
UNIT 2: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON YOGA

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 2.1 Learning Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 Historical Perspectives : An introduction
 - 2.3.1 Pre-Vedic Period: Indus Valley Civilisation
 - 2.3.2 Vedic Period
 - 2.3.3 Post-Vedic Period or Pre-Classical Period
 - 2.3.4 Classical Period: The Age of Patanjali
 - 2.3.5 Post-Classical Period
 - 2.3.6 Hatha Yoga Period
 - 2.3.7 Modern Period
 - 2.3.7.1 Strategies for Implementation of Yoga in School Curriculum in India
- 2.4 Let us Sum up
- 2.5 Further Reading
- 2.6 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 2.7 Model Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- state the origin of Yoga
- describe the historical development of Yoga
- explain the strategies of Government for implementation of Yoga in school curriculum

2.2 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding unit, we learnt about the meaning and some important definitions of yoga, importance of Yoga and its scope, aims and objectives of Yoga, the misconceptions on yoga, forms (schools) of yoga and the characteristics of a yoga practitioner. This unit deals with the historical

perspectives on yoga. A study of the history of yoga gives us a broader picture on the subject. This unit will help you to understand the historical development and ideas related to yoga practice. Also, we shall discuss the provisions taken by the Government to introduce yoga in the primary and secondary school level in modern India.

2.3 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON YOGA: AN INTRODUCTION

History is very much essential for our self realisation. It broadens the horizon of our mind by presenting before us the contents of our past traditions upon which our life is built. The present can be better understood, experienced and appreciated through the mirror of history. In case of yoga also, without adequate understanding of its historical background, it is hard to genuinely appreciate its spiritual treasure and practise it meaningfully and with effectiveness. Yoga has a hoary antiquity. Nobody has definite idea as to where, when and how its practice started. Its origin has lost in the mist of time. Yoga has been mentioned to be eternal (*sanatana*) in the *Mahabharata* and archaic (*puraatana*) in the *Srimad Bhawad Gita*.

The subject of origin of yoga may be studied from two points of view. One is psychological and the other is historical. If studied from psychological points of view, the origin of yoga cannot be confined to India alone, it becomes universal. Inquisitiveness to know what is there beyond the visible universe and to gain super-normal experience and extra-sensory power, which are but parts of yoga, were there in men since the beginning of human civilisation, in different parts of the world. This fact is reflected in the magical pictures engraved on the ancient caves of Southern Europe and on the graves of the Middle Asiatic countries. Ancient Greek mysticism, Egyptian magical practices, Samanism of the Middle East and Siberia, Sufism of Islam and Christian mysticism are all some methods of supra-mental realisation. Apart from the ancient Hindu scriptures like the Vedas, even in the religious scriptures and practices of religions like Christianity, Islam, Judaism also yogic procedures are found in symbolic form or otherwise.

From historical point of view, all the authors on yoga, irrespective of

the west and the east, agree that India is the place of origin of yoga. So far as the date or period of its origin is concerned, it is not possible to give a date or period when people started practising yoga. Evidences say that during the period of Indus Valley Civilisation, which dates back to 5000 B.C. or beyond, yoga was a flourishing culture in the Indus-Saraswati valley. From that time onwards till today, yoga has a long journey, during which it has passed through different phases of its development. The evolutionary phases of yoga may broadly be divided into (i) Pre-Vedic Period or Indus Valley Civilisation Period, (ii) Vedic Period, (iii) Post-Vedic Period (Brahmana Period, Early Upanishada Period, Epic Period, Period of Mahavira and Buddha), (iv) Classical or Patanjali Period, (v) Post-Patanjali Period, (vi) Hatha Yoga Period and (vii) Modern Period.

2.3.1 Pre-Vedic Period: Indus Valley Civilisation

Earliest archeological evidence of the existence of yogic practices could be found from the stone seals found in the excavation done at Mohenjodaro, Harappa and Mehrgarh, now in Pakistan. The excavation done at these sites unearthed the presence of the oldest civilisation on earth, dates back to 7000 years past which, later on, came to be known as Indus Valley Civilisation. In the excavations, more than 2000 seals have been found with human figures seated in asanas like Padmasana, Vajrasana and Bhadrasana, engraved on them. Some of such figures were of Lord Pasupatinath (Siva) who was regarded as the originator of yoga. From these seals, it can be ascertained that yoga was a popular practice during those days, if not earlier.

2.3.2 Vedic Period

During the Vedic Period there were two streams of yoga practised simultaneously- one was the practise of pranayama and dhyana by the priests as part of their religious rites while performing sacrifices. The other was the practice of the different limbs of yoga

by the saints and sages for their spiritual upliftment, independent of religious rites and rituals. In the Rig Veda and the Atharva Veda mention has been made of three categories of saintly persons, viz., Dheeras, Vratyas and Kesins. These yogis and spiritual leaders were highly honoured and had occupied much higher place than the priests in the society.

2.3.3 Post-Vedic or Pre-Classical Period

For the convenience of study, this period may roughly be divided into (i) the age of the Brahmanas, (ii) the age of the Earlier Upanishads, (iii) the age of the Epics and (iv) the age of Mahavira and Buddha.

- **The Age of the Brahmanas** : The age of the Brahmanas was the age of sacrificial rites and rituals. The socio-religious atmosphere of the time was not favourable to the Sages, Vratyas and Kesins for their spiritual practice. Even then, the features of yogic tradition was not excluded from the Brahmanas. The four Ashramas introduced during the Brahmanical Age had ascetic life (Sanyas Ashram) as its last stage which included ideals and ways of living as prescribed in yoga.
- **The Age of the Earlier Upanishads** : After the age of the Brahmanas comes the age of the earlier Upanishads, during which the importance on sacrificial rites and rituals of the Brahmanical Age were replaced by the importance of earning knowledge and wisdom through spiritual practices. As a result, secular and spiritual practices associated with yoga, became popular among the people. Although it is not associated with any sect or stream of yoga, the influence of yoga is prominently visible in the earlier Upanishads like *Brihadaranyaka*, *Chandogya*, *Kausatiki*, *Aiteriya*, *Isha*, *Kena*, *Katha* etc. The *Brihadartnyaka Upanishada* mentions about the practice of *pranayama* (hymn 1:5:23). The *Chandogya Upanishad* devotes

one complete chapter to the discussion on Dhyana. The *Katha Upanishad* elaborately describes Yama's yogic teachings to Nachiketa and also defines yoga. The *Swetaswatara Upanishad* deals with yoga in the second chapter (Slokas 8 to 14). The *Maitriani Upanishad*, a latter Upanishad than the *Katha* and *Swetaswatara*, but earlier to Patanjali, mentions six-fold yogic methods- Pranayama, Pratayahara, Dhyana, Dharana, Tarka and Samadhi. All these prove that yoga had an esteemed place in the society of that age.

The Upanisadic sages typically rejected the idea that the Brahmanical rituals had potency to lead to enlightenment. Their main thrust was on liberation and realisation of the 'Transcendental Self'. To this end, they forwarded elaborate spiritual teachings.

- **The Epic Age :** The two great epics of India- the *Ramayana* with seven cantos (*Kandas*) and the *Mahabharata* with eighteen parts (*Parvas*) were written at different times with a gap of hundreds of years. The story of *Ramayana* was of the *Treta Yuga* (Silver Age of the Hindus) and that of *Mahabharata* was of *Dwapar Yuga* (the Age after Treta).

The *Ramayana* reflects the spiritual practices of the time to be more ascetic (*Tapah*) than yogic. In the ascetic sadhana, the moral codes of conduct – the Yamas and the Niyamas were emphasised on equally. The *Yoga Vasistha Ramayana* portrays the entire of yogic dimension.

Srimad Bhagawad Gita, which is included in the Bhishma Parva of the epic (consisting of 700 verses, arranged in sixteen chapters, each one called as 'Yoga') is a dialogue between Lord Krishna, the God-incarnate, and his friend and disciple, Arjuna (in the midst of the battle-field of Kurukshetra), which emphasise upon four kinds of yoga . Those are- Karma Yoga (Yoga of Action), Bhakti Yoga (Yoga of Devotion), Jnana Yoga (Yoga of Wisdom) and Dhyana Yoga or RajaYoga (Yoga of Contemplation).

- **The Age of Jainism and Buddhism :** **Jainism**, one of the major socio-religious movements in India, was founded by Vardhaman Mahavira, who lived during seventh century B.C. As stated by the Jaina scholar, Haribhadra Suri, in his famous treatise, '*Yog Vindu*', 'Yoga is the wish-fulfilling tree (*Kalpa-Vriksha*) and the 'Supreme Wish-granting Jewel' (*Chintamani*). Jainism prescribes the observance of Yamas like non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence etc., Pratyahara, Dhyana and Samadhi to liberate oneself and attain '*Kevala Jnana*', the highest stage of Jaina sadhana. Thus, in Jainism, yoga is the foundation towards realising Reality (*Tatwa*).

Buddhism was founded by Gautama Buddha, in the fifth century B.C. His learning of yoga under the two teachers had greatly influenced his preaching after he had attained enlightenment (*Buddhatwa*). In Buddhism, *Shila*, *Samadhi* and *Panna* are indispensable sadhana(practices) for attaining Nirvana which are nothing but Yama-Niyama, Dharana-Dhyana and Asamprajnata and Dharma-megha Samadhi in Yoga.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Fill up the blanks:

- The evolutionary phases of yoga may broadly be divided into periods.
- yoga was a popular practice in India dates back to B.C.
- kinds of yoga have been emphasised on the 'Srimad Bhagawad Gita'.

Q 2: Explain about the practice of yoga in the age of Jainism and Buddhism.

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2.3.4 Classical Period : The Age of Patanjali

The Classical Period is the most fertile period in the history and development of yogic tradition. It is that period when sage Patanjali gave a systematic and scientific shape to yogic practices. Till that time, yogic practices were followed fragmentally by different schools in different ways without any systematic procedure. During this period, Patanjali did extensive and intensive research on yoga and wrote a treatise on yoga, the *Yoga Sutra*, meticulously arranging the entire thesis in a very methodical and scientific way. Many authorities on yoga say that it was Hiranyagarbha who was the first person to systematise yoga who had written two books on the subject. There is no falsity in the statement, but, unfortunately, there has been no trace of any such books could be found till date. So, Patanjali is regarded as the first person to write a treatise, solely on yoga.

Patanjali's Yoga Sutra consists of 196 sutras, systematically arranged in four chapters, called Padas- Samadhi Pada, Sadhan Pada, Vibhuti Pada and Kaivalya Pada.

2.3.5 Post-Classical Period

During the Post-Classical period, a number of **Later Upanishads, Dharmasastras and Smritis** were written. From these scriptures one gets the state of yogic practices during that period. Many of the post-Patanjali Upanishads have elaborately discussed the different elements of yoga. Twenty such Upanishads have been identified by the German scholar George Feuerstein and scholars of the Theosophical Society. These Upanishads have been termed Yoga Upanishads.

2.3.6 Hatha Yoga Period

In the post-Patanjali period, the focal point of yogic practice had gradually shifted from the 'soul-centered' one to 'body-centered'

one. Body being the vehicle for the journey of our life, from birth till death, where we are to cross over innumerable hurdles, it is required to take utmost care of the body to make it strong, firm and durable, and keep it fit to endure all sorts of eventualities to be faced in life's journey. In order to make it so, the body is required to be burnt in the fire of yoga. Hatha Yoga scriptures prescribe seven austerities to make the body pure, firm and durable.

Yogi Matsyendranath is said to be the first historical person to propagate Hatha Yoga; but, unfortunately, he had left no written document. It was his disciple, **Yogi Gorakhnath**, who lived in the eleventh century A.D. and wrote a number of books on Hatha Yoga, viz., *Goraksha Samhita*, *Siddha Siddhanta Paddhati*, *Goraksha Sataka* etc. During his time, the teachings of Hatha Yoga had started spreading.

In the South, **Tirumular** and others started propagating Kaya-Sadhana (Body Practices). Tirumular's *Thirumandiram*, a treatise written in Tamil language, is as popular a treatise in the South as is the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali in the North. Three noteworthy treatises have been composed within the period between the fourteenth and eighteenth century A.D. Those are *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* of **Yogi Swatmaram Suri**, written in the middle part of the fourteenth century, *Gheranda Samhita* of **Sage Gheranda**, written in the last part of the seventeenth century and *Siva Samhita*, written in between the later part of the seventeenth and the first part of the eighteenth century A.D.

The principles of **Kriya Yoga**, earlier developed and propagated by the Siddha yogis like Agasthya, Bagarnath and Babaji was lost in due course of time, but was revived and spread by Shyam Charan Lahiri. His disciples and chain of grand-disciples had spread Kriya Yoga throughout India and abroad, particularly in America and Europe. At present time, the teachings of Kriya Yoga has spread across the world through 90 branches in India and more than 500 branches abroad.

2.3.7 Modern Period

The Modern age in the evolution of yoga may be considered to have begun from September, 1893, after Swami Vivekananda had stepped on the soil of America and delivered his famous speech at the inaugural function of the Parliament of Religions, held at Chicago. He spread the messages of Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga and Raja Yoga in America and Europe and made yoga popular in the west.

Though modern age in yoga is claimed to have started with Swami Vivekananda's propagation of yoga in the west, **modernisation of yoga with new ideas and technology had started in 1924** only, with the first scientific research done on yoga at Kaivalyadham, Lonavla (Pune) by Swami Kuvalayananda. Besides Kaivalyadham, Yogic Therapy & Research Centre, Jaipur; Anandashrama by Dr. Swami Gitananda, Pondicherry; Ayurveda Centre of Varanashi Hindu Viswavidyalaya, Swami Vivekananda Anusandhan Sansthan (Vivekananda University), Bangalore; Astang Yoga Research Centre, Mohisur; All India Ayurveda Centre, Delhi; etc. have made worthy contribution in modernising and popularising yoga not only in India, but also all over the world.

Yoga has become so popular and so essential by now, that the United Nations Organisation has earmarked a particular day, i.e., June 21, to be observed by all the member nations simultaneously as International Day of Yoga.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Fill up the blanks:

- i) Patanjali wrote a treatise on yoga, the....., in a very methodical and scientific way.
- ii) Tirumular's, a treatise written in Tamil language, is a popular treatise in the South.
- iii) is said to be the first historical person to propagate Hatha Yoga.

Now, let us have a look on the various provisions taken up by the Government to include yoga education in the schools of modern India.

2.3.7.1 Strategies for Implementation of Yoga in School Curriculum in India

India's **National Policy of Education, 1986**, stated that special attention would be given on yoga as a system which promotes integrated development of both the body and mind and that efforts would be made to introduce yoga in the school level/all schools. Since 1988, yoga has been taught in secondary schools as an integral part of the compulsory subject-'Health and Physical Education'.

Practice of Yoga not only contributes to the physical development of children, but also immensely contributes to their mental, moral, intellectual, spiritual and social development as well. It has been found that yoga practice helps to cultivate or develop both the hemispheres of the brain equally, due to which there is all-round development of personality in children.

The subject Yoga Education which is essential for children's all-round development, though introduced, was not given its due importance in the school curriculum. The subject was taught casually, mostly by teachers of Physical Education, as a small fragment of the subject 'Health and Physical Education', without due emphasis on the most important parts such as moral and spiritual education which alone can transform the character and behaviour.

The **National Curriculum Framework (N.C.F), 2005** had adopted a holistic definition of health with the inclusion of yoga as an integral part. The N.C.F., 2005 had emphasised that the entire group-Health, Physical Education and Yoga, must be taken together as a comprehensive Health and Physical Education Curriculum, replacing the fragmentary approaches practised in schools. As a core of the School Curriculum, time allotment for games and Yoga must not be reduced under any circumstances. Equal importance along with

other subjects is to be given to the subject of yoga.

In keeping with the spirit of the National Curriculum Framework, 2005, the Central Board of Secondary Education had introduced Yoga as integral part of the compulsory subject, Health and Physical Education, to be taught at the Secondary Schools, from Class VI to Class X, as compulsory course, and in Class XI and Class XII of the Higher Secondary Schools as optional course.

In order to make the subject more effective and fruitful for students, the syllabi and training of teachers for transaction of Yoga in the schools required reviewing and reformulation. The Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, gave the responsibility to the National Council of Educational Research and Training (N.C.E.R.T) that had prepared an exhaustive syllabus with a view to make yoga a more integral part of the physical education programme in the schools run by Central Government. The new syllabus and the Course Materials for Yoga were released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development on 22nd June, 2015. In the new syllabus, 80% of the course had been kept as practical and 20% as theory. Necessary devices have been formulated by the C.B.S.E. for implementation of Yoga Curriculum in the public sector schools; but it is yet to device any strategy with regards to the implementation of Yoga Curriculum in the private sector schools affiliated to the board.

Meanwhile, the National Council for Teacher Education (N.C.T.E.) has made yoga a compulsory training, along with Information and Communication Technology (I.C.T.), Gender Studies and Inclusive Education, in the Teachers Training Centres/Institutions. The Council has prepared syllabus for teachers as well. In order to produce pool of yoga teachers, the N.C.T.E. has prepared syllabus for Diploma, Bachelor and Master Degree Programmes in Yoga Education.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Fill in the gaps:

- (i) Since yoga has been taught in secondary schools as an integral part of the compulsory subject-‘Health and Physical Education’.
- (ii) had adopted a holistic definition of health with the inclusion of yoga as an integral part.



2.4 LET US SUM UP

- The origin of yoga cannot be confined to India alone, it becomes universal. Since the beginning of human civilisation, yoga has been practised in different parts of the world.
- The evolutionary phases of yoga may broadly be divided into Pre-Vedic Period or Indus Valley Civilisation Period, Vedic Period, Post-Vedic Period (Brahmana Period, Early Upanishada Period, Epic Period, Period of Mahavira and Buddha), Classical or Patanjali Period, Post Patanjali Period, Hatha Yoga Period and Modern Period.
- Patanjali did extensive and intensive research on yoga and wrote a treatise on yoga, the *Yoga Sutra*. Yoga is prominently visible in the earlier Upanishads like *Brihadaranyaka*, *Chandogya*, *Kausatiki*, *Aiteriya*, *Isha*, *Kena*, *Katha* etc.
- Mention must be made of Kaivalyadham, Vivekananda University, etc. in modernising and popularising yoga.
- Government of India's National Policy of Education, 1986, stated that special attention would be given on yoga as a system which promotes integrated development of both the body and mind and that efforts would be made to introduce yoga in the school level/all schools.
- The National Curriculum Framework, 2005 has stated that as a core of the School Curriculum, time allotment for games and Yoga must

not be reduced under any circumstances. Equal importance along with other subjects is to be given to the subject of yoga.

- The Central Board of Secondary Education had introduced Yoga as integral part of the compulsory subject, Health and Physical Education, to be taught at the Secondary Schools, from Class VI to Class X, as a compulsory course and in Class XI and XII of the Higher Secondary Schools as optional course.
- The new syllabus and the Course Materials for Yoga was released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development on 22nd June, 2015. In the new syllabus, 80% of the course have been kept as practical and 20% as theory.
- The National Council for Teacher Education (N.C.T.E.) has made yoga a compulsory training in the Teachers Training Centres/Institutions



2.5 FURTHER READING

- 1) Phukan, B.N., (2012). *Yog Vijnan Parichay*. North Lakhimpur : Dr. Jogada Phukan.
- 2) Singh, Pancham (Ed.), (1975). *The Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. N.D.: Oriental Book Reprint Corporation.
- 3) Shastri, Pandit, A. Mahadev (ed), (1983). *The Yoga Upanishads*. Madras: The Adyar Library and Research Centre.
- 4) Taimini, I. K., (1979). *The Science of Yoga*. Adyar, Madras : The Theosophical Publishing House.



2.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- Ans to Q No 1:** (i) 7(seven)
(ii) 7000 B.C.
(iii) 4 (four)

Ans to Q No 2: Jainism prescribes the observance of Yamas like non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence etc., Pratyahara, Dhyana and Samadhi to liberate oneself and attain '*Kevala Jnana*', the highest stage of Jaina sadhana. In Buddhism, *Shila*, *Samadhi* and *Panna* are indispensable sadhana (practices) for attaining Nirvana which are nothing but Yama-Niyama, Dharana-Dhyana and Asamprajnata and Dharma-megha Samadhi in Yoga.

Ans to Q No 3. (i) Yoga Sutra
(ii) Thirumandiram
(iii) Yogi Matsyendranath

Ans to Q No 4. (i) 1988
(ii) National Curriculum Framework (N.C.F.), 2005



2.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions

- Q 1:** How many stone seals are found in the excavation done at Mohenjodaro, Harappa and Mehrgarh, now in Pakistan?
- Q 2:** Write a short note on 'The Age of the Brahmanas'.
- Q 3:** When did the Modernisation of yoga with new ideas and technology start?
- Q 4:** When were the new syllabus and the Course Materials for Yoga released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development?

B. Short Questions (Answer in about 150 words)

- Q 1:** How did the Classical Period : the Age of Patanjali provide a systematic and scientific shape to yogic practices?
- Q 2:** Write a short note on the development of yoga in the Vedic period.
- Q 3:** What kind of new syllabus and the Course Materials for Yoga was released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)?

C. Long Questions (Answer in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Describe the evolution of Yoga from the pre-historic days to the present day.

Q 2: Discuss the development of yoga in the modern period.

Q 3: Explain the strategies taken by the Government of India for implementation of Yoga in school curriculum?

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