

History and Origins of Yoga

Yoga, as a discipline, has a rich and multifaceted history spanning thousands of years. Rooted in ancient Indian culture, it evolved as a system of practices to harmonise the body, mind, and spirit. Its development can be broadly divided into four main periods:

1. Pre-Vedic Period (Before 1500 BCE)

- Yoga's origins trace back to the **Indus Valley Civilisation**, as evidenced by archaeological findings. Seals from this period depict figures in meditative or yogic postures, suggesting early forms of yoga practice.
 - This period likely emphasised nature worship, rituals, and proto-yogic practices tied to spiritual growth and community harmony.
-

2. Vedic Period (1500–500 BCE)

- The **Vedas**, India's oldest sacred texts, lay the spiritual foundation for yoga. The word "yoga" appears in the **Rig Veda**, referring to discipline and union.
 - Early yoga focused on rituals, hymns, and ceremonies as tools for spiritual connection.
 - Practices involved chanting (**mantras**) and controlled breathing to cultivate focus and awareness.
-

3. Upanishadic and Classical Period (500 BCE–500 CE)

- The **Upanishads** (philosophical texts) expanded yoga's meaning, focusing on the inner self and meditation. Key concepts introduced include **atma (soul)** and **Brahman (universal consciousness)**.
- The **Bhagavad Gita** (c. 500 BCE) outlined three major paths of yoga:
 1. **Karma Yoga** (Path of Action)

2. **Bhakti Yoga** (Path of Devotion)
 3. **Jnana Yoga** (Path of Knowledge)
- **Patanjali's Yoga Sutras** (c. 200 BCE–200 CE) formalised yoga into a system known as the **Eightfold Path of Ashtanga Yoga**, offering a structured approach to achieving liberation (**moksha**).
-

4. Post-Classical and Modern Period (500 CE–Present)

Post-Classical Yoga (500–1700 CE)

- This era saw the emergence of **Hatha Yoga**, focusing on physical postures (asanas) and breathing techniques (pranayama) to prepare the body for meditation.
- Texts like the **Hatha Yoga Pradipika** codified these practices, blending physical discipline with spiritual aims.

Modern Yoga (1700 CE–Present)

- In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, yoga gained global attention, thanks to teachers like:
 - **Swami Vivekananda**, who introduced yoga to the West.
 - **Tirumalai Krishnamacharya**, the "Father of Modern Yoga," who emphasised asanas.
 - His students, such as **B.K.S. Iyengar**, **Pattabhi Jois**, and others, popularised styles like Iyengar Yoga and Ashtanga Yoga.
 - Today, yoga is a global phenomenon, with diverse styles and practices catering to physical fitness, mental wellness, and spiritual exploration.
-

Philosophical Foundations

The core philosophy of yoga draws from the **Six Darshanas** (Indian schools of thought), particularly **Samkhya** and **Vedanta**. Its practices are designed to overcome human suffering and achieve ultimate freedom through self-realisation.