestive tract, and a breath practice (*kapalabhāti*) said to cleanse the front of the skull. The cleansing practices are followed by a collection of postures (*āsana*). It is in the *Pradīpikā* that the first non-seated *āsana* appear, though the bulk of the postures the text emphasizes are still oriented toward facilitating meditation and *prāṇāyāma*, breath work. The “breath” in *prāṇāyāma* is not just the physical breath, but refers to full-body energy (*prāṇa* or *śakti*). Following the section on *āsana*, the heart of the *Pradīpikā* concerns *prāṇāyāma*, emphasizing *kumbhaka*, breath holding, combined with energetic contractions in the body called *bandha*, and the powerful gestures of *mudrā*. The *Pradīpikā* ends with a description of *Nāḍa Yoga*, meditation on the inner or subtle sound.

In early *Haṭha Yoga*, *prāṇāyāma*, *mudrā*, and *bandha* are practiced vigorously several times through the day, preparing both body and mind for meditation through the purification of the energetic channels (*nāḍī*). Through intensive breath control combined with the contractions of *bandha*, the yogi awakens and sublimates sexual energy, drawing *prāṇa* into the central column of the body. The purificatory practices are said to cleanse the channels (*nāḍī*) of the body, preparing them to receive the powerful force of awakened *śakti*, facilitating the harmonious ascent of *kuṇḍalinī* through *suṣumṇā* to the crown center, *sahasrāra cakra*. The accomplished yogi is known as a *siddha*, after the supernatural powers that are said to arise with success in yoga, or a *jivanmukti*, one whose soul (*jiva*) is fully liberated.

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<sup>10</sup> Swami Muktibodhananda, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (Munger: Yoga Publications Trust, 1993).



Central to early *Haṭha Yoga* are two conceptions of the movement of subtle fluids or energies in the body, both centering on the conception of *bindu*, or “drops” of vital fluid. In the first model, the purpose of yoga is the drawing upward of reproductive fluids, male semen and female menstrual blood, into *suṣumṇā nāḍī* and ultimately to the crown center. These drops of reproductive fluid are seen as the quintessential alchemical substances, and their uplift the cause for immortality and power (*siddha*). In the second, the yogi protects drops (*bindu*) of the nectar of immortality (*amṛta*) that drip down from *ajña cakra* in deep meditation using an important gesture (*mudrā*) inherited from Śaiva Tantra, *khecari mudrā*. *Khecari mudra* in Tantra consisted of a meditation on non-dual Awareness, emphasizing the turning inward of the practitioner’s attention while keeping the external senses open. In *Haṭha Yoga*, like many of the meditations of earlier Tantra that evolved into purely physical gestures, *khecari mudrā* became the turning up of the tongue to touch the soft palate or enter the nasal canal. To accomplish this turning upward, the *Pradīpikā* suggests gradually cutting away the frenulum at the base of the tongue to allow it to turn back farther into the nasal cavity. The text states that the culmination of this practice is the touching of the “third eye” center (*ajña cakra*) with the tongue.

The core physical practices of *Haṭha Yoga*, after purification through *shatkarma*, *āsana*, and *prāṇāyāma*, are the three “bonds”: *mūla bandha*, *uḍḍiyāna bandha*, and *jālandhara bandha*, which combine into *mahā bandha*. *Mūla bandha*, the “root bond”, is performed by gently engaging the musculature of the pelvic floor as if to draw energy up into the body through the perineum. It is performed during *kumbhaka* after either inhale or exhale. *Uḍḍiyāna bandha*, the “upward flying” bond, is performed while holding the breath after exhale (*bahir kumbhaka*), lifting the ribs upward creating a vacuum that causes the abdomen to draw in and up into the rib cage. *Jālandhara bandha*, performed while holding the breath after inhale (*antar kumbhaka*), consists of lifting the sternum and lowering the chin to the chest, closing off the throat. The three *bandha* are said to contain *prāṇa* in the body and channel it into *suṣumṇā nāḍī*.

The *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā* asserts that all of its methods are for the purpose of attaining *Rāja Yoga*, and are methods to enter the meditative state of *samādhi*. The final section of the *Pradīpikā* teaches *Nāda Yoga*, meditation on the inner sound. Established in all the energetic practices described, the yogi enters stillness and turns awareness toward sound. The practice is described as a deepening absorption into the subtle sounds that are audible when the mind is quiet and energy awakened. Yoga, here interpreted as Union with the Divine (*Brahmān*), or the Supreme Self (*Ātman*), arises when this *samādhi* is perfected and the yogi realizes the individual self as not separate from the Supreme Self.

Primary text: verses from the *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā*, *Gheranda Saṃhita*, and *Gorakṣa Paddhati*

Just as moderate diet is the most important *yama*, and non-harming the most important *niyama*, so is *siddhāsana* the most important *āsana*. (HYP 1.38)<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

As salt merges in the sea, the mind and *atma* (soul/self) are considered united in *samādhi*. When the movement of *prāṇa* is completely annihilated, then mind is reabsorbed and then *samādhi* is considered attained. When the twofold nature of the individual soul and the cosmic soul becomes one, all desires/ideations are destroyed and that is considered *samādhi*. (*HYP* 4.5-7)

The sun dwells at the root of the navel, and the moon at the root of the palate. The sun consumes the nectar of immortality and thus man is held in the sway of death. Put the sun up and bring the moon down. This *Viparita-karani mudrā* is concealed in all the tantras. (*Gheranda Samhita*, 3.33-34)<sup>12</sup>

Ecstasy (*samādhi*) is described as the vanishing of all ideation (*sankalpa*) and [the realization of] the identity (*aikya*) of all pairs-of-opposites (*dvandva*) and of the individual self with the supreme Self. By means of the methods of Yoga, the yogin becomes absorbed into the supreme Absolute, which is free from fear, without support, without prop, and beyond ill. Just as ghee poured into ghee is still only ghee, or milk [poured] into milk [is still only milk], so the yogin is but [the singular] Reality. (*Gorakṣa Paddhati*, 2.85, 2.95-96)<sup>13</sup>

### *Yoga in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: yoga as embodiment*

*Haṭha Yoga* was revived in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and took root in two primary lineages, one “southern”, via Sri T. Krishnamacharya of Mysore, and one “northern”, via Swami Śivananda of Rishikesh. In both lineages, *āsana* was emphasized (more in Mysore than Rishikesh) and expanded, adapting exercises from European calisthenics and contortion. Krishnamacharya’s religious affiliation was *Vaiṣṇava*, and his teaching focused heavily on the philosophy of Patañjali’s *Yoga-Sūtra*, while Śivananda, the guru of well-known teachers Satchidananda (founder of Integral Yoga) and Satyananda (founder of Bihar Yoga), was *Śaiva*, brought more *bhakti* (and mainstream Hindu) philosophy to the practice, and sourced his teachings from *Vedānta*, the *Gītā*, and both Classical and Tantric yogas. Yoga as it has come to Europe and the United States is largely descended from these two lineages, with two primary students of Krishnamacharya, Pattabhi Jois (founding teacher of the Ashtanga yoga style) and B.K.S. Iyengar (founder of the Iyengar yoga style), most central. To distinguish it from the many historical yoga styles, scholars refer to yoga in these lineages as Modern Postural Yoga (MPY).

For modern yogis who practice styles descended from Iyengar or Ashtanga, Krishnamacharya is sometimes considered the “father of modern yoga”. Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (1888-1989) was a scholar and yogi who integrated *Haṭha* and *Rāja Yoga* teachings he received from Rāmmohan

<sup>12</sup> James Mallinson, *Gheranda Samhita* (Yoga Vidya, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> “Goraksha Paddhati”, trans. Feuerstein in Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition*.

Brahmacāri in Tibet with his study of various Hindu schools (*darśana*), and *Ayurveda*. He taught in the palace of the Maharaja of Mysore in the 1930s, bringing together practices from *Haṭha Yoga* and Himalayan Tantra with Patañjali's 8-limb system to create a *yoga* grounded in *āsana* but aspiring to *samādhi* and *Rāja Yoga* through cultivation of energy and the ancient practice of sense-restraint (*pratyāhāra*). Krishnamacharya created a system that connected poses in movement sequences synchronized with breath, called *vinyasa krama*, to create a much more vigorous and complex physical practice than in early *Haṭha Yoga*. *Vinyasa krama*, and the use of the Sun Salutation sequence (*surya namaskar*) as a repeated transition between sustained poses would be the centerpiece of Pattabhi Jois's Ashtanga yoga style, and the root of modern styles of flowing *āsana*. Krishnamacharya also greatly expanded traditional *Haṭha Yoga* practice with the inclusion of exercises for strength and flexibility popular in the 19th century "physical culture" movement, including European calisthenics, gymnastics, and contortion.<sup>14</sup>

Under Krishnamacharya and his students Pattabhi Jois, B.K.S. Iyengar, and Krishnamacharya's own son T.K.V. Desikachar (founder of the Viniyoga style), the collection of *āsana* grew to include collections of poses oriented around specific aspects of physical development such as standing, balancing, and seated poses, hip flexibility, deep back bending and forward bending, inversions, and twisting poses. In the century since this expansion of the scope and role of physical practice in *Haṭha Yoga*, poses and exercises from other systems continue to be brought in by teachers who find them useful. One notable recent expansion of the yoga corpus is the inclusion of exercises to strengthen the abdominal musculature, influenced by the work of Joseph Pilates.

Krishnamacharya's style integrated multiple yogic traditions, bringing the goals of Tantra (power, or *siddhi*) and Patañjali's *Rāja Yoga* (liberation, or *kaivalya*), together. He described insight into "one's true nature" as identical with the ancient definition of yoga as the Union of individual and absolute Self. While Krishnamacharya was creating modern vinyasa yoga through his integration of gymnastic *āsana* with the philosophy of Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtra*, he vigorously rejected much of the historical *Haṭha Yoga* tradition, such as the *kriya* and *śatkarma* that were integral to yoga in the era of the *Pradīpikā*. He felt that yoga as presented by Patañjali was the most appropriate philosophical and methodological orientation for practice. Krishnamacharya's emphasis on health and the cultivation of physical flexibility over the *Haṭha Yoga* goal of purification of the subtle body became the ground of Modern Postural Yoga.

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<sup>14</sup> Mark Singleton, *The Yoga Body* (London: NY, 2010).

Primary text: verses from Krishnamacharya's *Yoga Makaranda* and *Yogāsānagalu*<sup>15</sup>

Yoga is the foundation for both *siddhi* and Liberation. On analysis, yoga alone paves the way for complete ultimate knowledge of everything. A systematic pristine practice of yoga is a perfect tool for understanding one's true nature. Yoga is a state of oneness of *jivatma* and *paramatma*. (Yoga Makaranda, 2.4)

The philosophy of yoga is to withdraw the mind from external activities, to draw its focus inwards, and to bring it into deep concentration... After all the activities and movements of the mind cease, the mind which has become predominantly *sattvic* in nature becomes steady." (Yoga Makaranda, ch. 1)

*Āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* are initially extremely important. But if one wants to master *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma*, it is essential to bring the *indriyas* [the senses] under one's control. (Yoga Makaranda, ch. 2)

A number of people think that the *yogakriyās* are part of yoga, and they will argue as such. But the main source for yoga, Patañjali Darśana [viz. the *Yogasūtras*] does not include them... It is gravely disappointing that they defile the name of yoga. (Krishnamacharya, *Yogāsānagalu* (1941), quoted in Singleton, *The Yoga Body*)

As practitioners around the world have dedicated themselves to yoga, the practice continues to evolve, particularly as practitioners bring western scientific, humanistic, and postmodern political values to the practices. One transformative recent development is the practice of yoga by women to a degree never before known. The current influence of women practitioners and teachers is unique in the history of yoga, with women forming a substantial majority of yoga practitioners in the west. Women are challenging the patriarchal bias of many early yoga texts, and creating physical practices that meet their needs, including pre- and post-natal yoga, along with bringing a western progressive feminist perspective to the practice. *Karma Yoga* in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, as popularized by Mahatma Gandhi, combining with the politically progressive leaning of many modern yoga practitioners in the west has also given rise to yoga as political protest gesture. Modern yogis have used the physical practice, and the energy that arises through it, as inspiration for social action. One current organization popularizing this approach, "Off the mat, into the world", founded by yoga teacher Seane Corne, uses the Sanskrit term *seva* ("selfless service") to inspire social change and global activism.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Tirumalai Krishnamacharya, *Yoga Makaranda* (Madurai: CMV Press, 1934/2006). and Singleton, *The Yoga Body*.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.offthematintotheworld.org>

Modern and postmodern yoga philosophy has broadened from Krishnamacharya's focus on Patañjali to emphasize yoga's historical roots in Tantra. Several schools of yoga have arisen in the west that source their practices to Śaiva and Śakta Tantra rather than to Patañjali, giving rise to new translations and revivals of medieval Tantra, and to Tantric study among *āsana*-based yogis. In addition, yoga philosophy has encountered and been affected by western psychology and therapy. The new field of Yoga Therapy has arisen, using the physical and meditative practices of yoga to address both physical and mental-emotional distress. As *āsana*-based yoga takes root in the west, it is also encountering Buddhism in ways that it had not done previously, since Buddhism had been largely absent from India since before *Haṭha Yoga* existed. Western practitioners of *āsana* who are drawn to meditation now often do so through Buddhist communities and using Buddhist teachings like mindfulness, which have become widespread. Similarly, Buddhist practitioners, drawn to the physical cultivation of yoga *āsana*, are integrating the two practices and perspectives.

Yoga in the 21st century is a broad syncretic collection of practices and philosophical frameworks. From its roots in ancient Indian sacrificial worship, yoga has been influenced by every tradition it has come into contact with, absorbing both practical exercises and conceptions of reality. It has been oriented toward both transcendent liberation and immanent worldly power and engagement. The word “yoga” continues to collect meanings and ideology as it is taken up by non-Indian cultures and religions, and it evolves as it always has, through the bodies and minds of sincere practitioners in search of truth and the paths to deep well being.

*oṃ tryambakaṃ yajāmahe  
sugandhiṃ puṣṭi-vardhanam  
urvārukam iva bandhanān  
mṛtyor mukṣīya māmṛtāt*

*lokaḥ samasta sukhino bhavantu  
oṃ śanti śanti śantiḥ*

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*My reading list for deeper study:*

<http://www.seanfeitoakes.com/contemplative-practice/practice-resources/hindu-buddhist-yoga-reading-list/>

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