

CONCEPTS OF LIMINALITY AND COMMUNITAS AMONG
ASHTANGA YOGA PRACTITIONERS



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CONCEPTS OF LIMINALITY AND COMMUNITAS AMONG
ASHTANGA YOGA PRACTITIONERS

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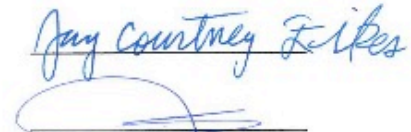
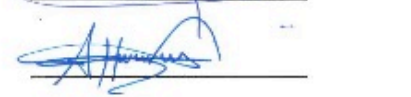

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ABSTRACT

The term *yoga* has been used to define various practices of asceticism and philosophical doctrines that emerged within the civilizations of the Indus Valley. From Vedic to Modern eras of yoga history, all yoga practices have shared ritualistic elements and have been shaped by many factors such as religion, politics, geography, society, literature, and culture. All of these factors helped create what is known today as “modern yoga”. This thesis focuses on the Modern Postural Yoga (MPY) school, “Ashtanga Yoga”, founded by Shri K. Pattabhi Jois in Mysore, India, and practised widely and daily by thousands of people all around the world. It is known as a school of yoga that incorporates discipline, authority and devotion; compared to its contemporaries, it is a rather strenuous and transformational yoga practice. Despite being called a “modern” practice, it embodies the *paramparā* tradition and *tapas* practices dating back to the Upaniṣadic era. *Tapas* is the inner heat that is the source of transformation; achieving it requires discipline. *Paramparā* is the direct transmission of knowledge from the teacher to student (*guru-śiṣya*) that requires trust, obedience, and devotion. Authority of the teacher, obedience of the student, and devotion to the practice is necessary in order to experience the essence of this seemingly physical practice. *Paramparā* aspect and the strict physical practice of Ashtanga Yoga is analyzed through Van Gennep’s “rites of passage”, placing Victor Turner’s concepts of “liminality and *communitas*” at the centre of its anthropological approach, and investigating the practice as a “secular healing ritual”, as seen by Elizabeth De Michelis. The analysis shows that Ashtangis share the same symbolic language and values without any discrimination of gender or status; they form *communitas*, experiencing similar effects and benefits of their practice every day with other Ashtangis. This research is the first attempt in Turkey to discuss a widely practised MPY school in terms of its history, practice, and its relevance to the concepts of liminality and *communitas*.

Keywords: *Communitas, Liminality, Rites of Passage, Ashtanga Yoga, Yoga, Modern Postural Yoga, Paramparā, Ashtangi, tradition, modernity, community, devotion, authority, discipline, obedience.*

ÖZET

Yoga terimi, İndus Vadisi medeniyetlerinin ürünü olan çeşitli çilecilik uygulamalarını ve felsefî doktrinleri ifade etmek için kullanılır. Vedik dönemden günümüze, yoga uygulamalarının tamamı bünyelerinde törensel öğeler barındırır ve tarih boyunca din, siyaset, coğrafya, toplum, edebiyat ve kültür tarafından bu uygulamalar şekillenmiştir. Tüm bu faktörler bugün bilinen anlamıyla “modern yoga”yı oluşturur. Bu tez, bir Modern Postürel Yoga (MPY) okulu olan “Ashtanga Yoga”ya odaklanır; Ashtanga Yoga, Şri K. Pattabhi Jois tarafından Hindistan’ın Mysore eyaletinde kurulmuştur ve tüm dünyada binlerce insan tarafından her gün uygulanır. Disiplin, otorite ve adanma barındıran bir pratik olarak bilinir; aynı döneme ait diğer MPY okullarına kıyasla, gayret isteyen ve dönüşüm yaratan bir uygulamadır. “Modern” olarak anılmasına rağmen, “paramparā” geleneğini ve “tapas” kavramını içinde barındırır. Tapas, dönüşümün kaynağı olarak kabul edilen içsel ateştir; disiplin gerektirir. Paramparā, bilginin öğretmenden öğrenciye (*guru*’dan *śiṣya*’ya) doğrudan aktarımıdır; güven, itaat ve adanma gerektirir. Öğretmenin otoritesi, öğrencinin itaati ve uygulamaya duyduğu adanma, fiziksel gibi görünen bu pratiğin özünü deneyimleyebilmek için gereklidir. Bu çalışmada Ashtanga Yoga’nın paramparā kavramı ve katı fiziksel uygulamaları, van Gennep’in “geçiş törenleri” ile çözümlenir; Victor Turner’ın “eşiklik (liminality) ve kolektif eşitlik (communitas)” görüşleri antropolojik yaklaşımın merkezine alınır ve pratik, Elizabeth De Michelis’in “seküler şifalanma ritüeli” ifadesi üzerinden incelenir. Sonuç gösteriyor ki, Ashtangiler (Ashtanga Yoga pratiği yapan kişiler), aralarında statü ve cinsiyet ayrımı olmadan, aynı sembolik dili ve aynı değerleri paylaşırlar. Diğer Ashtangiler birlikte pratiklerinin benzer etkilerini ve faydalarını deneyimleyerek, “kolektif eşitlik” oluştururlar. Yaygınca uygulanan bir MPY okulunun, tarihsel süreci ve uygulamalarıyla birlikte, “eşiklik ve kolektif eşitlik” kavramlarıyla bağıntılı bir şekilde incelenmesi açısından, bu araştırma Türkiye’de ilktir.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Kolektif eşitlik, Eşiklik, Geçiş Törenleri, Ashtanga Yoga, Yoga, Modern Postürel Yoga, Paramparā, Ashtangi, gelenek, asrîlik, topluluk, adanma, yetki, tâlim, itaat.*

*To my late grandfathers, who were always deeply supportive
and curious about my academic pursuits. I miss them deeply.*

*To my darling grandmothers, who have taught me perseverance,
hard work, and devotion. May they live long and be healthy.*

*And to my beloved parents, who have never spared their affection and love, and
never stopped believing in me.*

I would not have come so far, had it not been for them.

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न गुरोरधिकं तत्त्वं न गुरोरधिकं तपः ।
तत्त्वज्ञानात् परं नास्ति तस्मै श्रीगुरवे नमः ॥ ११ ॥

na guroradhikam tattvaṁ na guroradhikam tapaḥ |

tattvajñānāt param nāsti tasmai śrīgurave namaḥ || 11 ||

“There is nothing superior to the knowledge of Truth, nothing higher than the Truth, and there is no purifying austerity better than the Truth; salutations to that guru.”

(Guru Stotram, Guru Gita, Skanda Purāṇa)

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Significance of the Study

Millions of people all around the world have been interested in what yoga has to offer. Some are drawn to it for physical fitness, some for spiritual pursuits, some for mental and psychological health, some for the purpose of enlightenment. From prisons to child daycare centres, hospitals to luxury holiday resorts, yoga and its practices have been introduced to many people from different backgrounds. It is most probable that each practitioner or each person interested in yoga in some way has a different goal, and many receive its benefits.

This applies to Turkey, as well. For the past couple of decades, Turkish citizens – especially those living in the metropolitan cities – have been acquainted with yoga and related practices. The oldest and most popular yoga studios with branches in Istanbul (Europe and Asia) and Ankara have stood strong for 18 years now. This does not mean there were not any yoga practice going on in Turkey before the 2000s; some yoga instructors and practitioners I have met over the years mentioned the names of old yoga teachers who were already teaching during the late 80s and early 90s in Turkey. Besides these decades-old schools and teachers, there are many other studios (in smaller and larger scales) offering group, private and corporate yoga sessions all around Turkey. Fitness centres, gyms, sports clubs, and even in the municipal centres, one can find yoga classes.

Each year, the number of “certified yoga teachers” has incrementally risen. Majority of yoga teachers (in Turkey and also around the world) hold this “certified” status from the “Yoga Alliance”, a non-profit foundation based in the United States of

America. The situation of Yoga Alliance (YA) will also be briefly discussed in this thesis; however, for now, it is worth mentioning that in Turkey, by law, all yoga studios and yoga teachers (employed by these studios or working freelance) must carry a license by Sports for All Federation in Turkey. This state regulation, despite having been debated and at times objected by the yoga community, was deemed to be quite necessary due to the growing interest in yoga and number of yoga teachers certified by YA. Although YA provides a well-rounded curriculum outline and registry designation for all aspiring yoga teachers looking to create teacher training programs and to receive international credibility, it does not have any formal recognition under Turkish law. There have been attempts in Turkey to create federations or associations that would serve as a Turkish YA; however, in 2013, yoga was formally and lawfully declared to be under the regulations of Sports for All Federation, by the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

It was the autumn of 2008 when I first practised exercises of yoga. In the last ten years, I have attended thousands of hours of yoga classes, yoga workshops, yoga teacher training, and retreats. Having been teaching and practicing since 2014 in a rather traditional lineage (Dharma Yoga, a.k.a. Dharma Mittra Yoga), I am able to observe the differences between the diverse practices and lineages I have experienced over the years, the dissimilarities between teacher training certifications and passing of tradition, and the distinction between teachers and gurus. My personal and professional involvement in the traditional practices of modern yoga has made this research relatively easier for me to conduct. As I have experienced respect to and acceptance of the lineage and guru, I understand the importance of them for one's yoga practice. For me, the moment I chose to follow the practice of Dharma Yoga

was a key milestone. The concepts of guru and lineage have transformed my practice and my personality in the best possible ways. This is why I find these aspects fascinating to study in depth.

The scholarly work in Turkey about yoga is limited to medical and health researches or religious studies. A quick search on the Council of Higher Education's Thesis Center database clearly shows how little yoga has been studied in its entirety. The gap between yoga practices' health benefits and their soteriological importance seems to never have been questioned. When did pursuits of enlightenment transform into physical fitness? Why do many people relate yoga to New Age movements or self-help systems? Why are many afraid of practising it? Academic research on these issues is limited and also very much needed. Discussing thoroughly the gap between classical yoga and modern-day practices will help eliminate prejudices and misunderstandings related to yoga and its practitioners.

Yoga studies are only covered in our country within the scope of Hinduism and new religious movements (besides medical research), and these studies do not extend beyond medieval practices that are the basis of today's practices, which have shaped the popularity of yoga all around the world. Even outside of Turkey, "modern yoga studies" is a very recent field, not older than a couple of decades. Despite being a relatively young field, though, modern yoga has been investigated by the prominent scholars around the world who are experts in Indology, Sanskrit Language, History of Religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other related fields. This holistic academic approach is crucial, given Indus Valley's complex cultural and religious history, in order to understand the vast impact and expansion of yoga and its practices in all areas of contemporary living.

Mircea Eliade's comprehensive work (2009 [1958]) sheds light on many aspects of yoga; unfortunately, his book, 'Patterns in Comparative Religion', seems to be the final stop for many scholars. The effects of the Second World War and physical culture movement, the sociological and sociopsychological residues of British colonialism in India, the religious and nationalist reforms on the Indian subcontinent have all paved the way to what I would define as "reverse colonialism"; including the invasive characteristics of modern yoga and ideas of "strong Indian nation", which have been embraced in a variety of cultural, religious, economic, and social settings, in many European and Anglophone countries. Supported by the quite recent archaeological findings and manuscript discoveries, it is safe to say that the revived *yogas* of the 20th century has roots that are stronger, more coherent and more secular than many are able to comprehend.

In this research, I aimed to slightly open the door to systematic scholarly research and leave it ajar for further studies. My limited research did not allow me to dive deeper into the soteriological concepts of yoga practice over centuries. In the literature review, I focused primarily on Ashtanga Yoga's basis of textual yogic history, its practices and traditional roots, and the practitioners' state of "liminality" as well as their social relationship defined here as "communitas".

I chose to study Ashtanga Yoga under these concepts because it is a pioneering Modern Postural Yoga (MPY) school that has influenced millions of yoga practitioners over the decades. The practice itself has invariable sets of posture sequences; each practice starts with an Opening Prayer and ends with a Closing Prayer. There are only two different class types; one is the Mysore style, where each practitioner practices at their own pace and the other is the Led class, where all

practitioners practice in sync at the same time with the strict breathing instructions of the instructor. There is no “teacher training” system; Ashtanga Yoga system carries the ancient guru-śiṣya (teacher-student) relationship, where the student is to practice with the teacher for a considerable amount of time and is not to teach others until the teacher gives permission to pass on the knowledge. There are unspoken rules of living that are not imposed; in order to be able to complete an Ashtanga Yoga practice at 6-7 AM, the practitioner must sleep early the night before and must stop eating 12 hours prior to practice. All practitioners go through similar phases in their Ashtanga Yoga practice and this creates a unique bond among them. They share a common “ancestor” (their teacher) and they share a common practice every day. The ritualistic aspect of Ashtanga Yoga is more visible than any other Modern Postural Yoga (MPY) practices. Many classes of MPY in Turkey do not have an ancestral lineage. The practitioners usually do not discriminate between classes and attend them for the sake of the physical and mental benefits of the practice. There is, of course, transformation as a result of these practices, as well. However, Ashtanga Yoga’s strict features of invariability for posture, discipline, teacher authority, and devotion (to both the practice and the teacher) separate it from other MPY schools.

1.2. Liminality

The typology of yoga schools by Elizabeth De Michelis (2004, p. 188), as will be discussed further, clearly classifies modern yoga schools; Ashtanga Yoga, according to De Michelis, is an example of “relatively pure” Modern Postural Yoga (MPY) practice (2004, p. 188), whose emphasis is on the physical aspect. Despite the fact that Ashtanga Yoga is put under the category of MPY, its traditional and classical roots make it unique compared to its contemporaries.

De Michelis highlighted three elements of MPY (2004, p. 250-251) that are used to combine polarities such as “connecting tradition and modernity, revelation and rationality, the sacred and the profane.” According to these three elements (see below), transformation, healing, and spirituality create the foundation of “everyday appeal” of MPY. This “everyday appeal” encompasses the practitioners and at the same time gives them enough personal space to decide at which end of the polarity their practice will remain (De Michelis, 2004, p. 250).:

1. “Fitness discourse” relating to “anatomical and physiological assumptions” and “revolutionizing our whole being”.
2. “De-stressing discourse” relating to “Neo-Haṭhayogic healing” and “psychosomatic medicine”.
3. “Religio-philosophical discourse” bringing concepts of tradition and religion and “modern spirituality” together.

De Michelis’ outline for the typical MPY session, defining it as “a healing ritual of secular religion” has three parts: Practitioners come to the class and prepare mentally for the practice; the practice starts (with or without instructions) and proceeds along the path that each particular MPY school requires; and the practice ends with a “final relaxation” (De Michelis, 2004, p. 251). This framework can also be applied to the Ashtanga Yoga class setting; either in the “Mysore classes” (where each student practices at their own pace, within a group setting) or in the “Led classes” (where all participants practice uniformly either the primary or the intermediate series, as the teacher leads them through the poses in a rhythmic pace which everybody needs to follow). All practitioners enter the class and prepare mentally and physically for the practice. Opening prayer is chanted; in the Mysore

class, each practitioner chants it mentally before beginning their practice, or in the Led class, the students repeat the verses of the prayer after the teacher. Then the practice starts, during which all participants are expected to practice as per the instructor – either Mysore, or Led sessions – and the practice ends with a relaxation, where the practitioners are expected to finalize their practice within the rules of the class and conclude by taking some time to rest, before going back to the “real world”. The class setting has a certain ambience, adorned by photos or pictures, sometimes with flowers and incense. These outline the “ritualistic” attributes of Ashtanga Yoga practice.

It is important to understand what a ritual is and its components are. According to Roy Rappaport, a ritual does not necessarily have to be religious; it is a kind of “performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers” (1999, p. 24). Ashtanga Yoga practice itself, compared to other MPY practices, is comprised of absolutely “invariant sequences”; each practitioner must start their practice from the same start point, just like everybody else has done, and must follow through the same sequences without changing any part of it. A “must” in Ashtanga Yoga practice is performed by the ones who follow the lineage in the traditional sense. The shared experience creates similar, even identical feelings among the practitioners of Ashtanga Yoga, all around the world.

Starting from De Michelis’ “secular healing ritual” definition, I preferred to analyze Ashtanga Yoga from that perspective through Arnold van Gennep’s “the rites of passage” (1960). This analysis was prepared by De Michelis through the example of Iyengar Yoga, and other MPY schools. She listed the “separation phase” to be

“introductory quietening time in MPY; “the transition phase” to be “MPY practice proper”; and “the incorporation phase” as “final relaxation in MPY” (De Michelis, 2004, p. 252-257). My argument is that compared to other MPY practices, Ashtanga Yoga’s phases of “transition and incorporation” are not completely separated from one another; and in fact, transition phase lingers into the incorporation phase as the practitioners fully embrace their lineage.

It is important to define “lineage” and what it means in the MPY context.

Merriam-Webster defined “lineage” as “a group of individuals tracing descent from a common ancestor” or “such a group of persons whose common ancestor is regarded as its founder” (Merriam-Webster, N.A.). Ashtanga Yoga as an MPY school has a strict sense of lineage; Pattabhi Jois was the founder and when he got very sick in 2007, he passed down the authority to manage the institute and to hold the lineage to his daughter Saraswathi and grandson Sharath Jois. This means that the authority to teach the Ashtanga Yoga method is only given to those who studied with Pattabhi Jois, and later with Sharath Jois. The recent removal of certain names from the authorized/certified teachers list showed that the institute is very serious about the regular visits and openly disagrees with “teacher training” offered by unauthorized/certified teachers. According to KPJAYI, if authorized/certified teachers do not show up in Mysore regularly and teach against the learning tradition, they may face exclusion from the esteemed list of Ashtanga Yoga teachers, no matter how experienced these teachers may be (Jois S., N.A.). Being a holder of Ashtanga Yoga lineage requires full obedience to the rules and code of KPJAYI.

In order to understand MPY’s ritual aspect, I looked into van Gennep’s separation of “rites of passage” in three phases as “preliminal, liminal, and

postliminal” (1960, p. 11). Preliminal phase marks the separation from the society, the liminal phase is a transition, and postliminal phase is incorporation back into society.

Van Gennep categorized funerals to be example of separation rites, marriages to be of incorporation rites; “pregnancy, engagement, initiation, or to a lesser extent adoption, giving birth to a second child, remarriage,” etc. are examples of transition phases and rites (van Gennep, 1960, p. 11).

The first phase (separation) divides “sacred space and time away from profane and secular space and time” (Turner, 1982, p. 24). Separation requires leaving previously held social status behind, in order to “transition into” a different status. In terms of Ashtanga Yoga setting, when the practitioners (CEOs, housewives, university students, employees, workers, etc.) arrive in the yoga studio or class, they leave their social status at the door. This separation phase also entails “symbolic behavior” which embodies this status renouncement by greeting the teacher with brief eye-contact while hands held in “prayer position” (a.k.a. Añjali Mudrā or Praṇāmāsana), rolling out the mat and standing in *Samasthitiḥ* (mountain pose, hands in prayer position, body straight up) and chanting the Opening Prayer¹ that includes an invocation to Patañjali (compiler of the Yogasūtras, first classical text that lays out a systematized yoga practice) and also to the deceased Gurus. This invocation works as a reminder for the practitioners; a reminder of the beginning of their practice, of their historical lineage, of the importance of their gurus, of their devotion to the Ashtanga tradition. As this Opening Prayer is chanted by all Ashtangis all around the world and around the same time of the day – the only difference being the time zones

¹ See Appendix A.

– it creates unity among practitioners. This behavioural sequence defines a separation phase within Ashtanga Yoga practice.

The second phase is defined as “threshold, margin, transition” (Turner, 1982, p. 24), where the subject of the ritual does not see any traits of the previous phase, nor of the next phase. The subject, in a “social limbo”, has an ambiguous personality; no longer carrying the social status that was previously attached. Humility, full obedience to the teacher’s instructions, social equality, sexlessness, anonymity with the others who experience the same phase (Turner, 1969, p. 102) are salient characteristics of the liminality phase. There is silence, submission, seclusion; the phase carries within a “tabula rasa” where the subjects “destroy their previous status” and “inscribe the knowledge and wisdom of the group” (Turner, 1969, p. 103). As the next phase imposes new responsibilities, the subjects need to completely embrace this liminal status. As the Ashtanga Yoga practice starts during early morning, the practitioners gather in the same room, practising the same poses in the same order, having the same manners and leaving their social identities at the door; they do not have any hierarchy in the eyes of their teacher, and they must all obey the teacher’s instructions. The duration of practice of Ashtanga Yoga; usually ninety minutes and up to two hours, thereby create seclusion from the “real world”; there is no talking nor conversation, nor interference by others during their practice. Despite practising at different paces the invariant sequence of postures, the social bond creates solidarity among “Ashtangis” (Ashtanga Yoga practitioners). Other Ashtangis are usually the first people they interact with in the morning, after the practice, their bond remains and extends to their social status and lives. Equality among Ashtangis lingers; obedience to the instructor continues even after the transition phase ends.

Visiting KPJAYI (K. Pattabhi Jois Ashtanga Yoga Institute) in Mysore, India also indicates a “spatial symbolism”, which Turner (1982, p. 25) recognized as a subject’s passage from a “preliminal status to a postliminal one” over or through a threshold. Such spatial symbolism “may be the precursor of a real and permanent change of residence”. This crossing of a threshold could be accompanied by a visit to the lineage’s basecamp, as when several visits to the premises are required by KPJAYI, and with other subjects, in Mysore or somewhere else, the subject (Ashtanga Yoga practitioner, in this case) achieves *communitas*. In this liminal phase, once past the threshold, the practitioners are “physically separated from the rest of the society” for at least a month (Turner 1982, p. 26). This separation from the society marks the integration into *communitas*, as the more time practitioners spend at KPJAYI and follow the norms of studying there, the more likely they would be granted “authorization” in their next visits. Studying at KPJAYI “files down” the practitioners; as when they abide the rules of the institute, then they take up new habits (waking up as early as 4 AM, for example) to arrive in the *yogaśālā* for their morning practices, despite having former experience in the practice, they do as the instructor says even though it challenges their former practice, they change their eating habits (if they have not already). The rules at KPJAYI are to prepare practitioners both for the original practice of Ashtanga Yoga as performed in Mysore² and for the *paramparā*, the traditional guru-śiṣya relationship.

² Mysore is a city in the state of Karnataka, southwest of India. The Maharaja of Mysore, Sri Krishna Rajendra Woyedar, was an important figure during the modern yoga revival and he was the sponsor of Krishnamacharya, Guru of Pattabhi Jois. The role of Mysore traditions in the modern yoga revival is explained in section 2.1.3.3..

Turner's list (1997 [1969], p. 106) of liminality's features as opposed to those of the constructed "status system" laid out a schema that could be worked on to see what Ashtanga Yoga practice at KPJAYI and other settings with authorized Ashtanga Yoga teachers creates in the lives of Ashtanga Yoga practitioners;

1. Constant "transition": It is a transition from being a regular 'yoga' practitioner and being a recognized 'Ashtanga Yoga' practitioner with other lineage holders.
2. "Totality": Practicing an entire series with other people every day at the same hour sets a wholesome routine.
3. "Homogeneity": There is no status distinction between practitioners, despite their level of practice, everybody is considered to be in equal distance away from the teacher, and thus to the lineage. Holding an "authorized" or "certified" status does not grant an increase in status.
4. "Communitas": Ashtanga Yoga practitioners share a practice that becomes their everyday routine; practising the same series every day with other fellow practitioners creates similar feelings, similar practice journeys, similar transformations. They prefer to spend time together, even when the practice is over, thereby forming a community.
5. "Equality & Anonymity & Absence of status & Absence of rank & Absence of wealth distinction": All former social and economic status is abandoned during the practice. At KPJAYI, in such crowded classes, practitioners are almost nameless.
6. "Nakedness & uniform clothing": Ashtanga Yoga practice needs a certain set of clothing that allows practitioners to continue their physical routines

comfortably, and also to not distract others. Yoga clothing becomes a uniform; sometimes partially naked, they wear their yoga outfits for the liminal phase (during the class) and change into another set of comfortable yoga clothing (not naked).

7. “Sexual continence”: *Brahmacarya* is one of the *yamas* (ethical regulations) in the Patañjali’s *Yogasūtras*; it means celibacy and sexual restraint. Canonical texts on yoga advise practitioners to either refrain from sexual acts or retain sexual fluids³. The practice of Ashtanga Yoga is strenuous; and the body needs to retain its power by balancing physical actions, including sexual actions.
8. “Minimization of sex distinctions”: There is no gender discrimination among the practitioners during the practice; the teachers approach each and every individual with the same behaviour.
9. “Humility”: There is no room for pride in the practice; Pattabhi Jois would deliberately interfere with proud practitioners so that they would learn to leave their ego outside.
10. “Unselfishness”: Neither the students nor the teachers in the practice room could be selfish in their approach to one another; Ashtanga Yoga teaches its practitioners to “be in one another’s shoes” as when everyone goes through the same phases in the Ashtanga Yoga practice.
11. “Total obedience”: Practitioners must obey the rules of the class/school setting, and those of the teachers. *Paramparā* is built on mutual trust, yet it

³ This concept is explained in detail in the section 2.1.2.3..

starts with students' obedience to the instructor and to the norms of the lineage.

12. "Sacred instruction & reference to mystical powers": As the entire practice is derived from classical and medieval texts on yoga, the texts are attributed to sacred (even divine) personalities (Śiva, Buddha, Kṛṣṇa, etc.) and they inherently carry sacred instructions with reference to superhuman yogic powers. The physical practice of āsanās (postures) carry a deeper meaning than what is practised on the surface; however, at the MPY scene in general, such sacredness is of secondary importance. MPY classes usually emphasize the physical aspect of the yoga practice; the sacredness of the subtle body (as described in the haṭhayoga texts) is rarely discussed or taught within the MPY class routines.
13. "Silence": All must observe silence during the practice; the only sound is that of rhythmic breathing of each practitioner.
14. "Suspension of kinship rights and obligations": The seclusion for the Ashtanga Yoga practice suspends all familial obligations; especially when the practitioner is in Mysore, practising at KPJAYI, for at least one month, the physical distance from one's family produces this suspension.
15. "Acceptance of pain and suffering": Ashtanga Yoga's physical practice is strenuous and challenging, sometimes mentally and physically painful, and the adjustments given by the instructors are at times often frightening. Certain postures require hands-on adjustments from the instructors; these adjustments help the practitioner experience the effect of the full pose (or help them slowly get to that point). The instructor – when the practitioner

reaches that safe level of practice – might lead the practitioner into postures that might rather make them feel anxious. It is obligatory that the practitioners fully devote themselves to the practice, and fully trust in the instructor, and accept the literal pain and suffering that is to come during the course of their practice.

All these “properties of liminality” could be observed in the traditional setting of the Ashtanga Yoga practice; some properties are less visible, some are substantially present. Turner explained (1982, p. 24) that when the liminal phase is over, incorporation into the society brings a newly acquired “profane and well-defined status” for the ritual subjects.

Understanding the “incorporation phase” of the MPY as a “secular healing ritual” firstly requires information on the conclusion of the practice; once the physical practice is completed, the practitioners rest in Śavāsana (corpse pose), which is also advised in the Haṭhayogapradīpikā (verse 1.32). It is a supine pose, where the practitioner lies down on the floor, completely motionless, palms are facing up, and eyes are closed, for about 7-10 minutes. It is expected from the practitioner to be still, and to make the body feel loose and heavy on the floor, until the point where the body is free from all sensations. This practice is more than only resting; in order for Śavāsana to be efficient, one needs to withdraw the senses and move towards a more meditative state of mind (De Michelis, 2004, p. 257). This meditative state prepares the practitioner to be reintegrated into their daily lives after the strenuous exercises; it helps complete the cleansing process and also symbolizes “death and renewal of self” (De Michelis, 2004, p. 257-258). It is the final part of the “secular healing ritual”; the positive or relaxed feeling that is generated involuntarily by the body’s functioning

through the practice may leave the practitioners in a state of bliss. According to De Michelis, “the element of sacralized personal transformation and healing motivates the practice” (2004, p. 258); and she supported this idea by van Gennep’s statement that these rites are recurrent because of the fact that the changes they bring are “regarded as real and important” and may be seen as “enactment of death and resurrection” necessary to obtain these rite-product changes (van Gennep, 1960, p. 13). Ashtanga Yoga practitioners do not skip their daily practice, as constant repetition of the entire practice creates results – physical, mental, spiritual. The product of their “rite”, as per De Michelis’ statement above, is “personal transformation and healing”.

The argument of this thesis is that some of the properties of liminality in the Ashtanga Yoga example are carried into the third phase of “*rites de passage*” – “reaggregation, incorporation” – and create *communitas*. Despite the incorporation into the regular world, the practitioners remain in the liminality phase as their practice becomes more rooted. Ashtanga Yoga as a “secular ritual” shows its transformational benefits when repeated every day; the liminality phase, that is the phase of their routine Ashtanga Yoga practice, has profound effects on the practitioners and such effects can be observed when the practice has been repeated for a long period of time. After the practice is completed, the practitioners of Ashtanga Yoga do not leave the properties they carry during their practice – those properties become a part of their lives.

1.3. Communitas

Ashtanga Yoga requires discipline, respect of tradition and authority of the teacher (as well as the authority of the textual reference, such as the *Yogasūtras* of

Patañjali), and devotion to the practice. These aspects are deeply rooted in the classical teachings of yoga, which will be explained in greater detail in the following sections. The practice includes these three elements: discipline is *tapas* (inner heat); *paramparā* embodies the authority and tradition, and *bhakti* is devotion. Each practitioner who practices Ashtanga Yoga every day and also feels connected to the lineage carries and respects these three elements.

Communitas means equality among group members, “a modality of social relationship from an area of common living” (Turner, 1997 [1969], p. 96); this common living is a product of the liminality phase, and practitioners of Ashtanga Yoga sharing the liminal properties form communitas. The practitioners’ socially structured status, based on familial bonds, cultural backgrounds and gender do not exist in the liminal phase; the formed communitas allows them to see one another as they are, without social “classifications” (Turner, 1982, p. 127).

Going back several hundred years, to the first ascetics and forest dwellers of the Upaniṣadic era (to be discussed in later sections), we recognize they also formed communitas; “myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems, and works of art” are created under the conditions of liminality (Turner, 1982, p. 128). The ascetics’ moving away from the structured society and living on the margins of social life is a great example for Turner’s statement that “maximization of communitas provokes maximization of structure, which in its turn produces revolutionary strivings for renewed communitas” (Turner, 1982, p. 129); over the history of yoga, into the revival of modern yoga, this “maximization of structure” provoking “renewed communitas” is noticeable, the examples of which will be discussed in the literature review. The Vedic era of the Indus Valley created a firm structure for the lives and

belief systems of the dwellers; Brahmanical society (another example of *communitas*) became powerful and more established, as a result of this structure. This maximization of Brahmanical structure provoked wandering groups of ascetics during the Upaniṣadic era to move away from the society and from the established structure, hence the renewed *communitas* of the forest dwellers and was the catalyst to develop their own symbols and myths, and attain a new understanding of life and creation.

The “Ashtangis”, committed to their everyday practice takes a great deal of discipline and devotion, and to understand each other’s struggles, pains, obligations, responsibilities, problems, as well as accomplishments, triumphs, and loyalty to the lineage. They experience the phases of their secular ritual every single day. Each secular ritual, i.e. each practice, transforms them physically, mentally, and spiritually.

In the example of Ashtanga Yoga, we can refer to “normative and ideological *communitas*” (1997 [1969], p. 132). In the normative *communitas*, group members work towards a goal; they may need to “mobilize and organize sources”, “social control among the members” might be needed in order to achieve that goal (1997 [1969], p. 132). The first goal is to complete the primary series of asanas (postures). The instructors teach practitioners methods to succeed safely in postures; sometimes foreign instructors are invited to the studios so that practitioners can learn other methods. The Ashtangis have auto-control so as to be able to continue their practice every day; they are expected to follow sleeping, eating, and living patterns, which come naturally and are accepted socially. Once the practitioner is well established in the primary series of Ashtanga Yoga, it is possible for them to go to Mysore, and practice with the main lineage holder – Sharath Jois. As for the ideological *communitas*, there is an “attempt to describe the external and visible effects of an

inward experience of existential *communitas*” (1997 [1969], p. 132). Ashtangis often come together after their practice is completed for the day, and discuss the effects of their practice. All the work they do can appear to be physical, thus “external and visible”; however, they share the elements of discipline, authority, and devotion, which makes this external work result in spiritual experiences. The discipline they hold for their practice permeates other aspects of their lives. The devotion and love they have for the practice and their teacher slowly reflect on other people too, not only Ashtangis.

Working towards either completion of Ashtanga Yoga series, or towards realizing the essence of what it means to be human, Ashtangis follow the norms of their lineage and organize their lives around these norms (eating, sleeping, living habits, for example). What they all experience has many common traits and each Ashtangi can relate to other Ashtangis at different phases of their practice; the internal experiences with evident outward effects allow them to understand one another and share the feeling of *communitas*.

“*Communitas* is a group’s pleasure in sharing common experiences with one’s fellows” as defined by Edith Turner (2012, p. 2). With all the pain and suffering, as the Ashtangis undergo all these common experiences together, their bond strengthens; the practice creates a connection between the individuals practising this MPY system as well as with Ashtangis of many generations that came before them. Ashtanga Yoga’s deep and strong roots in the classical and medieval teachings bring members of the “Western society”, who are mostly foreign to the ethos of *paramparā* – together and create such *communitas* by sharing the same values despite their coming from distinct ethnic groups.

The aim of this thesis, and for the reader is to gain an understanding of the history of classical, medieval and modern yoga, as well as the formation of Ashtanga Yoga and its originality in terms of practice and tradition compared to other schools of MPY. Ashtanga Yoga is a unique example of MPY school, incorporating concepts and practices of the Upaniṣadic era into the Medieval. It is important to first go through the history of these practices and concepts related to what is practised as yoga today, and then understand the system of Ashtanga Yoga as a school of MPY, as well as a modern representative of paramparā tradition. This tradition and strictly set practices of Ashtanga Yoga create a feeling of *communitas*.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The research topic has sentimental value for me; as mentioned earlier, I have personally been involved in yoga for more than a decade now, however, the only practices that resonated with me have always been the “traditional” ones. I primarily wanted to focus on the modern yoga lineages that were rooted in Krishnamacharya’s teachings; as he was the “father of modern yoga” and his students were the pioneers in the spread of yoga practices to the West, it seemed about right to follow that path for this research.

Lineage is an important aspect of yoga practices. The teacher who is well-established in the teachings and practices conveys the knowledge to the student appropriately. This has been the traditional way of learning since the Upaniṣadic era. Looking into the modern era, it is known that all MPY schools have main teachers around whom the students get together to take “teacher training” from or to learn certain methods related to their physical or meditational practices. The authority of the teacher is visible, but not as strong as the authority seen in the guru-śiṣya relationship. The discipline may not require changing one’s living, eating, sleeping habits. And there may not be a need to have a devotional attitude towards the practice or the teacher. There is not a tradition in the sense of paramparā among other MPY schools, and this puts Ashtanga Yoga in a strikingly different position.

As I went deeper into my literature review, I realized that Ashtanga Yoga has a relatively stricter structure in terms of physical practice, and has a more centralized authority, KPJAYI being the heart of this practice’s method. Compared to the other two lineages (Vinyasa Krama, and Iyengar Yoga) that I was also interested in implementing into my research, Ashtanga Yoga has more definite set of techniques,

does not offer impersonal “teacher training”, and its practical patterns were for me much more available to observe than the others.

2.1. Sampling.

Given its traditional and demanding roots, Ashtanga Yoga is not a widely practised yoga method in Turkey; however, it is well-known among serious practitioners of yoga. There are only a few authorized Ashtanga Yoga teachers of Turkish origin (not all live in Turkey anymore), and there are very few Ashtanga Yoga students who have been to Mysore, India, to learn directly from the current lineage holder, Sharath Jois. Studying with Sharath Jois has a prerequisite of studying for several months with an authorized Ashtanga Yoga teacher; this also limits the number of practitioners and thus possible participants. As I have had some practice experience with the Ashtanga Yoga teachers (Turkish and foreign) over the years, and have worked with them as colleagues at several yoga studios where I taught my own lineage of practice, I was familiar with the field and the overall structure of Ashtanga Yoga, as well as some of the practitioners who were experienced.

Before I selected the participants, I needed to interview the teachers first. Either authorized or non-authorized by the KPJAYI but was granted permission to teach by their authorized teachers, being at the level of teaching meant a long, dedicated practice. If not a teacher, the participants needed to be practising yoga for at least 1-2 years and/or Ashtanga Yoga for a minimum of 6 months to 1 year, so they would have the basic understanding of the effects of their own practice and the elements of paramparā. It was crucial for the sake of obtaining reliable results that the participants definitely have visited Mysore. Visiting Mysore requires at least one month of stay on the premises; Ashtanga Yoga practitioners who work full-time at a

corporate firm or who have family members at home that need tending to find this amount of time is difficult to put aside. Even if they make the time, repeating it every year is difficult due to ongoing social and economic commitments. Making Mysore a priority suggests putting their Ashtanga Yoga practice and paramparā first. All these factors did not leave many participants to interview but helped me find the most suitable persons to interview given the scope of this research.

My key informant was an authorized Ashtanga Yoga teacher. I used to work with her at the same yoga studio. She had known about my thesis topic since day one, helped me find a book while she was in India and brought it back to Istanbul for me. She had always been supportive throughout my research and she directed me to other interviewees. All of my questions were answered by her; and we were able to continue the conversation off the record for a little longer, as the extended conversation was not related to this research per se. I also asked her opinion about the questions, and she stated that the questions cover the paramparā concept completely and she had nothing more to add to it. She put me in touch with several other students and teachers (authorized and non-authorized), some of which lived in other cities, or even in other countries. Snowball sampling allowed me to reach out to the practitioners with whom I had no previous contact before.

There were some challenges I encountered in terms of finding suitable persons to interview. Some of the potential participants were living abroad and out of reach, which reduced the number of interviews, I did to a total of 7. Two other teachers (one authorized and one non-authorized) I reached out to interview seemed reluctant and wanted to see the questions first. They did not answer them. It is understandable,

though, that in a very small community like this, people might prefer to keep personal thoughts and feelings to themselves.

Feedback after the interviews was affirmative; the participants were all thrilled to answer the questions. Perhaps they do not always have the chance to extensively describe their feelings about a practice that takes up so much of their lives, and that has shaped them greatly. Despite their busy schedule – they all continue practising their own professions while at the same time teach/practice yoga, take/give training, conduct household duties – they happily spared some time to answer the questions orally or in writing. One authorized instructor was located outside Istanbul, so he preferred to send the answers in written form. One student was very busy but she preferred to send a voice recording answering the questions. I conducted the other five interviews in conversation form. I feel the answers they gave me allowed me to understand the concepts of tradition, discipline, and community.

This is essentially a literature review thesis with small scale ethnographic research. The quota sampling provided me with the necessary answers I looked for in order to support the idea that Ashtanga Yoga practitioners have the feeling of *communitas* and their lives are mostly shaped around their practice. The persons I interviewed are of Turkish origin, have been to Mysore and studied with Sharath Jois, and have been practising in Turkey. In order to see the uniformity, similar standards of living and cultural background were necessary.

2.2. Research Design.

From the start of this thesis, I navigated the vast academic works mostly on my own; my prior knowledge of yoga history and yoga “philosophy” did not extend to dense scholarly works. None of the libraries in Turkey had the books I needed in

order to learn in depth and write about modern yoga history. I got in touch with a scholar from Harvard University and he shared his PhD exam required reading list with me; that was my lead to order books from abroad. I waited for two months for the big pile of precious books to arrive, and in the meanwhile, I did my online article research for the literature review. The whole subject has fascinated me ever since the first article I read. I purchased online courses of the same Harvard University scholar and studied the history of yoga, classical texts, and some Sanskrit via his online classes. I have gathered quite a number of articles and other scholarly works as my primary sources and started creating an outline for the research.

In the field, I participated in and observed Mysore and Led classes (Primary Series) for 6 weeks at different locations. Personally, despite my already advanced physical yoga practice, Ashtanga Yoga practice has transformed me even more rapidly; I was able to wake up every day at 6 AM sharp to attend the 7 AM classes. Some of them were on the European side of the city, and also on the Asian side. At that hour, the traffic was light. After experiencing the method personally for several weeks, I started the interviews in the way I described above.

Participant observation allowed me to construct the proper question sets for the interviews; Prof. Fikes suggested I prepare two sets of questions, one for the teachers, one for the students. This way, I was able to get more relevant answers on the meaning of tradition and teaching/learning within the concept of paramparā. We conducted some interviews at a coffee shop setting; one interview was completed in written form, and one in voice recording form. Once completed, they were sent to me via e-mail.

The questions can be found in Appendix H (for the instructors) and Appendix I (for the students). They were aimed at finding out properties of liminality and feeling of *communitas*. Personal transformations and learning of ethical rules were also under the focus of these questions. All of the questions were answered by all interviewees.



3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. What is Yoga?

Controlling the breath, performing specific physical postures, and concentrating the mind – all practised at once or separately – are what comes to mind when yoga is the subject. Today over 200 million people (IANS, 2017, para. 8) around the world practice yoga, and the United Nations declared the International Day of Yoga in 2014, which is to be celebrated every year on the 21st of June, in order to “raise awareness worldwide of the many benefits of practising yoga” (United Nations, n.d., para. 4). The UN focuses on the health, wellbeing, and lifestyles in harmony with nature, which would lead to an equilibrium between mind and body when it comes to briefly describe the primary benefits of yoga practice.

Over the course of several hundreds of years, the meaning attached to “yoga” and the practices it included has shifted and changed, been protected or omitted, added, embraced, created and refused.

The historical process of how yoga has been defined and how it has come to be perceived will be explained in the following sections. Yoga’s global adaptability to diverse cultural and social conditions, as well as its alterations in the milieus of science, physical culture and new religious movements, etc. (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017, p. ix) allows practitioners to continue to develop and change it even today. The scope of this research – Pattabhi Jois’ Ashtanga Yoga, its practices and presumed cumulative effects on the practitioners – requires a comprehensible introduction to the history of yoga, through briefly examining the content of various classical and modern Sanskrit texts that make up the philosophical and practical base of yoga practices throughout history, while also looking into various terms regarding its

perspective and practices, and ultimate goals. From yoga's definitions to its techniques and applications throughout history, readers will be provided with a summary of the philosophical, cultural, and social roots of Ashtanga Yoga, seen as a unique school of Modern Postural Yoga.

3.1.1. Definitions of yoga.

The term *yoga* has been used to define various practices of asceticism and associated philosophical doctrines that emerged within the civilizations of Indus Valley; Seth D. Powell (2018) created a useful timeline for its history, chronologically listing the specific eras under the light of historically determinable yogic texts and related practices in the following order: Vedic, Classical, Early Medieval, Late Medieval, Early Modern, and Modern.

Scholars who have studied yoga and its meaning have agreed on parallel ideas. Mircea Eliade etymologically defined the term's root (*yuj*) as "to bind together, to yoke, to hold fast" and stated that the term "serves to designate any ascetic technique and any method of meditation" (2009 [1958] , p. 4-5), while Powell extended the meaning as "to bind, harness, connect, concentrate" and also branched the term into two categories: "yoga as a state or goal, and yoga as a discipline or practice" (2018). This was agreed upon by Mallinson and Singleton; either as a practice or as a goal of such practices could yoga be defined (2017, p. 4). The idea of "union" as a state might be with "one's own nature, with an element, with divine power, or it might be a unification of the individual and the supreme self" (Mallinson and Singleton, 2017, p. 4). Certain textual references to definitions of yoga suggested it to be,

"a preliminary to practices leading to union with the deity or identified with equanimity and skill in action, the condition of *nirvāṇa*, a pleasure- and pain-

free state, unequalled power as well as joining or attaching, a means or method or way, profit or wealth, a trick or deceit, an undertaking or business, mixing, putting together or ordering, suitability, diligence or magic” (Mallinson and Singleton, 2017, p. 4-5).

However, this is challenged by the fact that some texts on yoga included a “dual usage”, where “yoga is defined as both the goal and the means”, an example for which could be given for the translation of the compound term *haṭhayoga*, as *haṭha* being “force, forceful”: “[the state of] yoga [achieved] by means of force” or “the forceful yoga [practice]” (Mallinson and Singleton, 2017, p. 4). Yoga as a goal outweighs yoga as a method in the majority of texts (Mallinson and Singleton, 2017, p. 4), which leads to the preference of the first translation in the example; however, in *haṭhayoga*, “methods known collectively as *haṭha* that lead to the goal called *yoga*” were dealt with (Mallinson and Singleton, 2017, p. 6). Other examples leading to confusion could be given from the *Bhagavadgītā* (along with the example of *kriyāyoga* [yoga of action] from the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*), where compound terms were abundant and had dual meanings: “*karma yoga* (yoga of/by actions), *bhakti yoga* (yoga of/by devotion), *abhyāsayoga* (yoga of/by repeated practice),” etc. (Mallinson and Singleton, 2017, p. 6).⁴

Peter M. Scharf defined yoga as “a comprehensive system of purifying consciousness in order to attain clear experience of one’s self and nature” and its aim as “to purify the consciousness in a comprehensive system and to “establish the self

⁴ The examples given in this paragraph are selected from the main reference sources of yogic texts in their relation to the general scope of this research. Schools of MPY take three texts as their main references; *Bhagavadgītā*, *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* (Yogasūtras of Patañjali), and *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*.

firmly in its own nature of silent pure consciousness” (2008, p. 1030). Eliade noted (2009 [1958], p. 359) that over centuries yoga has been “a pan-Indian corpus of spiritual techniques”; it has been adopted by Hindus, “heretics”, and other religious movements. As will be seen in the following sections, yoga was “reaction against metaphysical speculation and the excesses of a fossilized ritualism” (Eliade, 2009 [1958], p. 360); in order to “magically master the world”, one first needs to seek yoga for the “experience of the sacred or the attainment of a perfect self-mastery” (Eliade, 2009 [1958], p. 360).

Yogasūtra, one of the canonical texts of the classical era, defines yoga as “the stilling of the fluctuations of the mind,” as translated from Sanskrit into English by Seth Powell (2018). These mental fluctuations, which are “painful or painless”, include but are not limited to “right knowledge (direct perception, inference, scriptural testimony), misconception, verbal delusion, sleep, and memory; and they can only be controlled by “practice and non-attachment” (Satchidananda, 2013, p. 11-18), and by practice, Patañjali means meditation (Satchidananda, 2013, p. 161-167). Yogasūtra, as discussed in the next sections, emphasizes the importance of one’s ability to recognize the fact that suffering is caused by mental fluctuations and is embedded in all experience (YS 2.15). On the other hand, David Gordon White stated that today “the yoga taught and practised had very little in common with the yoga of the *Yogasūtra*⁵ and other ancient treatises,” and that the term semantically had a wide range of definitions, which created the potential over time for the practices to adapt

⁵ Pātañjalayogaśāstra, “a series of one hundred and ninety-six short statements (sūtras) concerning yogic techniques and states” (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017, p. xvi); a.k.a. Yogasūtra, Pātañjalayoga, Yogadarśana, or Yogasūtra of Pātañjali.

and change (2012, p. 2); White’s statement complied with James Mallinson and Mark Singleton’s suggestion that “yoga as a practice” and “yoga as a doctrinal or philosophical system” need to be covered separately (2017, p. xi).

In the sections below, the philosophical base of yoga will be covered chronologically according to the dates of most influential texts, after which the practical yoga that influenced today’s popular practices will be discussed.

3.1.2. History of yoga.

In order to trace the roots of modern yoga, looking back on the earliest Sanskrit scriptures is indispensable. Despite the common claim that “yoga practice is more than 5000 years old” (IANS, 2017), there is hardly enough archaeological or textual evidence showing that before the 5th century BCE there was a definitive set of yoga techniques (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017, p. xii). Below is a table of relevant Sanskrit texts (of Vedic, Classical, Medieval), which will be briefly reviewed focusing on their definitions of yoga and yogic practices.

Table 1.

Selected Sanskrit Texts on Yoga that Shaped Modern Yoga Practices

<i>Dates</i>	<i>Texts</i>	<i>Eras</i>
1500-1000 BCE	Vedas	Vedic
1000-700 BCE	Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas	Vedic
700-300 BCE	Upaniṣads	Vedic → Classical
200-100 BCE	Bhagavadgītā (as part of Mahābhārata)	Classical
300-400 CE	Yogasūtra	Classical

1100-1300 CE	<i>Amṛtasiddhi</i> (12 th c.), <i>Dattātreya yogaśāstra</i> (13 th c.), <i>Yogayājñavalkya</i> (13-14 th c.),	Medieval
1400-1600 CE	<i>Śivasamhitā</i> (15 th c.), <i>Haṭhapradīpikā</i> (15 th c.), <i>Yogacintāmaṇi</i> (17 th c.),	Medieval
1700-1800 CE	<i>Gherandasamhitā</i> (18 th c.), <i>Haṭhabhyāsapaddhati</i> (18 th c.)	Medieval

Note: This table is a reduced version of Seth Powell’s online course on the history of yoga. Powell, S. (2018). *History of Yoga Timeline*. Retrieved from Yogic Studies: <https://www.yogicstudies.com/products/ys-101-intro-to-yoga-history-and-philosophy>

3.1.2.1. *Yoga as described in the Vedic era texts.*

The oldest Sanskrit scriptures are the *Vedas*; Ṛg Veda, Sāma Veda, Yajur Veda, and Atharva Veda are the four Vedas that constitute the “textual foundation of orthodox Hinduism” (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017, p. xii). *Veda* is a Sanskrit word, meaning “knowledge”, and every so often referring to “all sacred knowledge, transcending the ordinary and giving power to the knower”; *The Vedas* or *The Veda* are sacred texts, believed by many Hindus to be eternal, dating as far back as around 2000 BCE (Killingley, 2008, p. 940). Culturally, the knowledge given in the Vedas was “contained in the individual’s memory, received from elders, not accumulated by observation, experiment and computation, and deposited in books and databases” (Killingley, 2008, p. 940).

Before they were textualized, Vedas had been an oral tradition consisting of hymns, rituals⁶, myths, and cosmology; it was a Brahmanical tradition, creating the foundation of what is today known as Hinduism (Powell, 2018). Being an oral tradition and consisting of “spoken sequence of words recorded in human memories”, it was passed down from teacher to his student (Killingley, 2008, p. 940) and “breathed out the original being” (Killingley, 2008, p. 941). It is believed to be “a manifestation in the sound of the eternal Brahman⁷,” and “a true *brāhmaṇa*”⁸ is the one that has the knowledge of the *Veda* (Killingley, 2008, p. 941). Eliade noted that correct pronunciation of the Vedic texts helped the rituals productiveness, which aided in “purifying the intelligence” and liberating the spirit (2009, p. 14). Reciting the Veda, even without the ritual performance, was believed to bring “wisdom, *brāhmaṇa* status, proper behaviour, fame and prestige, health and peaceful sleep; and to bestow even the benefits of the ritual” (Killingley, 2008, p. 940).

The “early yoking”, as Powell put it, appeared in the R̥g Veda (15th-12th century BCE), where the verb actually referred to “hitching an animal to its rig, or chariot”, and “yoga” did not refer to a soteriological discipline yet (Powell, 2018). Some

⁶ *Yajña* (sacrifice) and other rituals (Killingley, 2008, p. 940) practiced around a ceremonial fire, and while chanting specific mantras.

⁷ A neuter noun in Sanskrit; denoting “the one supreme, absolute being from which the entire universe develops, and into which the universe merges when it dissolves, and which is the innermost self of every being” (Scharf, 2008, p. 114).

⁸ A title of caste members given “by birth to priests, scholars, thinkers, writers and systematisers of Hindu culture”; this caste “studies, memorizes, and communicates the sacred knowledge”, and in the Veda, they were specialists for the Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*), reciting and teaching the Vedic texts (King, 2008, p. 117).

passages pointed towards meditation and included a hymn to a long-haired sage, which, according to Mallinson and Singleton, meant a “mystical ascetic tradition similar to those of later yogis” (2017, p. xii). Some breath-retention and postural techniques practised by the Vrātya⁹, like the long-haired sage, were mentioned in the Atharva Veda (10th century BCE), which were possibly the “fore-runners of later yogic techniques” (Mallinson & Singleton 2017, p. xii). Mallinson and Singleton put forth that later yogic texts, due to their composition in Brahmanical scenes, included certain Vedic principles an example of which was the attainment of immortality (2017, p. xiii).

In the Vedic literature, a verse or an expression articulated in a ritual was called a *mantra* and four collections of mantras were each a *saṃhitā*, both symbolically forming the base of the structure of Vedas (Killingley, 2008, p. 943); the *Brāhmaṇas*¹⁰ was the layer on top of these two, and then the *Āraṇyakas*¹¹ formed another layer, upon which the *Upaniṣads* were built (Killingley, 2008, p. 943).

⁹ A distinct group of wandering ascetics practicing their own rituals and austerities, outside the conventional Vedic society (Stefon & Doniger, 2015). They are also often “linked to the supposed Vedic shamans of the Ṛgveda and thus considered as “proto-shamans” (Samuel, 2017, p. 115).

¹⁰ In the Vedas, these texts (prose) discourse over the Vedic rituals. The term means “belonging to brahman / Veda” and the *Brāhmaṇas* are separate from the mantras (Killingley, 2008, p. 118).

¹¹ Ideologically and chronologically, *Āraṇyakas* are positioned between the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Upaniṣads* within the Vedas; their main emphasis is on the significance of the “Vedic rituals that are more advanced and rarely performed,” (Killingley, 2008, p. 39) and the powers that come with by performing these rituals. Lexically, *Āraṇyaka* means “belonging to the forest or wilderness,” as a contradiction to the village setting (Killingley, 2008, p. 39). “Knowledge of the ritual, the cosmos, and

Between the 700-300 BCE, *Upaniṣads*, established the grounds for the *Vedānta* (end of the Vedas); these were texts on philosophical knowledge, “containing some of the earliest written teachings on yoga” (Powell, 2018). The Sanskrit word *upa-ni-ṣad* meant “to sit down close to”, as Roebuck noted it to be “referring to the student sitting at the guru’s feet” and also containing a “hidden correspondence between the macrocosm/microcosm” (2008, p. 894). The texts are believed to carry great sacred significance, pointing to the core teachings of Hindu philosophical system: “ideas about the nature of the individual and of the universe” (Roebuck, 2008, p. 894). The teachings were strictly taught by the teacher to the student, as their content revealed “hidden names or correspondences” which were not to be shared with just anyone, but only to be kept confidential between the teacher and the student (Roebuck, 2008, p. 894). Composed over some centuries, the number of Sanskrit texts that are called the *Upaniṣads* reach over a hundred; however, the term is mostly used for the twelve to fourteen fundamental texts (Roebuck, 2008, p. 894): “*Īśā (Īśāvāsyā)*, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, *Chāndogya*, *Taittirīya*, *Aitareya*, *Kauṣītaki*, *Kena*, *Kaṭha*, *Śvetāśvatara*, *Muṇḍaka*, *Praśna*, *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, also including the *Maitrī* and *Mahānārāyaṇa*”. Being the end of the Veda, the *Upaniṣads* are the last part of the *Samhitā*, *Brāhmaṇa*, and *Āraṇyaka* textual sequence (Roebuck, 2008, p. 894); they were believed to be composed by “the ancient sages whose teachings are recounted within the texts themselves,” and the oral tradition of memorizing and passing them on to next generations of students have been regarded as an estimable practice even today among Hindus (Roebuck, 2008, p. 894). The authors of the above-mentioned textual

the human being” is pointed out, which is later extended in the *Upaniṣads* applying certain ideas, similarly in which the knowledge is not granted to those that were not initiated (Killingley, 2008, p. 39).

sequence made the social change visible through their prose and verses; while, during the Saṃhitās, earthly wishes were worked toward, and afterlife – as similar as the very life the seekers were living – was yearned for, and although during the Brāhmaṇas the sacrificial rituals and receiving blessings as the fruits of those sacrifices were central, the Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads internalized the formerly physical sacrifice, turning it rather into “a form of contemplation” (Roebuck, 2008, p. 897)¹². The influential wandering ascetics, Śramaṇas, enthused certain schools (Buddhism and Jainism) to turn away from the Vedic authority; however, some stayed and helped create the Upaniṣads, “questioning the Vedic religion and society” (Roebuck, 2008, p. 897). Non-dualistic (Advaita) approach to cosmos appears in *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, and classical Hindu theology is present in *Maitrī Upaniṣad*, referring to Trimūrti (Brahmā, Rudra, Viṣṇu) (Roebuck, 2008, p. 900). What the Upaniṣads taught and in which system they were accepted by some Hindus is as follows:

“Human beings (and indeed all other sentient beings) are caught up in Saṃsāra, the round of existence, in which they die and are reborn time after time in consequence of their actions (karma). Distinct from, and unaffected by, the changing nature of the individual is the self (ātman), the unchanging reality within every being. The corresponding reality within the universe is Brahman, the absolute. Liberation (mukti, mokṣa) is the freeing of the ātman from saṃsāra: for some, but by no means all, Hindus, this is seen as a union of ātman

¹² The detailed social and spiritual causes behind such changes are beyond the limits of this research, yet it is still important to point out that animal slaughter may have been rejected due to “a growing emphasis on non-violence” (Roebuck, 2008, p. 897).

with Brahman, or a realization of their essential identity. It is indeed in this form that Upaniṣadic thought has been absorbed into Hinduism.” (Roebuck, 2008, p. 898)

The Upaniṣads held ideas and statements that were later integrated into the Sāṃkhya philosophical system, as well as centuries later being introduced to the West by Max Müller, paving the way to expand the “occult and theosophical ideas” (Roebuck, 2008, p. 901). Considering the number of people who did not study the Upaniṣads exclusively with a teacher, nor associated to any caste nor born a Hindu, the teachings in the texts prove to be powerful and universal (Roebuck, 2008, p. 901).

In the Kaṭha Upaniṣad, yoga is defined as “firm restraint of the senses” (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017, p. 17); verses 6.10 and 6.11 describe that when one calms the five senses and the mind and stops the movement of the intellect, one reaches the “highest state”, and when one is not distracted, it means the senses are firmly restrained and one is in state of yoga (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017, p. 17). “Going inward” and restraining senses, instead of performing rituals, is referred to as being the highest state. In Sāṃkhya philosophy, the material (*prakṛti*) and the spiritual (*puruṣa*) “fall out of balance, resulting in a devolution into material existence” (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017, p. xv). This results in the misperception that *puruṣa* is “the twenty-four elements (*tattvas*) of *prakṛti*, including the senses, intellect and mind” (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017, p. xv); the misperception is the root cause of suffering of the human, who is constantly deluded by identifying oneself with the transitory elements of the *prakṛti*. Unless one sees the “truth” that one is not *prakṛti* but *puruṣa*, one is eternally stuck in the *saṃsāra* (cycle of death and rebirth). According to Mallinson & Singleton, “this model provided a framework for much

subsequent thinking about yoga, which developed as a practical solution to the ontological problem posed by Sāṃkhya” (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017, p. xvi).

Seth Powell discussed that the Upaniṣads were not a rejection of the Vedas, but rather a reinterpretation by the “counter-culturalist” śramaṇas, who “existed on the fringes of mainstream Vedic society” and who preferred to “retreat into forests, and renounce the social values and religious practices, seeking answers to life’s greatest questions” (2018). By retreating into forests, these ascetics practised various methods of using the body “in a disciplined manner to cultivate power and transcend the very limitations of the mind and the body, yoking the mind, body, and senses” (Powell, 2018). Even the Buddha himself, Powell argued, could be taken as an ascetic; as Prince Siddhārta, renouncing his royal life and studying with gurus, performed various forms of asceticism ranging from extreme to mild, sought answers to life’s deepest questions and enlightenment to break free from constant suffering (Powell, 2018). As the Vedic era ended and Classical era commenced, the early yogic – “yoking” – practices emerged to discipline the body and the mind. Meditation (dhyāna), chanting mantras (oṃ), controlling the breath (prāṇāyāma), seated postures (āsana), austerity (tapas) practices – including standing postures and inversions – to create spiritual heat were listed by Powell as early yoga practices (Powell, 2018). According to Powell, these non-seated physical postures (standing or inverted) were the ancestors of haṭhayoga; the seekers (śramaṇas, ascetics) practising tapas were largely male and celibate, with a goal to acquire psychic powers (*siddhis*), to gain liberation (*mokṣa*) from *saṃsāra*, and thus to achieve immortality (Powell, 2018). Their retreat into the forests was in order not to create more karma (action), and

attempts (*tapkarāsan*¹³) to cease karma would help them on their path to mokṣa, “release from earthly existence” (Powell, 2018). Inverted postures were practised in order that the *bindu* (life-force; semen) that is created on the top of the skull (crown chakra) and is spread down towards the sense organs as a result of gravity and not being wasted; this nectar of immortality (*amṛta*) is cultivated and saved for spiritual gain, thus inverted postures were practised to keep the *bindu* on the crown by turning upside down, to “taste the nectar of immortality”, preserving its power (Powell, 2018). Such practices (and more to be discussed further on) were the “roots of psychophysical methods of later medieval haṭhayoga tradition”; modern inversions, Powell added, “are told to bring oxygen to the head area and to remove sickness,” which is to be discussed later on. Therefore, once Vedic *yajña* ritual shifted contextually and went through a semantic change; instead of literal fire rituals, *tapas* (internal spiritual heat) was sought after, and thus vigorous physical postures were practised to create this *tapas*, their result would be to “attain boons from deities”, as would *yajñas* do (Powell, 2018).

Geoffrey Samuel (2017, p. 48) brought a geographical perspective to this era; “the Second Urbanization of South Asia” was the term he used in order to describe the larger urban settlements that took place in the Central Gangetic plain and various other regions after the 500 BCE:

“The Central Gangetic plain was one of the two most significant regions in relation to early religious movements. This was where the early ascetic movements, including the Buddhists and Jains, took shape, and it was also a

¹³ *tap-kar-āsan*: tapas-create-āsana; postures practiced by ascetics to cultivate *tapas* (Powell).

very important area for the Upaniṣads and developments in Brahmanical traditions. The other significant region in relation to early religion was the area to the immediate west and north-west, including present-day Western UP, Haryana and Punjab. This was the region associated with the early Vedic texts and was clearly the heartland of the early development of the Vedic and Brahmanical tradition in India. ... The population ... in this region, ... saw itself as *Aryan* (*ārya*) by contrast with surrounding people and used Vedic Sanskrit for ritual purposes.” (Geoffrey Samuel, 2017, p. 48).

Located on the north-eastern part of today’s India, River Gaṅgā’s basin “spans one million square kilometres in India, Nepal and Bangladesh” (Alley, 2008, p. 259). Gaṅgā is believed to be like a “forgiving mother”, cleaning after her children’s mess and providing them with food. She purifies, cleanses, nourishes, sustains; she is forceful and rejuvenating (Alley, 2008, p. 259). She holds a sacred and important place for Hindus all around the world. It is a river that gives life, abundance, and blessings. Spiritual teachings have been conveyed to her banks (Alley, 2008, p. 259).

Samuel went on further explaining the “contrast between Old Vedic (hymns of the Ṛgveda) and late Vedic (later Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, early Upaniṣads and most of the Sūtras)” (Geoffrey Samuel 2017, p. 51). He previously (Geoffrey Samuel 2017, p. 50) referred to another scholar’s remarks on the differences between the two groups of the population during that era:

“To say that there was tension between these two worlds – the non-Aryan / Buddhist / Jain world on the one hand, and the Aryan / Brahmanical / Vedic world on the other – is to understate the case. In the sixth century BCE they were really two different worlds, at least as perceived by their main

representatives, or perhaps – as seen especially by the Brahmins – two opposite worlds” (Geoffrey Samuel, 2017, p. 50).

Samuel’s conclusion was that the arrival of the Vedic people to the region and the Sanskritization¹⁴ process changed the traditions on rituals and their performance; “the non-Aryans, who had previously been able to follow Aryan religion, were ... admitted to the Vedic society as Śūdras (low-caste members), unable to perform a ritual (and so unable to enter heaven),” which permanently created a division between the two populations (Geoffrey Samuel, 2017, p. 53).

In this framework, it is important to note where celibate practices and women stand in such a social structure. The references to earlier ascetic practices do not point to any female participation; nor do the Brahmanical practices include women. The natural fact that women menstruate and give birth is perceived as “polluting”, which ideologically justifies women’s inferiority in the social structure (Samuel, 2017, p. 90); this perception is based on a Vedic-Brahmanical myth that “Indra’s guilt” upon murdering a Brahmin “is transferred to women in the form of menstruation” (Samuel, 2017, p. 91). Practitioners of childbirth are socially placed in the caste of “untouchables” (Samuel, 2017, p. 90), which also suggests the impurity of childbirth. Samuel emphasized, however, that there are “two sets of values”; one being Brahmanical and soteriological, the other being countervailing and “auspicious” (Samuel, 2017, p. 91). Brahmanical values are aligned with “concepts of purity and

¹⁴ A term created by Indian Sociologist Prof. M.N. Srinivas. As J. F. Staal put it, the term “is used to mean a process by which a lower caste attempts to raise its status and to rise to a higher position in the caste hierarchy” through various behavioral, cultural or ritualistic adoptions (1963, p. 261).

caste-duty”; countervailing values are positioned around “fertility, productivity, this-worldly success” (Samuel, 2017, p. 91). The impurity was not only attached to females; the vrātyas (the pre-Vedic ascetics) would perform “unorthodox rituals” such as sacrificing the sacred cow for food and water abundance, or sexual intercourse between a prostitute and a brahmacārin (a young celibate), or a “chief queen stimulating intercourse with the sacrificed horse” (Samuel, 2017, p. 116-117). “Transgressive sexuality” is not intrinsic to Vedic rituals; however, despite their unorthodoxy, they were considered as highly effective (Samuel, 2017, p. 117). The (male) renunciate life, as described in various texts of Jain or Buddhist views, requires celibacy; yet there are examples of some early “Jaina movements that were open to participation of women,” which may be a part of “organized urban movement rather than isolated forest householder-ascetic model” (Samuel, 2017, p. 125). It is possible that there might have been an inversion of the traditional perception of sexuality; as sexuality is not seen as immoral but rather as impure, what is seen here is the idea that extreme impure actions might bring back social order. This will be briefly discussed in the following pages. According to Samuel, Buddhist doctrines “modified and developed the existing Jaina tradition”; while Jaina principles of yoga “primarily consisted of extreme forms of asceticism,” Buddhist teachings included “systematized dhyāna (meditation) techniques and insight practices” and criticized the Jainas and Brahmanical ascetics for continuing such extreme forms of asceticism, considering them as “inappropriate” (Samuel, 2017, p. 126).

The main ideal of retention of semen – only possible within male physiology – for power gain in haṭhayoga has its roots in the Indic beliefs; “abstention from and/or control over male ejaculation” indicates great human strength and such strength

brings about “spiritual power” (Samuel, 2017, p. 181). An ascetic renounces domestic life and everything that comes with it; wives represent the domestic life that is the very foundation of social structure, which must be rejected altogether (Samuel, 2017, p. 181). The rejection of sexual acts, or self-restraint over sexuality, could even make the ascetic more powerful than gods; a legend suggests that such power would disrupt the harmony of the nature, and the gods would send “celestial dancing-girls” to distract the renunciate, so that he would lose his spiritual powers due to broken self-control (Samuel, 2017, p. 181). Abstaining from sexual acts is regarded as a form of purity, which is a highly respected value within Indian social structure; sexuality points to having a family life and a wife, which are accepted as “impurity and pollution” (Samuel, 2017, p. 182). Hence, female asceticism is considered as “marginal and problematic”; even the goddess Pārvatī’s renunciate practices had the goal of finding a husband (Samuel, 2017, p. 182). This suggests that renunciate practices, even when undergone by females, bring out spiritual powers; however, in goddess Pārvatī’s case, these powers are limited to the prosperity of the household (Samuel, 2017, p. 182). The model of male-oriented spiritual power takes a theoretical shift later¹⁵, where the physiological differences between male and female are no longer considered as a hindrance in the way of gaining spiritual powers as both men and women are considered to carry “male and female essences” and their “internal energy processes are more or less the same” (Samuel, 2017, p. 182). Then again, in practice, no women are considered as “fully equal to men”; because religious and ritualistic life that is concerned with this very world is seen as women’s concern,

¹⁵ The medieval era review in section 2.1.2.3 of this thesis includes practices that come from Vajrayāna or Tantric Buddhism.

while religious and ritualistic life focused on “transcendental goals” is seen as men’s concern (Samuel, 2017, p. 183). Vrātyas are considered by some scholars to be a “precedent of śramaṇa (wandering ascetics) traditions”; their connection to the military by caste status or by taking up “gang” duties (Samuel, 2017, p. 127) also points to similarities between the medieval ascetics of the Gorakhnāth tradition, which is discussed in the following sections.

It is useful to touch upon the status of women. During the era of the R̥gveda (circa 1700-800 BCE), despite the socially and religiously accepted patriarchal norms, women’s status was higher and women were considered as “complements of men” (Young, 2008, p. 1007). There used to be female poetesses, they would chant Vedic mantras; women warriors, goddesses, and ritualists were existing. However, as the culture spread in location and reached around the Gangetic Valley, women’s status started to weaken (Young, 2008, p. 1007). Urbanisation led to men’s empowerment in warfare, agriculture, trade, and “centralized royal power” as well as “specialized knowledge” (Young, 2008, p. 1007). As the fathers were away from the household, female children would lack the knowledge as conveyed by their fathers, unless taught at the “boarding schools”; the wives used to take part in conducting rituals, however, priests became more dedicated to the practice of rituals and women had to stay away from this social field, as well (Young, 2008, p. 1007). The concept of “purity” was applied by the priests to women; as menstruation and childbirth were considered impure, women would be separated from the society during these times (Young, 2008, p. 1008). Ideas of purity and impurity of women developed into the protection of virginity before marriage, even to the level of child marriages, as the earlier a girl married, the easier it would be on her parents (Young, 2008, p. 1008). Wives would

carry “auspicious symbols” (such as forehead mark, bangles, wedding chains, etc.) that would show their attachment to their husbands; when widowed, they would remove all these symbols (Young, 2008, p. 1009). Until Tantrism, women were considered to not have the capability of liberation; however, these ideas were “challenged by bhakti and Tantrism” (Young, 2008, p. 1009).

3.1.2.2. *Yoga and its practices in the classical era.*

Moving forward in the classical era of yoga history, which coincides with 200-100 BCE, the great epics of Mahābhārata (a part of which is the *Bhagavadgītā*) and Rāmāyana contain teachings of yoga and depictions of a yogin; in the Mahābhārata, it is said (verse 12.304.2ab) that “there is no knowledge equal to Sāṃkhya and no power equal to yoga” (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017, p. 17). Mahābhārata is a massive literary work, containing “myths and teachings, and everything there is to know” (Thomas, 2008, p. 469); due to its significance within the Hindu tradition, it is also referred to as the Fifth Veda (Thomas, 2008, p. 469). The epic covers the “dynastic conflict between two sets of royal cousins; the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas” (Thomas, 2008, p. 469), which is caused by a succession refusal, eventually leading to a violent war on the battlefield. The Bhagavadgītā’s narrative takes place on this battlefield, as the legendary dialogue between Arjuna of the Pāṇḍavas and his charioteer, Kṛṣṇa. On the battlefield, the famous warrior Arjuna is torn for having to kill his cousins; and Lord Kṛṣṇa in disguise reminds him of his *kṣatriya varṇa*¹⁶ duties. In the Gītā, yoga is

¹⁶ The term *varṇa* means “color” or “social rank”; there are four major *varṇas* hierarchically listed in the Ṛgveda: the brāhmaṇas (ritual specialists, priests, knowers of the Veda), the kṣatriyas (warriors, royalty, governors), the vaiśyas (merchants, farmers, artisans), and the śūdras (low-caste members, laborers, service providers) (Kroll, 2008) (Powell, 2018).

taught by Kṛṣṇa as “a form of action and devotion in the world” (Powell, 2018); the teachings cover “one’s moral-cosmic duty (dharma), action (karma) and its consequences, and the true nature of the self (ātman)” (Powell, 2018). The entire scripture blends the elements of yoga that are part of former scriptures, as well as of asceticism, and criticizes the ritualistic feature of the Vedas (Powell, 2018). Kṛṣṇa’s doctrine in the Gītā, as Powell compared, is not for the Brahmins; the spirituality it embodies is right on this world, requiring absorption in action as a form of devotion to God (Powell, 2018). The Gītā emphasizes the distinction between *dharma* (righteousness, goodness, law, morality) and *adharma* (evil, immorality, wickedness); what maintains the cosmic harmony is dharma, not the yajña (ritual), as dharma defines the social construct (Powell, 2018).

Kṛṣṇa is called in the Gītā (verse 11.9) as *mahāyogeśvara* (the Great Lord of Yoga); Powell suggested that it is “through yogic powers that Kṛṣṇa takes on many forms,” all of which he shows Arjuna, leaving him in fear and fascination (2018). In the Gītā, yoga and related terms are found 155 times in total, which is the equivalent of 20% of the verses in the Gītā (Powell, 2018). Four paths (*mārgas*) of yoga are described; *Karmayoga* (path of action), *Jñānayoga* (path of knowledge), *Dhyānayoga* (path of meditation), *Bhaktiyoga* (path of devotion), among which Bhaktiyoga is the supreme secret as Kṛṣṇa reveals to Arjuna (verse 18.75). Knowledge (jñāna) is superior to yajña (verse 4.33), and yoga is described as “skill in action” (verse 2.50). For Dhyānayoga, the very “original yoga mat”, as Powell put it (2018.), is depicted (verse 6.11), and rules for basic alignments to prepare for meditative techniques are taught (verse 6.13). Powell also pointed out that in verse 6.15, *nirvāna* (a Buddhist term) is also reinterpreted. As Kṛṣṇa favors Bhaktiyoga above the other paths, the

Bhaktiyoga practitioner is considered greater than ascetics, Sāṃkhya yogins, and those who perform rituals (verses 6.46, 6.47, 12.6).

Powell concluded that the Gītā covers teachings of Sāṃkhya, yoga, and the Upaniṣadic philosophical doctrines (*ātman*, *brahman*, etc.); however, the teachings are incorporated into an entire Kṛṣṇa bhakti tradition, where Kṛṣṇa equals to Brahman (2018). The review and revision towards *yajña* are evident throughout the text; as Kṛṣṇa's teachings are universal, *yajña* is no longer something only attainable for the Brahmins, but for others as well, in various forms of devotional practice (e.g. bhaktiyoga) (Powell, 2018). The moral teaching on dharma as “one's own duty, social or moral obligation, virtue, justice, religion, etc.” is also an essential part of the Gītā (Powell, 2018); Arjuna's dharma-related predicament is solved by karmayoga, as he finds resolution through teachings of Kṛṣṇa about layers of dharma¹⁷.

The Gītā has been considered one of the most important sources of yogic knowledge; another great source that represents the “Classical” yoga is the Yogasūtras, composed by sage Patañjali, sometime between the 4th and 5th century BCE (Powell, 2018). Yogasūtra is also called as *Patañjalayoga* or the *Yogadarśana*¹⁸, and traditionally it has numerous commentaries like the one Patañjali authored (Powell, 2018). Yogasūtra consists of 195 sūtras; these represent the “textual minimalist genre of philosophical Sanskrit texts”, carrying dense meanings, to be

¹⁷ Three layers of dharma (that concern this topic) as laid out by Powell (2018): *Svadharmā* (one's own personal dharma), *Kuladharmā* (family dharma), and *Jatīdharmā* (dharma of birth / of one's caste).

¹⁸ *Yogadarśana* is one of the 6 philosophical systems of Indian thought that accept the authority of the Vedas; the standardized *Ṣaḍdarśana* (six views) includes the following schools: *Nyāya*, *Vaiśeṣika*, *Sāṃkhya*, *Yoga*, *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā*, and *Vedānta* (*Uttara Mīmāṃsā*) (Scharf, 2008, p. 715).

explained and taught by a guru or a commentator (Powell, 2018). Powell defined the Yogasūtras as “a philosophical and psychological treatise, on the nature of the human mind, human suffering” and “a systematic approach toward attaining complete spiritual freedom or the isolation of pure consciousness” (Powell, 2018). Again, according to Powell, the text’s target audience was “male, Brahmin ascetics”, and the Buddhist and Jainist thoughts had a direct influence on the text (Powell, 2018). Patañjali was known to be a Brahmin Sanskrit intellectual, most probably also a yoga practitioner according to Powell; his authorship has been attributed to three different and very important works¹⁹, yet to this day, scholars have not agreed on whether Patañjali, who authored the Yogasūtras, was the one that also authored the other two texts (Powell, 2018).

There are similarities between the teachings of Patañjali and Jainist or Buddhist orders. The ascetics following the Jaina order would observe “abstention from killing and violence of any kind, not lying, not taking what has not been given, the renunciation of sexual activity, and the renunciation of attachment” (Samuel, 2017, p. 132). The Buddhist tradition also forbids “killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and the taking of intoxicants” (Samuel, 2017, p. 132). Buddhist system of “Four Noble Truths – suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, the way to the cessation of suffering” suggest that in order to be released from the endless cycle of birth and rebirth, one should apply “dhyāna”, which will result in riddance of residues that lie deep in the subconscious (Samuel, 2017, p. 136-137). Using

¹⁹ Patañjali’s authorship of a grammatical commentary, named *Mahābhāṣya*; a systematical approach to yoga, named *Yogasūtras*; and an Āyurvedic medical discourse named *Carakasamhitā* (Scharf, 2008, p. 594).

“dhyāna” to attain this cleansing of impurity, is the main goal of Patañjali’s Yogasūtra, within the Brahmanical tradition (Samuel, 2017, p. 136-137).

Yogasūtra consists of two layers, *sūtra* (the main text) and *bhāṣya* (commentary), and altogether the text is named *Patañjalayogaśāstra*²⁰ (*PYŚ*); reading both the text and also its commentary has become “standard and authoritative in the Yoga Darśana tradition (Powell, 2018). Philip Maas pointed out (2013, p. 58), it is confirmed in the colophons of *PYŚ* that “the oldest title of the work” was “the authoritative exposition of yoga that originates from Patañjali, the mandatory Sāṃkhya teaching”.

Sāṃkhya, one of the six philosophical systems (Ṣaḍdarśana) of Indian thought, carries dualism within; every person is subject to suffering “that arises from bodily, natural or supernatural causes,” and the only way to end this suffering is through acquiring the knowledge of “manifest (*vyakta*) nature, unmanifest (*avyakta*) nature, and the knower” (Scharf, 2008, p. 745). According to this system, *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa* make up the duality; the unmanifest nature is *Prakṛti*, and *Prakṛti* allows each self (*Puruṣa*, the manifest nature) to go through conditions of nature, only to eventually be isolated from it, which would lead to *kaivalya* (detachment) (Scharf, 2008, p. 745). The complex system of Sāṃkhya, within its dualistic view, suggests that each person has a variety of tendencies that make them behave in a certain way during their lifetime; these tendencies are kept in the subtle body and they determine the conditions of the person’s next life. The cycle of life and death is experienced in each incarnation, and this cycle of suffering is called *saṃsāra*. Thus, *Prakṛti* affects

²⁰ The theory, on which scholars have not yet reached an agreement, that both the text and the commentary is written by Patanjali himself is proposed by Philip Maas (Maas, 2013, p. 57-58).

everything that creates attachment, tendencies, and certain behaviours in Puruṣa, as well as everything that unleashes it (Scharf, 2008, p. 746). “Understanding through discernment in order to achieve kaivalya (isolation) has close parallels with Raja Yoga” (Baumfield, 2008, p. 747), and hence the ultimate teaching of the *Patañjalayogaśāstra*.

Geoffrey Samuel considered the Yogasūtra of Patañjali to be “the chief witness” of “the classical meditational text of the Brahmanical meditational tradition” (Samuel, 2017, p. 221). The practices of yoga, bringing the macrocosm and the microcosm together, Samuel noted, suggested “an open model of the human body” (Samuel, 2017, p. 221); certain late Vedic and early classical texts refer to supernatural yogic powers that allow a yogi to relocate his consciousness to another human body at the time of death, or that a yogi can “transfer himself to the sphere of the sun through yoga” through the suṣumnā²¹ channel, which is “the pathway by which one can travel through the solar orb to the World of Brahman” (Samuel, 2017, p. 221). Dhyāna practice of meditation described in the Yogasūtras of Patañjali is concerned primarily with the aim of “isolating oneself from the world”; as in the Buddhist practices of meditation, the path to samādhi in the Yogasūtras also points to “withdrawal from external and focusing inward” (Samuel, 2017, p. 221). The eight limbs of yoga (Aṣṭāṅgayoga) as elaborated in the Yogasūtras, and later taken on by the MPY school

²¹ Suṣumnā nāḍī is the central energy channel in the subtle body, sided by Idā and Piṅgalā nāḍīs; these three main nāḍīs make up the “basic model for the yogic body” (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017, p. 173). Nāḍīs are explained as psychic energy channels, found in the body of every living being. Although they are not “medically” visible, they are defined as covering the entire body like the nervous system. Nāḍīs will be discussed later in the section on haṭhayoga in the medieval texts.

Ashtanga Yoga, has references in much earlier practices; some of the limbs (prāṇayāma, pratyāhāra, dhyāna, dharana, samādhi) are found in Maitrī Upaniṣad, “adapted and used variously in Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jain contexts” (Samuel, 2017, p. 222). Exiting one’s own body consciously or entering the body of another through the practice of yoga (by means of meditation) is also mentioned in the Yogasūtras as a result of constant practice (Satchidananda, 2013, p. 183). According to Samuel, some of these psychic powers mentioned in the Yogasūtras also could be found in Buddhist texts of the same era or a little later; and such material powers are “pragmatic” endeavours for the Brahmanical or Buddhist renunciates of those times in terms of recruiting more “followers and clients”, like the sādhus in modern India (2017, p. 223).

The Yogasūtras of Patañjali has four chapters that are named as certain *pādas* (feet): Samādhi Pāda (on mental concentration), Sādhana Pāda (on practice), Vibhūti Pāda (on yogic powers), Kaivalya Pāda (on liberation). Scharf described those *pādas* respectively as “settled awareness”, “means”, “powers”, “self-sufficiency” (2008, p. 1039). In the Samādhi Pāda, Patañjali defines the state of yoga as “*yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ*” (YS 1.2); once the fluctuations of the mind are restrained, the state of yoga is achieved (Powell, 2018). *Vṛtti* (the mind) is fivefold, consisting of “valid means of knowledge, misconception, imagination, sleep, and memory” (YS 1.5-1.6) (Powell, 2018). Direct perception, inference, and tradition provide correct guidance for the yogin, which is the “valid means of knowledge” (YS 1.7) (Powell, 2018). Restraining the *vṛttis* is only possible “through repeated practice and dispassion” (YS 1.12); once the yogin is able to practice, for a long time, without a pause, and with devotion, then he/she gains “a firm ground” (YS 1.13-1.14) (Powell, 2018). Without any desire

towards sense-objects that are directly seen or indirectly known through scriptures, one attains dispassion that is “controlled consciousness”; and one is freed from longing for nature’s qualities and components (*guṇas*) by the realization of the Self (*Puruṣa*) (YS 1.15-1.16) (Powell, 2018). Another means of stilling the *vṛttis* is through “devotion to the Lord” (YS 1.23)²², as the Lord (Supreme *Puruṣa*) is not affected by “afflictions, actions, fruits of actions or by any inner impressions of desires” (Satchidananda, 2013, p. 37). The sound OM is the Lord’s representation in the sonic form (YS 1.27); repeating the sound OM and realizing its meaning will bring one inner-consciousness and will remove all obstacles (YS 1.28-1.29). These obstacles are “disease, dullness, doubt, carelessness, laziness, sensuality, false perception, failure to reach firm ground and slipping from the ground gained” (YS 1.30) and also “distress, despair, trembling of the body, and disturbed breathing” (YS 1.31); contemplation, Patañjali suggests, is “the best way to prevent these obstacles” (YS 1.32) (Satchidananda, 2013, p. 49). As means of contemplation, Patañjali advises “cultivating attitudes of friendliness toward the happy, compassion for the unhappy, delight in the virtuous and disregard towards the wicked” (YS 1.33) (Satchidananda, 2013, p. 51), and also controlling the exhalation and retention of the breath (YS 1.34), or concentrating on “subtle sense perceptions”, such as the palate or the tip of the nose (Y.S. 1.35), or imagining the Supreme Self as a bright light that shines within (YS 1.36), or reflecting on a mind that is completely free of all of the obstacles (YS 1.37), or on an incident that one encountered in dream state or in deep sleep (YS 1.38), or on anything that one prefers which will uplift him/her (YS 1.39). As seen, in

²² *Īśvara-praṇidhānād vā.*

the first chapter, Samādhi Pāda, the qualities of the mind and how it is affected, and how the obstacles on the way to realizing the Supreme Self is laid out; when the mind is cleaned from all the obstacles, then the ultimate truth is understood by clear vision and one breaks free from the cycle of death and re-birth (Satchidananda, 2013, p. 72). Transcending nature is seen as a virtue because only then it is possible to understand the ultimate reality, that is realizing the fact that one's true self is not what is perceived by the senses, but what is beyond.

Powell commented that Samādhi Pāda is for those who are already ready for the practice of yoga; however, Sādhana Pāda, the second chapter of the Yogasūtras, is for those who have a suffering mind (2018). Satchidananda presented the second chapter as “practical hints to be followed in the daily lives of the practitioner to prepare them for the more precise practices to follow” (2013, p. 73); the theory of yoga is explained in the Sādhana Pāda for the yogin to start simple, following the guidelines outlined by Patañjali. In order to overcome the mental obstacles²³ (ignorance, I-am-ness, desire, aversion, clinging to life) (YS 2.3), Patañjali presented Kriyāyoga: *tapas*, *svādhyāya*, *Īśvara-praṇidhāna* (YS 2.1); enabling a yogin to improve on the path to samādhi. *Aṣṭāṅgayoga* (eight limbs of yoga) system is laid out by Patañjali, the last limb of which is samādhi. Powell suggested that the yogis who followed this system were most probably “male brahmin ascetics/renunciates, residing in forests/caves” (2018).

The first limb is the *Yamas* (restraints, or social ethics) that branch out as *ahiṃsā* (non-harming), *satya* (truthfulness), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmacarya* (sexual restraint, celibacy), *aparigraha* (non-coveting). The second limb is *Niyamas*

²³ *Kleśa*, as explained by Powell (2018), is the “fundamental misperception about the nature of reality”, and one's own “misidentification with Prakṛti, while Puruṣa is one's true essence”.

(observances) that branch out as *śauca* (cleanliness), *santoṣa* (contentment), *tapas* (austerity), *svādhyāya* (self-study, or mantra repetition), *Īśvara-praṇidhāna* (devotion to the Lord); the last three niyamas make up the Kriyāyoga that is mentioned above. The yogin is expected to be established in these first two limbs, in order to move on to *āsana*, which is the third limb. *Āsana* literally means “seat”; as one of the sutras define it to be “firm and comfortable” (YS 2.46). *Prāṇāyāma* is the fourth limb, controlling the breath in the *āsana*. *Pratyāhāra* is the withdrawal of the senses, like a tortoise retreating into its shell; this is the fifth limb. The first five limbs are all outer practices, as preparation for the “inner limbs” (*antar-anga*), as Powell described (2018). *Dhāraṇā* (concentration) state is the sixth limb; *dhyāna* (meditation) is the seventh limb and this state is achieved through uninterrupted concentration on the object of concentration. This state is also called *saṁyama*, which means “total restraint” (Powell, 2018.); *dhyāna* is uninterrupted and continuous for much longer periods of time, then the eighth limb is achieved, which is *samādhi* (state of uninterrupted meditation).

The third chapter of the YS is Vibhūti Pāda; this chapter describes the outcome of the yoga practice, which are the “yogic powers” (*siddhis*). These *siddhis* are “by-products” of the “final three limbs of Rāja Yoga” as Satchidananda described (2013, p. 159); they are attained via “practices in previous births, by herbs, mantra repetition, asceticism, or *samādhi*” (YS 4.1) (Satchidananda, 2013, p. 197). Powell described the *siddhis* as “spiritual side-effects” of yoga practice (2018); if the yogin performed *saṁyama* on certain objects of concentration, he would gain knowledge of what is beyond that object. From sutra 3.16 and on, Patañjali described them; these *siddhis* include (but are not limited to) “knowledge of the speech of all creatures, reading

minds, gaining invisibility, knowledge of one's death, gaining supernatural strength, knowledge of the entire universe, stopping urges of hunger and thirst, knowledge of past lives, levitation, divine healing, mastery of the elements, etc.” (Satchidananda, 2013, 172-188). However, in order to reach *kaivalya* (isolation, dissolution), the yogin needs to have non-attachment even towards the siddhis (YS 3.51).

The fourth and final chapter of the YS is Kaivalya Pāda; when kaivalya is attained, as Powell (2018) described, “conscious seer is isolated from the mind-body and the world”. Mallinson & Singleton (2017, p. 397) brought all of these ideas together in order to describe this state: “The ‘isolation’ in question is of the spiritual principle (*puruṣa*) of Sāṃkhya (defined as ‘that which sees’) from the material principle (*prakṛti*) and its three constituent qualities (*guṇas*) by means of discrimination (*viveka*).”

3.1.2.3. *Yogic practices in the medieval era.*

Medieval texts create the very roots of modern-day yoga practices that are popular all around the world; these practices are usually encompassed under the name *haṭhayoga*, the teachings of which were conveyed in a variety of scriptures approximately between 6th and 18th centuries CE (Powell, 2018).

The word *haṭha* literally means “forceful” (Powell, 2018) or “force” (Mallinson, 2011, p. 770). Mallinson suggested that “*haṭhayoga* uses the techniques of *haṭha*” and the manuscripts that describe these techniques do not give a definition of this word in the teachings (2011, p. 770); as the techniques were challenging and as they were related to ascetic practices (like aforementioned *tapas*), they may have outlined as such (2011, p. 770). Another meaning is derived from the fragments of the word *haṭha*, as “union of the sun (*ha*) and the moon (*ṭha*)”, which is widely used in modern

applications and definitions of *haṭhayoga*; despite the fact that such a goal or result of union is described in certain texts, this definition is considered as “esoteric” by some scholars (Birch, 2011, p. 527). The conclusive remarks about the meaning of *haṭhayoga* (as “forceful yoga”, “yoga of force”) were put forward by Jason Birch in his very precise and detailed article (Birch, 2011, p. 548) on the meaning of this term:

“Rather than the metaphysical explanation of uniting the sun (*ha*) and moon (*ṭha*), it is more likely that the name Haṭhayoga was inspired by the meaning “force”. The descriptions of forcefully moving *kuṇḍalinī*, *apāna*, or *bindu*²⁴ upwards through the central channel suggest that the “force” of Haṭhayoga qualifies the effects of its techniques, rather than the effort required to perform them” (Birch, 2011, p. 548).

The early references to *haṭhayoga* can be seen in Buddhist tantras from the 8th century CE onwards; the influence of tantric Buddhism and Vajrayana Buddhism, according to Powell, is evident (2018). Tantra belief and practice system follows the idea that “the universe we experience is ... the concrete manifestation of the divine energy of the godhead that creates and maintains the universe, seeks to ritually appropriate and channel that energy, within the human microcosm, in creative and emancipatory ways” (White, 2001, p. 9). Tantric texts include information on,

“...the creation and destruction of the universe, the devotional worship of deities, spiritual practice (*sādhana*), ritual worship (*purashcharana*), the six

²⁴ Those three life-forces, in the subtle body, are known to move downwards from the top of the head (*bindu*) and from the chest (*apāna*), or remain at the base of the spine (*kuṇḍalinī*); the Haṭhayoga texts suggest that by applying certain techniques and practices taught in these texts and by one’s teacher, the *yogī* would be able to force / manipulate these energies upwards (Mallinson, 2011).

magical powers (śaṭkarma), and yoga that involves visualization (dhyāna yoga), ... origin of the gods and goddesses, various classifications of beings and worlds, the spiritual structure of the human body, human obligations and dharma according to different stages of life, the creation of statues, the uses of mantra, meditative imagery (yantra) and symbolic hand positions (mudra), the design of shrines, vows, and various forms of meditative practice” (McDaniel, 2004, p. 70).

Tantras are perceived in a variety of ways; these ways define them as “practices uniting discipline (yoga) and pleasure (bhoga)”, or a highly intellectual field only approachable by the people in the higher caste who are well-read, or a series of “magical rituals practiced by low-caste people” who act on their desires of extramarital sex and attaining magical powers through covering it by these rituals (McDaniel, 2004, p. 70). Whatever the perception is, the rituals within tantric practices either heals or harms the members that live in the community; and despite the end result, Hindu tantra traditions embrace all – “Vedic, Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, Śakta”, or even Buddhist (McDaniel, 2004, p. 70). Tantric practice (“meditation with mantra, mudra, yantra”) would eventually bring “wisdom and access to the goddess” and “supernatural power or perfection” to the practitioner (McDaniel, 2004, p. 70). According to Young (2008, p. 1011), “growing importance of agriculture and fertility symbolism, goddess worship became popular”; and this symbolism affected the Tantric systems.

The 6th century witnessed new religious movements, whose textual sources were new types of scriptures (*Tāntrikas*; *tantra*, *āgama*, *saṃhitā*), other than the Vedic and Brahmanical texts (*Vaidikas*) (Powell, 2018). *Tāntrikas* have proportional

teachings on meditational/visualizational yoga, as well as seated postures, breathing techniques, hand gestures (*mudrās*), and mantras; and these new teachings were rooted in different traditions such as Tantric Śaivism (of godhead Śiva), Vaiṣṇavism (of godhead Vishnu), and (Tantric) Vajrayāna Buddhism (Powell, 2018). Tantric traditions are also named as *mantramārga* (path of mantras), the teachings of which would instruct on particular mantras; the goal of these traditions is to conquer death, to achieve “liberation in this body and life”, which is to become one with the deity (Śiva) (Powell, 2018). This “divinization of the body”, according to Powell, was a new concept that was presented in the tantras (2018). Transgressive practices of Tantric traditions, which are briefly explained below, are examples of this concept. It is crucial to keep in mind the fact that Patañjali’s system and the haṭhayoga teachings suggest that “preserving the semen” is one of the main ways to attain liberation; this is found as “brahmacharya” (abstaining from sexual acts) in the Yogasūtras and “vajrolīmudrā”²⁵ (semen retention) in the haṭhayoga texts. However, the approaches are different. Amṛtasiddhi, an early 11th century text on haṭhayoga, praises the yogi practicing this mudrā, “the yogi who knows *vajroli* is worthy of success, even if he behaves self-indulgently, disregarding the rules taught in yoga” (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017, p. 242); while Yogasūtras emphasize the importance of the “yamas and niyamas” and Patañjali’s aphorism 2.40 goes as “by purification arises disgust for one’s own body and for contact with other bodies” (Satchidananda, 2013, p. 183). The

²⁵ James Mallinson explains this mudra as “a method of drawing liquids up the urethra, which, through enabling *bindudhāraṇa* (bindu concentration) is said to lead directly to Rāja Yoga, the royal yoga” (2018, p. 183). This mudra could either be practiced by a male yogi, or with a female practitioner; in the latter, the yogi withdraws the semen back from the female’s vagina (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017, p. 251).

paradigm shift that took place in several centuries is remarkable; the effects of Tantric traditions and the social importance of transgressive rituals will bring greater awareness of this shift.

The techniques of physical haṭhayoga practice are first mentioned in *Amṛtasiddhi*; this text, only mentions *mudrās* (bodily seals) and *bandhas* (bodily locks) (Mallinson, 2011). This text and other texts that make up the main haṭhayoga corpus²⁶, cover the following practices²⁷: preparation (where the yogī should practice, how his diet should be), cleansing techniques (*ṣaṭkarmanī*, “the six actions” and additional two other practices – *dhauti*, *basti*, *neti*, *trāṭaka*, *nauli*, *kapālabhāti*, *gajakaraṇi*, *cakri*), postures (*āsana*; seated and non-seated), breath control (*kumbhaka* or *prāṇāyāma*; *sūryā*, *ujjāyī*, *śītalī*, *bhastrī*, *sītākārī*, *bhrāmarī*, *mūrcchā*, *plāvinī*), bodily seals (*mudrās*; hand gestures and bodily shapes) (Mallinson, 2011, p. 775-778), as well as bodily locks (*bandhas*), concentration on the inner sound

²⁶*Amṛtasiddhi* (12th c.), *Dattātreyayogaśāstra* (13th c.), *Amaraughaprabodha* (13th c.), *Gorakṣaśataka* (13th c.), *Vivekamārtaṇḍa* (13-14th c.), *Yogayājñavalkya* (13-14th c.), *Yogabīja* (14-15th c.), ***Śivasamhitā*** (15th c.), ***Haṭhapradīpikā*** (15th c.), *Śivayogapradīpikā* (15th c.), *Yogacintāmaṇi* (17th c.), ***Gherandasamhitā*** (18th c.), *Haṭhabhyāsapaddhati* (18th c.) (Powell, 2018). These texts make up only some part of the corpus; the ones that are emphasized with bold are the most studied among today’s yoga practitioners (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017, p. 251).

²⁷Some of these practices, despite being physical, were given “soteriological value” by their commentators, turning them into methods, much easier than Patañjali’s eight-limbed system, to reach *samādhi* (Mallinson, 2011, p. 775). Comprehension of these techniques requires more specific research; thus, only their names and categories are mentioned here, some of them will later be discussed in more detail within the scope of this research.

(*nāḍānusandhāna*), fixation (*dhāraṇā*), meditation / visualization (*dhyāna*) (Powell, 2018).

All these techniques (and more) from the 12th century until the 18th cumulatively created the basis of today's yoga practices; therefore, it is important to look back on the early practitioners of haṭhayoga. Powell mentioned (2018) Mallinson's theory of "two Ascetico-yogic Historical Streams": *munis* (sages) and *siddhas* (adepts). The *munis*, as mentioned before, were the "orthodox Brahmanical" ascetics, who were described in the late Upaniṣads, epics, Pāli Canon, and Purāṇas; they were a part of the early śramaṇa groups (Powell, 2018). The *siddhas*, on the other hand, followed the knowledge that was outside the Vedas; they were "heterodox" adepts, antinomian followers of tantric scriptures that belong to Vajrayāna Buddhism and Tantric Śaivism, and two of the most known Mahāsiddhas of them were Matsyendranāth and Gorakhnāth (Powell, 2018). The Nāth Tradition, as Powell (Powell, 2018) put it, took its power from breaking away from establishment; being the "outsiders", they "ate meat, drank wine, and engaged in sexual rituals", which were all against the "purity model of Vedic Brahmanism". Some examples, as Geoffrey Samuel described them, "seem to be deliberately transgressive and bizarre" (2017, p. 233); such as, "night-time orgies in charnel-grounds, eating human flesh, using ornaments, bowls and musical instruments made of human bones, engaging in sexual relations while seated on corpses". Such practices are considered as "left-handed", indicating the Indian custom that perceives left hand to take tasks that are polluted and not pure (Samuel, 2017, p. 233). Today's India has a divided view towards "Tantric practitioners who are respectable members of the society" and others; while contemporary versions of earlier transgressive practices could be found

today, also, there still are groups – such as naked *Aghoris* – eating and drinking out of human skulls, inhabiting cremation grounds (2017, p. 233).

If we consider this from a contemporary perspective, substances and sexual acts might be considered as “immoral”; however, as discussed above, from the perspective of Vedic Brahmanism, its “impurity and pollution” is the main concern (Samuel, 2017, p. 231). In Tantric practices, sexual acts are considered as a gateway to “liberating insight” (Samuel, 2017, p. 231). Despite Tantra’s fame for “sexual practices” in the modern-day Western world, it was not the primary act of spirituality in much earlier times (Samuel, 2017, p. 231). Brahmanical Śaiva traditions and Buddhist traditions both created the transgressive rituals within their practices, no matter how much Hindu scholars and Buddhist scholars try to “put the blame” on one another (Samuel, 2017, p. 232). Not only the Śaiva and Buddhist groups but also the Vaiṣṇavist and Jainist groups were engaged in Tantra; yet, their engagement did not extend to transgressive practices for “liberation” (Samuel, 2017, p. 232). From an etic point of view, these transgressions are not received positively; examples within Sanskrit literature of the 6th century and later depict the *kāpālīka* (skull-men) practices as “evil, horrifying, or comic” (Samuel, 2017, p. 232). Samuel defined these depictions as “cliché” and noted that the “negative stereotyping” is even evident in Bollywood movies (Samuel, 2017, p. 232), to defame the non-orthodox; however, he also noted that despite the negative reception, practitioners of such rituals are also respected by common people who also benefit from these performed rituals for health and welfare (Samuel, 2017, p. 232). Even kings would “hire” these “low-caste hereditary practitioners” of “Kula or Kaula traditions” in order to maintain their rule; Samuel quoted from G. L. Hart on the fact that the kings owned *muracu* (battle drum)

that carried the spirit within, which was to be “made happy with blood and liquor sacrifice” (Samuel, 2017, 236). The *vrātya*, as described in a text from the Atharvaveda, who could perform such rituals, is “glorified” and “self-identified with Śiva”, which is very similar to the “much later deity yoga practices of Śaiva and Vajrayāna Tantra” (Samuel, 2017, p. 238). This self-identification of the *vrātya* (or later the renunciates or the ascetics) with deities, despite benefiting the society, was not viewed as pleasant; the power they possessed to create magic and to deceive was both respected and feared (Samuel, 2017, p. 239).

The *munis* (mostly male, celibate ascetics in the medieval era) did their practices to cultivate *tapas* (physical and mental austerities), which were, according to Powell, “forerunners of physical haṭha techniques, such as standing on one foot, or hanging upside-down (*tapkarāsan*)” (2018). The concept of *tapas* is also present in the Yogasūtras; meaning “to burn, create heat”, *tapas* signified disciplined practice that would purify the practitioner, tame their mind, in order to prepare the practitioner for the meditation practices (Satchidananda, 2013, p. 75-79). In the Yogasūtras the only goal is to prepare one on the path to *samādhi* (enlightenment); the reason of such practices in haṭhayoga was to receive divine blessings or well-being from the deities, such as *siddhis* (supernatural powers), or *mokṣa* (liberation), and the practices included ancient inversions in order to retain the life-force *bindu*, which is the nectar of immortality (*amṛta*) (Powell, 2018). Powell called this process of transition from *tapas* into *haṭhayoga* as “āsana-ization²⁸ of practices” (Powell, 2018); and to this day, the *munis* have been performing these *tapas* techniques in India.

²⁸ This term was used by Richard Rosen in his book “*Original Yoga: Rediscovering Traditional Practices of Hatha Yoga*”, published by Shambala Publications, Inc., in 2012.

The idea of “subtle energy body” that is present in today’s yoga practices around the world dates back to tantric teachings; *cakras* (lotuses, wheels), *nāḍīs* (energy channels)²⁹, *prāṇas* (life-force, breath), *vāyus* (winds), *ādhāra* (mental fixations), *kuṇḍalinī-śakti* (goddess, serpent power)³⁰. When this subtle energy body is manipulated through forceful physical practices (hence, *haṭha*), eventually the merging of Śiva and Śakti happens, which would lead to the flow of amṛta. It is important to note, without getting deeper into the subject than needed within the scope of this research, that the tantric Śaiva school of Kaula carries these teachings on serpent power (Mallinson, 2011, p. 770); from this tantric school, a rather left-handed branch sprung and the practices of this branch played a crucial role in giving birth to *haṭhayoga* practices: the Nāth Tradition. According to Mallinson, simultaneously, earlier bindu-oriented *haṭhayoga*, the Kaula’s *layayoga*³¹ and Śaiva *kuṇḍalinī*

²⁹ Late Upaniṣads mentions these energy channels, Tantras name them as *iḍā*, *piṅgalā*, and *suṣumnā*; around 72000 *nāḍīs* are mentioned, yet there are different tantras that give different numbers and maps of the subtle energy body (Powell 2018).

³⁰ When awakened and risen, nectar of immortality – amṛta – flows through the body; this is accomplished by physical practices that allow the manipulation of subtle energy, resulting in the union of Śiva and Śakti, and thus providing a door to liberation via divine union (Powell, 2018).

³¹ The Yogatārāvalī, the first verse of which has been chanted (as part of the “Opening Prayer”) at the beginning of every Aṣṭāṅgayoga practice ever since its integration into this particular modern postural yoga system by Pattabhi Jois, is a 14th century text that lays out the foundation of Haṭha and Rājayoga as means of attaining liberation (Birch, 2015, p. 4); while haṭhayoga is all about techniques, Rājayoga is “beyond all techniques” (Birch, 2015, p. 4). According to Birch, Rājayoga teachings in the Yogatārāvalī can be dated back to a still existent text – *Amanaska* – from the 12th century; this text considers all 7 limbs of aṣṭāṅgayoga and also the techniques of haṭhayoga unnecessary on the path to samādhi, which is the main goal of Rājayoga and which can be achieved by only practicing *Amanaskamudrā* (“eyes half-

techniques were integrated, which formed the synthesis in the *Haṭhaprāḍipikā* by Swātmārāma – the very foundational text of almost all modern haṭhayoga traditions that in turn succeeded (Mallinson, 2011, p. 779-780).

From the 7th and 8th century onwards, yoga practices of sexual focus could be found among the Śaiva and Buddhist groups; the Śaiva groups include Siddha teachers in the south of India and Nāth teachers in the north, and the recognisable; Matsyendra and Gorakh, as mentioned earlier (Samuel, 2017, p. 276). The Buddhist groups were linked to the “mahāyoga Tantras”; all of these groups, according to Samuel, seem to be active around the same time in these different regions, “suggesting a shared ascetic culture” (Samuel, 2017, p. 276). Some scholars put forward the idea that Matsyendranāth and his followers shifted the “cremation ground associations and symbolism to the reformed and domesticated traditions”; because of this reform, the techniques presented by these groups were now accepted by larger groups of people including householders (Samuel, 2017, p. 276). The techniques that were attached to the Nāth groups included, but were not limited to, “practices aimed at health, long life and immortality, sexual practices, internal “subtle body” practices, and alchemical practices associated with mercury-based elixirs” (Samuel, 2017, p.

closed, gaze outward, focus inward”) (Birch, 2015, p. 5). In some other medieval texts, there is a “fourfold scheme” of achieving samādhi; the dullest student practices *mantrayoga*, average student practices *layayoga*, the capable student practices *haṭhayoga*, and the most gifted practices *rājayoga* (Birch, 2015, p. 6). *Haṭhaprāḍipikā* offers a two-fold scheme that comprises *haṭhayoga* and *rājayoga*; as the text incorporated layayoga into haṭhayoga, an example of which could be *śavāsana* (corpse pose), a once layayoga practice, later presented in the *Haṭhaprāḍipikā* as an *āsana* (bodily posture) (Mallinson, 2011, p. 776).

276). “The blissful expansion of consciousness” would be achieved by sexual acts, consuming meat and alcohol; the result is *siddhi* (power) and it would take the practitioners to immortality (Samuel, 2017, p. 277). The texts ascribed to the Nāth tradition mention the *cakras* and *kuṇḍalinī*; the techniques to raise the serpent power (*kuṇḍalinī*) from the lowest *cakra* to the highest in order to reach “liberating insight” (Samuel, 2017, p. 277); some of the concepts and techniques that were derived from this tradition are to be briefly explained below.

It is also essential to mention that practices related to Tantra were also carried on by the Islamic mystics and Sufis; Śaiva, Buddhist, Sufi, and Vaiṣṇava groups took up these practices and presented them in their “translated” forms (Samuel, 2017, p. 335). Perhaps, this “translation” and integration was the very root of how the revived modern yoga has been welcomed by millions of people around the world, no matter what their religious background was. Śaiva ascetics performed Tantric practices “as their personal *sādhana* or spiritual practice, also as the basis for the ritual services they performed for their lay clientele” (Samuel, 2017, p. 336). Today, Vaiṣṇavism is more predominant among the renunciates and they are not “primarily Tantric”, compared to the period when Śaivism was more popular (Samuel, 2017, p. 336). After Brahmanical Hinduism became dominant in India and modernist movements of the 19th century started to occupy the yogic scenes, the yogic practices were radically pulled away from their Tantric background; although haṭhayoga is the foundation of “modern forms of health, medical and recreational yoga” it emerged from the Tantric practices of Nāth tradition – the very foundational text of haṭhayoga being the *Haṭhayogaprāḍipikā*, a Nāth text of “internal and yogic sexual practices” – the modern yoga revivalists, such as Swami Vivekananda, viewed this heritage to be overly

“embarrassing” and they “reconstructed” yoga within the context of Patañjali's Yogasūtras (Samuel, 2017, p. 336). Today, not many yoga practitioners are aware of the Tantric and sexual origins of modern haṭhayoga practices (Samuel, 2017, p. 336). Possibly due to this “embarrassment” and the dominance of Brahmanical / Vaiṣṇavite Hinduism during the modern yoga revival (which is covered in the next section), Tantra-related practices were accepted as heterodox forms of yoga and Vedāntic interpretations of the Yogasūtras were deemed as orthodox teachings of yoga. It is important to keep in mind that the key figures of the modern yoga revival are members of higher Hindu *varnas* (caste): Swami Vivekananda (promoting synthesis of Christian with orthodox yoga tradition), Sri Ramakrishna (Swami Vivekananda's guru), Shri Yogendra, T. Krishnamacharya, Pattabhi Jois, B. K. S. Iyengar are some of the names that will be mentioned in this research.

The synthesis of two systems (bindu-oriented haṭhayoga and Śaiva *kuṇḍalinī* techniques), as mentioned earlier, paved the road to today's yoga practices; these systems have included the following techniques (Powell, 2018): “Āsana (postures), ṣaṭkarma (six actions; purifications), prāṇāyāma (breath extension, control), kumbhaka (breath retention), mudrā (bodily seals), bandha (bodily locks), nādānusandhāna (concentration in the inner sound), dhāraṇā (fixation), dhyāna (meditation, visualization), samādhi (soteriological goal; Rājayoga).” These are, as Powell described it, “psychosomatic, psychophysical techniques” that are affective on the body and mind; despite the fact that the classical texts did not mention non-seated āsanās, the first mentions of such āsanās were in various “forms of tapas or ascetic movements” (2018). In haṭhayoga, the goal of performing āsanās is to purify and strengthen the body, bring health to bodily systems, get rid of diseases, and attain

lasting vitality (Powell, 2018). In general, the goal of haṭhayoga is “bodily purification, therapeutics that target and treat ailments, attainment of power, and ultimately liberation” (Powell, 2018); during the development of haṭhayoga by practice and text, the followers of these teachings were “conducting experiments on body and āsanās”, and these experiments helped develop the haṭhayoga techniques in time (Powell, 2018). These techniques, however, were not deemed fruitful if practiced without Rājayoga, neither would Rājayoga be fruitful if practiced without haṭhayoga; this and the path to liberation via these techniques is explained in Haṭhaprāḍipikā by Swātmārāma.

The number of āsanās in haṭhayoga were considered and understood to be eighty-four in total; however, recent findings of various manuscripts dating back to 17th to 18th centuries showed that certain haṭhayoga texts contain more āsanās (Birch, 2018, p.137). “Extreme asceticism” and renunciate practices were not embraced by the “pioneering yoga gurus” of the 20th century; however, certain teachings of the earlier texts that were passed down onto their generation might have been appropriated by their teachers who were Brahmins, just like themselves (Birch, 2018, p. 138). Birch pointed out that, most of the āsanās (“seated, forward, backward, twisting, arm-balancing, inverted postures”) that were taught in the 17th and 18th century sources were the forerunners of modern yoga practices of the same kind (Birch, 2018, p. 138); certain teachers might have taught āsanās that were similar in practice but different in names, due to differences of categorisation and identification in various regions where they were active or preference to stand out (Birch, 2018, p. 138). Dynamic āsanās or transitions between āsanās, as Birch noted, are not described

in details in the texts on haṭhayoga; *sūryanamaskāra*³² (salutation to the Sun) is a practice that cannot be found in haṭhayoga texts, and so is the method of *vinyāsa*³³ (Birch, 2018, p. 138). Moving āsanas and sequences were only mentioned in *Haṭhābhyāsapaddhati*, an 18th/19th century text that includes 112 āsanas; however, even this text does not give information on the hold length for an āsana or how to direct the breath while entering/breaking an āsana or while holding it (Birch, 2018, p. 139).

The haṭhayoga texts were meant to be accessible for all; there was no religious separation between the practitioners, nor between the genders or castes. Theoretical and metaphysical aspects of the teachings were less important compared to the methods and techniques. One did not have to be a renunciate, as some texts³⁴ refer to practitioners with wife and children; demonstrating “all can gain success through yoga practice” (Powell, 2018). Various groups of people, despite their cultural,

³² A vigorous practice of *sūryanamaskāra* is mentioned in a commentary to Haṭhaprāḍipikā, as noted by Birch; however, this commentary warns the practitioner against the negative effects of this practice on the body (2018, p. 139). Other records on the possible sources of *sūryanamaskāra* being a form of “worship ritual to Sun” were also noted by Birch (2018, p. 139).

³³ Norman E. Sjoman noted down a very important clarification on this term; “*vinyāsa* is a term used in vedic ritual and refers to the subsidiary factors around a mantra that are required to make the mantra effective” (1999, p. 65). This literal meaning of the term does not have any place in yoga; rather it appears in the Mīmāṃsā, one of the six philosophical schools of Hindu thought (Śaḍdarśana) and as Krishnamacharya was a student of this school of thought, Sjoman commented that the use of this term might indicate a “vedic sanction to yoga practices” (Sjoman, 1999, p. 65).

³⁴ Śivasamhitā.

biological, religious origin, would adopt these techniques of haṭhayoga (Powell, 2018.).

3.1.3. Modern yoga.

Having reviewed the textual references to the soteriological context of yoga and its practices throughout history; the emergence of haṭhayoga teachings, their Early Modern interpretations and applications (e.g. aforementioned Haṭhābhyāsapaddhati of the 18th-19th century), it is now possible to analyse modern practices and understand the relevance and remit of contemporary yoga practitioners. Despite the fact that postures (*āsanas*) had only recently been introduced to the yoga scene – compared to the rest of the haṭhayoga teachings, where mental practices for concentration and meditation, as well as practices that focused on the subtle body, were more central – the word “yoga” now refers mostly to the “semi-secular” practice of bodily postures (Newcombe, 2009, p. 1). This semantic and structural change of “yoga” and its practice occurred due to various reasons and circumstances which will be discussed below.

Various ascetic practices of meditation, concentration, or tapas, were taken up and developed by different religious, sectarian, or social groups³⁵, and such practices have been “documented” and “observed” ever since the emergence of these practices and their practitioners (Newcombe, 2007, p. 2). Patañjali’s schema of the eight-limbed yoga system (4th-5th century CE) (as described in the Yogasūtras) has been the

³⁵ These practices and other techniques “have been used by Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs while maintaining their own metaphysical beliefs,” despite the idea that yoga is primarily assumed as Hindu (Newcombe, 2009, p. 2).

framework of yoga practice and philosophy that is followed in the contemporary scene of yoga in India (Newcombe, 2007, p. 2). Upon this eight-limbed yoga system, which suggested liberation (state of yoga) via “restraint of the modifications of the mind-stuff,” came Tantric texts and their practices that presented a different way of liberation, that is through “activating a series of energetic centres and channels” or “inducing kuṇḍalinī to climb up the spine to the highest chakra” (Newcombe, 2007, p. 3). The Tantric practices later “aimed for promoting health, longevity, and physical immortality in association with the aims of spiritual liberation” (Newcombe, 2007, p. 3); however, as Newcombe pointed out, these alternative practices were not socially embraced and the Tantric practitioners were seen as “potentially dangerous,” therefore the yoga revivalists in contemporary India strived to reduce the links between tantra and yoga (Newcombe, 2007, p. 3). Bodily postures other than seated poses, special techniques on manipulating the breath and cleaning the body, seals and locks, along with the concept of Samādhi were brought together in the haṭhayoga corpus from the 11th century until the 19th century (Newcombe, 2007, p. 4). During the formation of this haṭhayoga corpus, the sociopolitical scene of the Mughal and Colonial India allowed certain groups of yogis³⁶ to be acknowledged by the kings and regional rulers – they were given land “in exchange for esoteric knowledge and military alliances” (Newcombe, 2007, p. 5). The yogis in collaboration with local princes would spoil the business of British traders and the colonial government; eventually, royal aids were intervened by the British forces, leaving the yogis out of

³⁶ Some ascetics following the order of Gorakhnāth “self-identified” themselves as “yogis”; from 12th-13th centuries on, they have been notorious for their “supernatural powers of alchemy and prophecy, and military ability” (Newcombe, 2007, p. 5).

resources (Newcombe, 2007, p. 5). The lack of resources caused these groups to beg for their survival needs, causing Christian missionaries and European voyagers to label them as “immoral” or “criminal”; this perception of the yogis extended into the 21st century (Newcombe, 2007, p. 5).

Colonial interference from the British and rising interest amongst the European scholars for the Indian cultural, religious, and historical heritage triggered the idea that yoga and sāmkhya as philosophical systems are superior to the “practices of ascetics”; this ranking was supported by “both the Europeans and educated Indians” (Newcombe, 2007, p. 5). Later in the 18th and 19th centuries, translations of the Bhagavad Gītā and Upaniṣads, along with some other Sanskrit texts, inspired the Romantic and Transcendentalist waves, starting an “Oriental Renaissance”, where “Indian spirituality” was “idealized and celebrated” from “European and American intellectual circles” (Newcombe, 2007, p. 6). The Bhagavad Gītā with its “three yogas³⁷” (Newcombe, 2007) and Patañjali’s eight-limbed yoga schema is hypothesized as the “foundation of yoga practice” among the modern practitioners of yoga (Newcombe, 2009, p. 3).

The term “modern yoga” refers to, according to Elizabeth De Michelis, “certain types of yoga that evolved mainly through the interaction of Western individuals interested in Indian religions and a number of more or less Westernized Indians over the last 150 years” (De Michelis, 2004, p. 2). De Michelis pointed out that despite “modern yoga” practices and doctrines that were once part of haṭhayoga, a different term was necessary for emphasizing the difference between haṭhayoga and the overall

³⁷ Karmayoga (life; yoga of action; non-attachment to the results of one’s work), bhaktiyoga (love; yoga of devotion); jñānayoga (light; yoga of knowledge; wisdom of the ultimate reality) (Mascaró, 2003).

practices that evolved in recent decades (De Michelis, 2004, p. 8); “Modern Postural Yoga” is the new term she instead presented referring to today’s lineages of practice that became popular in the West and all around the world.

The “typology of Modern Yoga” De Michelis created (De Michelis, 2004, p. 188) is quite specific and detailed; this research is primarily focused on one lineage (school) of “modern yoga”, whilst De Michelis’s typology in its entirety is illustrated to attain a thorough understanding. As stated by De Michelis (De Michelis, 2004, p. 187-189), and as will be discussed below, Swami Vivekananda’s reconstruction of “yoga” was the starting point; Modern Psychosomatic Yoga (MPYs) is the main branch under Modern Yoga, focusing on “body-mind-spirit training”. Over time, the schools of yoga with this focus shifted towards other aims; some dived deeper into postural practice and breathing (Modern Postural Yoga; MPY), some into meditation and concentration (Modern Meditational Yoga; MMY) (De Michelis, 2004, p. 187-189). The schools that fall under the typologies of MPY and MMY – as they focus more on the physical aspects of the practice – do not reflect much on or evaluate “the religio-philosophical underpinnings of their practice” (De Michelis, 2004, p. 187-189); a very well-known saying by Sri K. Pattabhi Jois – founder of Ashtanga Yoga, the MPY school that is the centre of this research – may support this suggestion: “Practice and all is coming” (YJ Editors, 2009, title).

Another branch that is relatively younger than MPY and MMY, is Modern Denominational Yoga (MDY); the schools or structured practices under this category are demanding of their members and are more organized, focusing mostly on the ideologies of their “Neo-Hindu *gurus*”, individuals follow their school’s “beliefs,

rules, and sources of authority”, not taking yoga as their main interest (De Michelis, 2004, p. 188-189).

De Michelis isolates “Indian schools of Modern Yoga active only in India and through the medium of local languages” (2004, p. 188-189) from her typology of Modern Yoga. When the topic of Modern Yoga arises, “anglophone yoga” or “transnational anglophone yoga”, as named by Singleton (2010, p. 9-10) is the primary concern; since, it was through English publishing and teachings that Modern Yoga concepts – as discussed below – spread and evolved, and those schools with English publishing were able to open branches of their schools or centres outside India (De Michelis, 2004, p. 189).

3.1.3.1. Swami Vivekananda and the modern yoga revival.

De Michelis pointed out two important dates in the history of yoga that marked the shift into “modern yoga”: 1849 with Henry David Thoreau, 1893 with Swami Vivekananda (2004, p. 2-3). “Sources of knowledge” were “intuition and true reason” according to the American Transcendentalists (De Michelis, 2004, p. 81); one of their pioneers was Henry David Thoreau, who self-labelled himself as a “yogi” a reference in a letter written in 1849 (Powell, 2018). In the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, Vivekananda made a speech on “the universality of all religions”; he was well-received and supported by the attendees of the parliament, and later with a “Neo-Vedāntic interpretation of the Yogasūtras”, he published his book “Raja Yoga” in 1896 (Powell, 2018).

Vivekananda was influenced by other Neo-Vedāntic pioneers; Rammohan Roy (Neo-Vedāntic Enlightenment), Debendranath Tagore (Neo-Vedāntic Romanticism), Keshubchandra Sen (Neo-Vedāntic Spiritualism) (De Michelis, 2004, p. 46). Briefly,

Neo-Vedāntic ideas included; “dialogues between the western and Indian cultural values”, “a humanistic Unitarian Christianity”, “active social service modeled on – and challenging – Christian missionary activity”, “Hindus possessing unique yoga faculty”, “Hindus possessing power of spiritual communion and absorption” (Newcombe, 2007, p. 7). In 1893 at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, Vivekananda was invited to represent Hinduism; as Powell noted (2018) he shared the “core message of the Vedanta” and “preached the universality of all religions”. His speech was well-received, and not much later, he went on to found Vedanta centres at various locations in the United States of America. (Powell, 2018).

Vivekananda, as influenced by his forerunners and some of his contemporaries of the modern yoga revival, promoted a “āsana-free yoga” – despite later leading to the emergence of “practice-oriented anglophone yoga” (Singleton, 2010, p. 4-5) – and had a suspicious attitude towards the “practitioner of haṭhayoga” (Singleton, 2010, p. 35, 44). Singleton pointed out that Vivekananda had a “cultural nationalist project” and endorsed a kind of “Indian spirituality” that focused on “body and spirit” (Singleton, 2010, p. 145). The “prāṇa model of yoga practice” that was suggested by Vivekananda himself in his book *Raja Yoga*³⁸ affected today’s modern yoga practices greatly (Singleton, 2010, p. 147, 153); with his efforts, yoga was “rescued from the merely philosophical or philological and presented as the *summum bonum* of the (authentic, practical) Indian spiritual tradition,” and also “refashioned as a cultural symbol, in harmony with the religious and intellectual aspirations of educated

³⁸ Vivekananda published his renowned book *Raja Yoga* in 1896; it was a “Neo-Vedantic interpretation” of Patañjali’s *Yogasūtras* (Powell, 2018), as a result of which Patañjali’s *aṣṭāṅgayoga* system is perceived and/or labeled as *rājayoga* within the Modern Yoga milieu.

Indians” through the filter of “Western influences and standards” (Singleton, 2010, p. 169). It is important to note, as Singleton emphasized, that Vivekananda did not offer a traditional system of yoga, but he was the first example of “transnational anglophone yoga” – as outlined by Singleton (Singleton, 2010, p. 208).

De Michelis highlighted Vivekananda as the “first Neo-Vedāntic guru” who strategically made use of the Westerners’ sympathetic approach towards “Asian” teachers; he openly advocated that Hinduism was superior to all religions and Indians were “spiritual and religiously observant at all times” (2004, p. 111). Despite not having been initiated into a monastic order, he applied for the Parliament of Religions by “introducing himself as a monk” (De Michelis, 2004, p. 112). This intrinsic introduction needed support; he approached the Theosophical Society for validation of his application, yet he was declined as he did not intend to become a member; however, Brahmo Samaj³⁹ embraced Vivekananda, as Brahmo Samaj representative Protapchandra Mozoomdar was a member of the Parliament’s selection committee and he confirmed Vivekananda’s participation as a “representative of the Hindu monastic order” (De Michelis, 2004, p. 112). “Brahmo ideas and Neo-Vedāntic ideology”, according to De Michelis, were shaped and formed by the Freemasonry that was founded in India during the 1760s; the ideas of “brotherly love, faith, and charity”, the prerequisite of “belief in a supreme being” to become a member, and to be “good men and true, men of honor and honesty” following whichever belief

³⁹ Founded in 1843, Brahmo Samaj (Brahma Society) aimed to reform Hinduism; their ideas included rejecting “Vedic authority, incarnations, karma or the cycle of death and rebirth, Hindu rituals, caste system, polytheism, image worship”, and embracing influences by Islamic and Christian teachings (Stefon & Doniger, 2015).

system were all parallel to Brahma Samaj's "religious universalism" (De Michelis, 2004, p. 68). Members of the Freemasonry included, at the time of inauguration, the European aristocrats, and they wanted the "native gentlemen" to also join; in 1843, "the Rising Star of Western India Lodge" was founded, and in less than a century, a hundred and eighty-three lodges had been established, with native members who were "lawyers, judges, and government officials" (De Michelis, 2004, p. 69).

Vivekananda's father urged him and his brother to join the Freemasonry around 1884, with the intention that they would eventually meet influential people; the ideologies Vivekananda encountered in the Freemasonry lodge resonated with the Brahma ideas and fortified his perception of them (De Michelis, 2004, p. 100).

With a goal of promoting Hinduism as a form of universal spiritualism, Vivekananda and his contemporaries were very clear that haṭhayogis made up the "unacceptable facet of modern Hinduism" (Singleton, 2010 p. 70). As mentioned above, Vivekananda was openly degrading the physical haṭhayoga practices; consequently, in his book *Raja Yoga*, he wrote:

"This portion of the Yoga is a little similar to the Hatha - yoga which deals entirely with the physical body, its aim being to make the physical body very strong. We have nothing to do with it here, because its practices are very difficult, and cannot be learned in a day, and, after all, do not lead to much spiritual growth" (Vivekananda, 1897/1920, p. 18).

However, at the same time, Vivekananda drew attention to his thoughts and commentaries by selecting followers of popular movements that were further from standard conventions supporting what he addressed with scientific approaches; this perspective was reviewed by Andrea Jain:

“Vivekananda especially appealed to American women interested in alternatives to orthodox religion. The guru joined Transcendentalists, Theosophists, and Hindu reformers in projecting modern values and ideas onto a reified notion of Hinduism. The result, for Vivekananda, was a modern and nondualist interpretation of Patanjala Yoga, and with his book entitled *Raja Yoga* (1896) and other texts, Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Mission ossified the equation of raja yoga with a modern and nondualist interpretation of Patanjala Yoga by providing it with indigenous authority. For something to qualify as modern, it had to be compatible with science, so Vivekananda sought to prove that raja yoga was scientific. In this context, he did invoke some components of hatha yoga, but only on his own terms” (Jain, 2014, p. 32-33).

Elizabeth De Michelis stated strongly that Vivekananda was “validating his interpretations of yoga” via “physics and empiricist epistemology”; he sought to justify the “subtle physiology” as taught in his “prāṇa model”, by claiming that “yogis already knew what modern anatomy and physiology are discovering” and that he was “in line with the latest discoveries of science” (De Michelis, 2004, p. 166-167). This would also appeal to the monotheistic and Christian ideals. However, as Singleton expressed (2010, p. 72), despite trying to bring haṭhayoga to a scientific setting, Vivekananda disregarded its “ends and means”, arguing that haṭhayoga is an obstacle in the path of mind and spirit work; after two months of attempting at haṭhayoga practices with one guru, Pavhari Baba – a haṭhayoga “expert” of the time – and ending up with declining health, Vivekananda abandoned haṭhayoga, which led him to shift his discourse into completely “rejecting or ignoring haṭhayoga as the most inferior aspect of yoga” (Singleton, 2010, p. 73). Although Pavhari Baba linked haṭha

and dhyāna (meditation) traditions of yoga without a challenge, Vivekananda avoided that; Singleton pointed towards the controversies within Vivekananda's discourse, which was a struggle to aggrandize Rāja Yoga as opposed to haṭhayoga (Singleton, 2010, p. 74). Due to the above-mentioned reasons of belittling the haṭhayogin – “demonization” and “impurity” of the “performing fakir-yogi”, their being grouped together with “magic” and “mendicancy”, as well as the arguments on “what counts as religion and what does not” – Vivekananda made the distinction between “longevity-focused” haṭhayoga and “religious”, hence closer to God, concept of Raja Yoga (Singleton, 2010, p. 74). By doing so, he would propagate “a form of yoga to ‘the West’ that would be perceived as the antithesis to the body-centred religion popularly associated with yoga” (Jain, 2014, p. 32). Vivekananda's indirect involvement in the Theosophical Society also publicized the ideas of modern yoga revival and was shaped with; the Society's founder Blavatsky also classified haṭhayoga as “inferior” and Rāja Yoga as “superior”, the former being “only based on physical practices” and the latter being capable of training “mental and intellectual powers” (De Michelis, 2004, p. 178).

In his approach, Vivekananda promoted “four yogas” in a successful attempt to teach a “universalistic and accessible Hinduism” that would serve the “spiritual improvement of all mankind” (Newcombe, 2007, p. 7). *Rāja Yoga* was one of those four yogas, the other three being Karmayoga, Bhaktiyoga, and Jñānayoga. These four yogas were pathways to “self-realization”, practising them would “manifest the Divinity within” (Newcombe, 2007, p. 7). Due to Vivekananda's success in the West, discourses within the modern revival of yoga in India reinforced Vivekananda's narrative as well – Swami Sivananda helped spread Vivekananda's teachings in his

own publications which were distributed worldwide (Newcombe, 2007, p. 8). Sanskrit scholar and Orientalist Max Müller commended Ramakrishna, the other guru of Vivekananda, while demeaning the haṭhayogins and saṁnyāsins (renunciates); as Singleton quoted (2010, p. 75), Müller would take his judgment from Vivekananda's account on Ramakrishna, hence was "blind to the unorthodox, tantric elements that were so central to (Ramakrishna's) religious life". Even Müller later subtly criticized Vivekananda for reviving yoga in a way that allowed it to later become a mere practice for personal gains and thus a corrupt version of it (Singleton, 2010, p. 76). In the end, Vivekananda "established ... the most successful and productive branch of Neo-Vedāntic occultism" and his teachings were very much embraced by "Neo-Vedānta's Western partner, New Age religion" (De Michelis, 2004, p. 50).

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the key advocate in India's independence from colonial British control, was also an influential figure during the revival of yoga; the rules he lived by (satya, ahimsa, tapas, brahmacharya) were described in the Yogasūtras of Patañjali (Newcombe, 2007, p. 10). He would observe "truthfulness, non-violence, fasting, sexual abstinence, vegetarianism" and also, he would represent a new "Indian nation that is self-reliant" (Newcombe, 2007, p. 10). He did not fully support Western medicine, despite being educated in England; and he did not fully support Ayurveda⁴⁰ (Newcombe, 2007, p. 10), yet he was for the "yogic physical practices" in order to live a healthy life (Newcombe, 2007, p. 10), such as easy prāṇāyāma techniques and sufficient practice of āsana (Newcombe, 2007, p. 11).

⁴⁰Āyurveda, "knowledge/science of healthy and long life", is generally considered as traditional Hindu medicine with a complex and rich theoretical system; its practices and theory were parts of three different Sanskrit texts dating between 100 CE and 400 CE (Tilak, 2008, p. 77).

Gandhi had diverse personal and political relationships with his era's influential figures in yoga revival scene; and along with them, his yoga ideal was “anticolonial; to promote physical health, mental control, and duty to assert the truth” (Newcombe, 2007, p. 11). Newcombe strongly suggested that, Gandhi's stand for India's independence was also a symbolic frame for the revival of modern yoga; in order to survive the oppression of the colonial British rule, yoga was to be repositioned “as a system of physical culture and therapeutics in 20th century India” (Newcombe, 2007, p. 11).

3.1.3.2. Physical culture, therapeutics, and yoga.

The effect of industrial advancement, urbanization of livelihood, and British oppression brought about a social “body” movement in India. Facing the “narratives of Social Darwinism and eugenics; the science of improving a population by controlled breeding to increase the occurrence of desirable heritable characteristics.” that promoted “nationalism and military readiness” (Newcombe, 2007, p. 12), the “physically weak” people of India needed a shift in their cultural practices if they were to “stand strong” against the colonial rule. These familiar narratives were very much present in the late 19th century Europe; physical determination of nations was not only for health and aesthetic reasons, but also for nationalist ethics and “man-making” (Singleton, 2010, p. 82). Britain and several other European nations followed this idea of “national strength” because of the necessities in industrial production; in order to work in difficult conditions for industrial production, men needed much physical strength (Singleton, 2010, p. 83). In the English public schools, physical education – a combination of “military training” and “continental gymnastics” – was encouraged, and this encouragement came with strings attached; “manliness,

morality, patriotism, fair play, and faith” were to be embraced all together for the forming of “the perfect Englishman” (Singleton, 2010, p. 83). The belief that bodily improvement of individuals would result in collective improvement of “everybody” within a nation was also supported by the view of “body-mind-soul imbalance”; the brainpower of the industrial era was at the cost of physical as well as non-physical traits of men (Singleton, 2010, p. 84).

Singleton reasoned (2010, p. 84) that under the haṭhayoga revival lay the “nostalgia for wholeness”, with a primary focus on the body; “self-fulfilment” was the goal of the nationalist physical culture movement, and its parallel was “self-realization” as propagated and popularized by Vivekananda and others. “Popular postural yoga” was defined by Singleton as “a hybridized product of colonial India’s dialogical encounter with the worldwide physical culture movement” (2010, p. 81). This hybrid included “āsanas, martial arts of Indian origin, wrestling, warm-up exercises, sūryanamaskāra, weight lifting, pillar exercises, and drills” (Newcombe, 2007, p. 12). The hybridized practice came to being, as a result of the aforementioned nationalist discourses that permeated the British thinking and hence found a ground in the pre-independence Indian political and cultural scene (Newcombe, 2007, p. 12). The logical conversion of a gymnasium into a temple for “various Indian physical disciplines” along with journalism that supported “yogi freedom fighters” paved the way for such a hybrid to receive popular acceptance soon enough (Newcombe, 2007, p. 12). Anecdotal and social connections between gymnastics and yoga were explained in crucial details by Singleton (2010, p. 84-88); therapeutic cures, harmonial gymnastics, aerobic gymnastics, military gymnastics, and other derivative techniques were integrated into the physical education programs in India.

From gymnastics into therapeutics, the shift into a “secularized yoga for everybody, including women” was the basis of āsana-oriented practices; “physical improvement with the potential of eugenic mutations to lead to a stronger national race”, as Newcombe noted (2007, p. 12), was a notable thought of the time, held by Shri Yogendra. “Swedish movement cure”, Yogendra’s approach, along with Swami Kuvalayananda’s “Kaivalyadhama Yoga Ashram” where yoga for therapeutic goals developed a basis for a physical-culture-oriented yoga practice to emerge (Newcombe, 2007, p. 16). Another important figure in the history of modern postural yoga emergence is K. V. Iyer, who fused āsanas, physical culture, and bodybuilding practices (Newcombe, 2007, p. 13). Several influential masters⁴¹ of modern postural yoga branched out from this era’s prominent figures; the scope of this research does not allow currently for further details on each persona. However, these masters were the most notable ones among their contemporaries who started off “yoga as an exercise for physical health, therapeutic healing, spiritual awakening, and national liberation” movement (Newcombe, 2007, p. 13). “Public health and fitness”, “Body Perfection”, “health benefits of physical postures”, and so on... these phrases were used to advertise the recently growing modern yoga (Newcombe, 2009, p. 8). The attempt to merge the traditional Indian thoughts and practices with those that are modern and Western, experiments and researches were conducted; “physiological effects of āsana, prāṇāyāma and meditation techniques” were to be “verified” and

⁴¹ Newcombe (2007) briefly brought together a selection of connections between certain influential figures. For example, Max Müller was influenced by Shri Yogendra; Iyer tutored Sundoram and Balsekar; Swami Yogananda’s brother Bishnu Charan Ghosh was another yoga and physical culture mixer. The notorious (Larson, 2018) Bikram Choudhury was a student at Ghosh’s school of yoga.

“explored” through the use of “western biomedical science” (Newcombe, 2007, p. 11). Yoga was soon to be generally accepted as a “therapeutic technique” that would be relaxing and would help to “maintain health and well-being” (Newcombe, 2007, 12-13).

One of the recognised and widely practised exercises within the classes of modern yoga schools is sūryanamaskāra⁴² (sun salutations); the eugenic thought was behind the integration of this “exercise” into yoga classes, and from the gymnasiums of K.V. Iyer to the teachings of Swami Sivananda, as well into the 1960s with Iyengar’s canonic book, *Light On Yoga*, sūryanamaskāra and its variations became part of the common practice in almost all, if not all MPY classes (Newcombe, 2007, p. 14). Singleton noted that bringing together yoga and physical culture, Iyer kept sūryanamaskāra as a fundamental exercise of his method and at the same time he approached yoga “as medical gymnastics” (2010, p. 124); he would advertise his “yogic therapy” method as “scientific, practical, and quick” (Singleton, 2010, p. 124). The king of Mysore was among Iyer’s patients (Singleton, 2010, p. 124), and their association would help deliver the teachings of Krishnamacharya, which will be covered below.

3.1.3.3. Yoga of the physical culture scene at Mysore Palace.

The Maharaja of Mysore, Sri Krishna Rajendra Woyedar, sponsored Iyer and his gymnasium at the Mysore Palace; during his reign, “cultural innovations,

⁴² Pratinidhi Pant, Rajah of Aundh, as explained in the footnote of Singleton’s article (2013, p. 45), was the pioneer of modern sūryanamaskāra system that is found in modern yoga practice today; he was also a body builder at the time (Singleton, 2010, p. 124).

scientific and technological experiments, and education revolutions” were a particular focus of attention (Singleton, 2010, p. 178). During the 1920s and 1930s, the Maharaja helped spread the physical culture movement in Mysore, which was mostly built upon yogāsana (Singleton, 2010, p.179). The Maharaja’s health problems led him to find Krishnamacharya, who was already well-known during that time for his therapeutic approach to yoga; and he was cured by the yoga master, which created a mutual trust between the king of Mysore and the father of modern yoga (Shri K Pattabhi Jois Ashtanga Yoga Institute, 2009, para. 5-6).

As the Maharaja supported “gymnastics, military exercises, Western sports and games”, the residents of the Mysore Palace would take part in these activities (Singleton, 2010, p.179). Having scanned the palace records, Singleton specifically marked that “Krishnamacharya was appointed as an instructor at the boys' school to teach the Yogic system of exercises” (Singleton, 2010, p.179); he also emphasized the fact that during that time, yogāsana classes and sūryanamaskāra classes were still held separately (Singleton, 2010, p. 180).

Later, a new yogaśālā would open in order to sustain the well-being of the young boys at the palace; as an option to physical education classes, yogāsana classes with Krishnamacharya would encourage their physical development (Singleton, 2010, p.181). Singleton also noted that this fusion of yogāsana and physical exercises was not only apparent in the Mysore Palace, but also in all the schools in Mysore State (Singleton, 2010, p.181). As the yogaśālā was inside the Palace and not open to the general public, if an outsider wanted to enter the classes, they would need permission; Pattabhi Jois, attending Krishnamacharya’s classes outside the palace, was granted such permission, due to the shared Brahmin root of their families, as stated by

Singleton (2010, p. 184). It is important to highlight the fact that Krishnamacharya was very well rooted in the Vaiṣṇava Brahmin tradition; his father taught him āsana and prāṇāyāma, the Vedas, as well as the “rituals and Vedic lifestyle” (Mohan, 2010, p. 1-2). At various higher education institutions, he studied Sanskrit, Vedānta, Sāṃkhya, mīmāṃsā and yoga (Mohan, 2010, p. 3); he then went to Tibet to meet the yogi who tutored him for more than seven years in haṭhayoga (internal cleansing techniques, āsana and prāṇāyāma) and the Yogasūtra and Sāṃkhya philosophy (Mohan, 2010, p. 4-5). As his student A. G. Mohan proudly stated that Krishnamacharya “was one of the foremost authorities in the field of yoga as a whole and in several other fields of Vedic studies,” but he was “recognized as the greatest authority in haṭhayoga, both in knowledge and practice” (Mohan, 2010, p. 23). He was accredited with linking breath to the āsana, *vinyasa krama*; Mohan noted that he would often include a variety of information (“benefits and contraindications of a āsana, recommendations for vinyāsa krama, classical references and derivations, variations, mental focus, suggestions for bandhas,” etc. [Mohan, 2010, p. 29]) into his teachings.

Krishnamacharya’s haṭhayoga system was an apparent blend of exercises held at the palace, combined with yoga teachings and Krishnamacharya’s own “brahminical tradition” that he carried and passed onto his children and students (Singleton, 2010, p. 178).

A couple of decades during which he served at the Mysore Palace, he “elaborated” this system of “dynamic and repetitive sequences of āsanās” (Singleton, 2013, p. 51); however, he always referred the origin of his system to one very old text

named “Yogakurūṭa”⁴³, passed down to Krishnamacharya by his Tibetan guru, Rammohan Brahmachari, the manuscript example or copy of which cannot be found (Singleton, 2010, p. 185). Irrespective of this, Krishnamacharya’s merging of āsanas and the Patañjala system of philosophy created the basis of many modern schools of yoga (Singleton, 2010, p. 186). Iyer’s comment on Krishnamacharya’s “experimental teaching” and T. R. S. Sharma’s statement that Krishnamacharya always “invented and innovated” the practices without an inviolable order was, according to Singleton (Singleton, 2010, p. 186-187), pragmatistic. Krishnamacharya had a flexible teaching system; according to the student’s capacity, time, location, background etc. he would adapt his methods (Singleton, 2010, p. 188). Later, though, he put together certain āsana and vinyasa sequences in his book *Yogāsanagalu*; his systematization of dynamic sequences with drill counts was for groups of young practitioners (Singleton, 2010, p. 189-190).

There are anecdotes about Krishnamacharya’s suggestions or ways of teaching non-Hindu students which shows his ability to adapt and appropriate the knowledge of yoga as he saw fit; he would suggest A. G. Mohan to not give mantra repetition to Muslim client/students, for example, and he would also tell him that Muslim students must be encouraged to continue their own prayers while taking up haṭhayoga practices for their health. Another example maintains Krishnamacharya would not

⁴³ There is ongoing scholarly research on the sources of Yogakurūṭa; Jason Birch proposed the hypothesis that the Haṭhābhyāsapaddhati, the 18th/19th century text mentioned earlier that includes sequences and moving āsanas, might be connected to Yogakurūṭa (Birch, 2018, p. 142). Pattabhi Jois, founder of Ashtanga Yoga, bases his entire system on Yogakurūṭa; although he never saw the text itself, another student of Krishnamacharya’s (B.K.S. Iyengar) saw it (Smith, 2008, p. 157).

give Vedic chants with proper pronunciation to a female Western client (Mohan, 2010, p. 109-110).

Given the era's popularization of "muscular youth", Singleton referred to several other works that Krishnamacharya's Yogāsana classes were considered by some of the teenagers trained at the Palace as old-fashioned; as yoga was more related to "ascetics, renunciates, Vedic and brahminical teachings", the boys who were more traditionally inclined would prefer to train at the yogaśālā rather than Iyer's gymnasium that was down the hall (2010, p. 191). With all the nationalist struggles going on in the country at that time, a rather cultural direction to Western athletics was what Krishnamacharya would offer to the young generation (Singleton, 2010, p. 191). As a way to "save" yoga's embedded status, yogāsana shows would take place at Mysore Palace – more of a performance than a competition – for the Maharaja and the residents of the palace (Singleton, 2010, p. 192); Krishnamacharya was indeed reviving yoga with the help of all the resources he then had. A. G. Mohan, one of Krishnamacharya's legacy-bearing students, wrote about the āsana demonstrations in the memoirs of his almost twenty-year-long studies with Krishnamacharya; the most difficult and intense āsana demonstrations conducted by Krishnamacharya and performed by his students used to draw attention to yoga's incredible benefits on the human, so people would remain curious and start taking up yoga practice (Mohan, 2010, p. 46-47). Singleton also noted (2010, p. 194-195) that Krishnamacharya was indeed propagating "circus-like" performances of āsanās, as described by students at the palace, for the sake of popularizing yoga as an exercise regime. Krishnamacharya, pioneering a new era in the physical culture history of India and of the world, created a system of revived "indigenous exercise within the context of Westernized curricular

physical education in late colonial India” (Singleton, 2010, p. 198). He would adjust his teaching formulas to students’ needs, and this may have been the reason why some of his prominent students created their own methods of teaching and practice that were different than one another (Singleton, 2010, p. 189); an example is Pattabhi Jois, who is the founder of the Ashtanga Yoga system, the main focus of this research. Jois was very young when he met Krishnamacharya, and he was given a series of strenuous exercises to be practised in an order of counts (Singleton, 2010, p. 189). Jois had taught “Krishnamacharya’s vinyāsa-style yoga” since 1948; but it was not until when a yoga practitioner of Belgian origin met and wrote a book about him in 1971 that Jois became “popular” in the Western scene of yoga (Goldberg, 2016, p. 267-248).

At the Mysore Palace, it is likely that only boys were allowed to take part in physical activities. It recounts among the one hundred students who studied with Krishnamacharya, was the very young Jois. The Maharaja was very fond of young Jois’ demonstrations and very supportive of him; with this support, Pattabhi Jois started teaching yoga at the Sanskrit University at a very young age in 1937 until he retired in 1973. While he was teaching there, a 14-year-old female student named Savitramma attended the yoga demonstrations at the university led by Jois, “accompanied by her father” who was also a scholar of Sanskrit; she later married Jois. She was both Jois’ first student and was “given a teaching certificate by Krishnamacharya” (Shri K Pattabhi Jois Ashtanga Yoga Institute, 2009, para. 6-7-8). Another account gives the information that she, too, studied sacred texts of Krishnamacharya (Garnier, 2019). It is not documented, whether Savitramma Jois ever actively taught yoga classes. A “famous” female student of Krishnamacharya’s,

who is known as the “first lady of yoga” (Caplan, 2015, para. 2) is a Latvian actress with the stage name “Indra Devi”, née Eugenie Peterson, who studied with Krishnamacharya, despite his initial reluctance to accept her as his student. (Martin, 2002, para. 9-10). Indra Devi later became one of the pioneer yoga teachers in the West to spread the teachings in her own constructed method, especially to the celebrities of the USA in Hollywood. She was never involved in Ashtanga Yoga as taught and practised by Pattabhi Jois.

3.2. What is Ashtanga Yoga?

3.2.1. Paramparā tradition.

Systematized by Sri K. Pattabhi Jois, Ashtanga Yoga (or “Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga”, or simply “Ashtanga”), one of the most popular forms of Modern Postural Yoga practices, follows the ancient Indian tradition of *paramparā*. Literally meaning “proceeding from one to another” (Byrne, 2014, p. 111), *paramparā* is passing down the knowledge from teacher to student, protecting the legacy and tradition, as learned and taught for generations in the same lineage.

Today, yoga teacher training do not often require any pre-study – or any former experience in yoga practices, at all – with the teacher who is offering the teacher training; and it is quite easy to obtain a “yoga teacher certification” and start giving classes right away. The certification standards set by Yoga Alliance, a USA-based non-profit association, have been accepted internationally since 1997-98 (Yoga Alliance, 2017, para. 5); however, they do not have any on-site inspection or supervision outside the USA that would regulate whether or not their standards are actually being applied. Any yoga teacher that is trained in a YA certified training

could become a member of the YA; there are annual payments to keep one's YA member status, so that as one stays a member for a certain period of time, they can open a yoga teacher training too – providing they also made the needed payments to create a school profile (Yoga Alliance, 2017). In this impersonal system of yoga teaching and learning, an apparent form of capital dynamic; one can pay to be certified, and pay to be registered in the YA system, and pay to open their own school, which would train people who would pay to be certified, and so on. The teachers who conduct the training usually do not know the trainees' backgrounds or personalities; they do not meet them periodically to evaluate their progress and overall psychological and physical well-being. My personal experience with teacher training over the years has shown that many people with various psychological problems who need counselling end up becoming a yoga teacher. Unable to guide themselves, how are they going to guide others in their practices or yogic pursuits? Like a pyramid scheme, this certification system that has many people paying hundreds of US dollars but in doing so, does not serve the essence of yoga; yet it is established in a way that attracts many aspiring yoga teachers who do not want to take the risk of training in a program that will not grant them a YA certification.

All around the world, even in some cases in India, so many teachers and yoga schools are registered in Yoga Alliance; however, some yoga schools still hold their status of “being traditional” by not following this purely capitalist form of acquiring the title of “yoga teacher”. Ashtanga Yoga is one of those schools, sticking to the rooted tradition of *paramparā* as their way of receiving, processing, and transferring knowledge. Jean Byrne, a scholar-practitioner of Ashtanga Yoga, defined this tradition to be “premodern” (2014, p. 107); due to the fact that Ashtanga Yoga

coincides with the Modern Yoga era, however, also carrying Upaniṣadic and medieval elements. To become a “lineage holder” in Ashtanga Yoga, one needs to go to the Krishna Pattabhi Jois Ashtanga Yoga Institute (KPJAYI) in India every year, to study with the teacher holding the knowledge (now Sharath Jois), and continuously show their dedication and discipline; this constant effort may be granted an “authorization” to teach the methods as passed down on from Pattabhi Jois to Sharath Jois (his grandson). Despite the fact that the lineage holder is now Sharath Jois, R. Saraswati Jois (the daughter of Pattabhi Jois) and Sharmila (sister of Sharath Jois) are also listed as gurus of the KPJAYshala (KPJAYshala, 2017). Being an authorized teacher means that the teacher has the necessary knowledge, practice, and understanding of the tradition in its pure form.

As previously discussed, Patañjali’s *Yogasūtras* defined the classical *Aṣṭāṅgayoga* (eight-limbed yoga); however, Pattabhi Jois’ “modern” Ashtanga Yoga is rather different than this classical definition. De Michelis considered Jois’ Ashtanga Yoga as a “relatively pure example of Modern Postural Yoga” (2004, p. 187). Pure in the sense that it incorporates some unchanged concepts of Indian asceticism (*tapas* and *paramparā*), medieval haṭhayoga practices, and also the modern physical culture rendering.

The emic description of the Ashtanga Yoga method must start with its roots. Pattabhi Jois’ Ashtanga Yoga is based on the yogic knowledge that is given in *Yogakurūṇṭa*, which was taught by Rammohan Brahmachari to Krishnamacharya, and by Krishnamacharya to Jois. Despite the fact that this text’s existence and its way of imparting (completely or partially) has often been questioned (Byrne, 2014, p. 109), this heritage is claimed by the lineage holders, as well as by other lineages that

branched out from Krishnamacharya's teachings (e.g. B. K. S. Iyengar's and T. K. V. Desikachar's). Byrne quoted Pattabhi Jois that Yogakuruṇṭa stated "oh Yogi, don't do *āsana* without *vinyāsa*" (2014, p. 109), which is the rhythmic method that is the basis of Ashtanga Yoga practice.

As mentioned above, this practice is deeply rooted in the "*paramparā*" tradition; it is a method of knowledge transmission, orally from teacher to student, a way of making sure that the student (*śiṣya*) deserves to receive it – meaning, they are respectful, committed, appropriate, eligible – therefore proficient in the knowledge that is passed down from the teacher (*guru*) (Chryssides, 2008, p. 590-591). The student must surrender to the teacher and the teacher must have pure intentions; thus, the transfer of knowledge would be based on mutual trust, obedience and devotion, as the tradition requires; it is a sacred and unwritten pledge between the student and the teacher, woven by their dharmas (Jois, Parampara, 2009, para. 4).

Mysore teaching method creates a unique teacher-student relationship; even though the postures in the series are practised in the same order by every student, each student has their own pace of progress. Adjustments within poses are given to the student when the teacher deems necessary; these can be verbal, visual, minimal, or physical and intense (Byrne, 2014, p. 110). The physical adjustments require mutual trust and receptivity between the teacher and the student; if the student does not trust in the teacher, then the adjustments might feel too uncomfortable to continue the practice every day (Byrne, 2014, p. 110). The physical aspect of *paramparā* starts here; the teacher gives adjustments according to the condition of the student, and the student, in time, learns to receive the adjustments. The adjustments themselves carry within detailed information about the nature of the complex physical postures and

their transitions; no matter how much one memorizes the detailed features of certain poses and lists them on a figurative piece of paper, it cannot be compared to the actual experience of the practice that an actively practising teacher carries and conveys to their students.

Paramparā does not start and end at the physical level. This tradition dates back to the time of the Upaniṣads, as covered in the earlier section when the student learned directly from the teacher and exactly as the teacher taught. The guru-śiṣya relationship is a continuous one, even going beyond that very lifetime, connecting the śiṣya to their guru, and to their guru's guru, and so forth; even leaving the physical body does not affect this perpetual relationship and knowledge transmission (Burley, 2000, p. 68). All traditional haṭhayoga lineages go back to the very first teacher, Śiva (as noted in the first verse of Haṭhayogapradīpikā), who “taught the science of Hatha Yoga”; this imposes a divine responsibility both on the guru and the śiṣya. The student must be devoted to learning from their teacher, whatever the teacher has to convey; these could be oral teachings, written teachings, daily behaviour of the teacher, and daily practices of the teacher. “Indian spirituality and practice have traditionally been passed on within an intense and intimate pedagogical relationship” (Burley, 2000, p. 71); finding such a rooted custom in a modern yoga setting is what makes Ashtanga Yoga unique and pure. This tradition cannot be found anywhere else; even the self-proclaimed “traditional” schools of yoga – which could easily be spotted by a quick Google search – do not follow this custom in its entirety. Other branches that follow Krishnamacharya's teachings also lack this sort of guru-śiṣya relationship; they are decentralized and their training could be taken in different parts of the world (Byrne, 2014.) Despite carrying a lot of modern features, given its history of physical

culture background in the time of its formation, Ashtanga Yoga “holds central the guru-śiṣya relationship with Sharath Jois, and previously his grandfather Pattabhi Jois” (Byrne, 2014, p.112); this requires a spiritual, physical, and mental commitment to visit Mysore at least once a year, for a duration of one to three months (Jois, Studying at KPJAYI, 2009, para. 4). This commitment and regular training at the KPJAYI set the foundation of the “authorization” process; practitioners come to the institute in Mysore and practice with the Jois family daily, at their scheduled hour, and receive the knowledge from the teacher directly. However, they are asked to not have any “expectation of obtaining the authorized or certified status” (Jois, Teachers Information, 2009, para. 1).

Practitioners must “have faith in the method and their teacher to discover the benefits of the Ashtanga Practice” (Byrne, 2014, p. 112). As they show their commitment to the practice and to the teacher, the teacher conveys the knowledge in the manner he learned from his teacher. When the teacher decides that the student has learned the practice completely, and has the capacity and personality to teach it the exact same way, he grants the “authorization” so they, too, can teach others under the blessings of their teacher. The students are expected to study only at the KPJAYI, and not at any other local schools or with other teachers; except, if they wish to learn Sanskrit or chanting (Byrne, 2014, p. 113). It is clearly stated on the website of Sharath Jois (Teachers Information, 2009, para. 2) how the teachers receive the consent to represent this lineage; the institute does not approve any “teacher training programs” conducted outside the KPJAYI facilities, the listed authorized teachers have “shown a considerable degree of proficiency and appreciation of ashtanga yoga

in its traditional form” and have studied at KPJAYI on a regular basis, and are strictly expected to “teach the method as it is taught” at the institute.

Paramparā does not have room for more than one line of learning; the lineage is supported by generations of dedicated and devoted teachers, who would tirelessly teach the next generation of teachers. The tradition requires to “learn one method, from one teacher and not to learn many methods at the same time with many different teachers” (Byrne, 2014, p. 113). If one student learns the method completely and is considered eligible to teach by the director of the Institute (Sharath Jois), they are invited to take a training course in order to be acknowledged as “lineage holders” (Byrne, 2014, p. 115). The already existing guru-śiṣya relationship allows both parties to give and receive the details of the method during this “by invitation only” kind of training (Byrne, 2014, p. 115). “Yoga philosophy, hands-on adjustments, teaching technique, and correct ways of sharing Pattabhi Jois’ teachings” are the main focus points of this training (Byrne, 2014, p. 115). Once authorized (or certified), the teachers are officially a part of the lineage; the authorization signals that they follow the custom without any alteration, that they show loyalty to the method and other lineage holders, that they are a part of the “guru-disciple family”, that they are “organically ready to teach” (Byrne, 2014, p. 115). Difference between authorization and certification lies at the level of advancement of the practice one holds; a certain number of visits to KPJAYI and completing the full Primary Series are pre-requisites for eligibility for authorization, while certification requires completion of Primary, Secondary, and Third Series (Byrne, 2014, p. 115). What is taught at KPJAYI can only be taught elsewhere by the authorized or certified teachers who are listed in the KPJAYI website; there are no “teacher training” in the sense that is popular among

the Western (and even Indian) modern yoga scene, and the only authority of Ashtanga Yoga in the world is the KPJAYI (Byrne, 2014, p. 115). The institute is rooted in Mysore, where the founder Jois' teacher Krishnamacharya also taught most of his life; so even in terms of location, the lineage remains intact. Despite the fact that many practitioners of various other yoga practices criticize Ashtanga Yoga as solely being a physically dynamic practice, it is the only school of yoga where *paramparā* exists in its true sense and is deemed as crucial (Byrne, 2014, p. 117).

Due to the inevitable effect of the tradition, the yoga rooms where Ashtanga Yoga is practised are adorned to represent the setting of the *yogaśālā* at KPJAYI; such settings aim at showing respect and devotion to the lineage and its holders, as well as the “authoritative presence of Pattabhi Jois” and “the correctness of the yoga being taught and practiced”, which is supported with photographs of Pattabhi Jois and Sharath Jois, (Byrne, 2014, p. 117). The studios away from the *yogaśālā* “copy”, in a way, the original and therefore equal to it. Devotion towards the Guru shows the *bhakti* aspect within the tradition; love and devotion for the teacher are “central” and it makes Ashtanga Yoga “personalized, rather than abstract” (Byrne, 2014, p. 118). This central *bhakti* element within Ashtanga Yoga makes it entirely unique, compared to other systems of yoga that derived from Krishnamacharya's teachings, where “decentralized and depersonalized training and accreditation systems” define their authority (Byrne, 2014, p. 118).

3.2.2. Tapas and authority.

Dedication, discipline, and authority prepare Ashtanga yogis to initiate “tapas” within; the application of “heated effort” dating back to the Upaniṣadic era as a reformed “*yajña*” (Vedic sacrifice ritual with the sacred fire) is the very core of

Ashtanga Yoga. The practitioners and teachers of the lineage emphasize greatly this aspect of their practice; although seemingly “physically oriented”, Ashtanga Yoga dates its roots to “canonical textual sources” (Smith, 2008, p. 140). The synchronicity of continuous breathing and movement creates body heat and sweat; which is optimal in the practice, as the produced heat is believed to “boil the blood”, thus helping the body get rid of its pain, detoxing the internal organs, improving blood circulation, and thus removing impurities (Jois, *The Practice*, 2009, para. 4-5).

The Sanskrit word “tapas” comes from the Sanskrit root “*tap*”, meaning “to give out heat” (Smith, 2008, p. 143); in the R̥gveda, the results of tapas are explained to affect both “cosmic and spiritual planes”, and it gives the ascetic “clairvoyance” and powers to “incarnate gods” (Eliade, 2009, p. 106). Haṭhayoga practices, as discussed in earlier sections, aimed at raising the serpent power (kuṇḍalinī) that sleeps at the root of the spine; when the serpent power awakens, it creates an “intense heat” and as it raises up through higher cakras the remainder of the body is “inert and cold”, and the passages the kuṇḍalinī moves through remaining hot (Eliade, 2009, p. 246).

According to the Vedas, tapas is believed to bring “personal transformation and spiritual refinement”; constant effort and discipline of the ascetics create sweat and this sweat symbolically represents the monsoon that brings abundant rain as well as the “sacrificial cauldron” in which milk (representing the semen) is boiled, thus heat and sweat “lead the ascetic to spiritual rebirth” by “burning out impurities” (Smith, 2008, p. 143). This “mystical inner heat” (Eliade, 2009, p. 106) is also part of the tantric techniques, aforementioned as “austerities” in the Bhagavadgītā, and is also part of the Kriyā yoga and the Niyamas in the Yogasūtras (Smith, 2008, p. 143-144); incorporating tapas within Ashtanga Yoga through its strenuous physical practices

that require discipline, devotion, and determination suggests its strong ties with the canonical texts on the yoga knowledge. Pattabhi Jois drew tapas primarily from the Yogasūtras (verse 2.43) noting that “impurities are destroyed, the intellect becomes purified, and the body and sense organs are perfected” (Jois P., 2010 [1999], p. 14-15). His creation of the Ashtanga Yoga practice is dependent on the idea that the body needs to be purified and strengthened through āsanās so that the breath is purified, and the body gets rid of all diseases (Jois P., 2010 [1999], p. 22-23). The equation for creating one drop of blood and Amṛtabindu is quoted by Smith from Miele; as āsanās have purifying effects, in conjunction with intake of essential food, in 32 days, “one drop of new blood” is produced in the body, and “32 of this new blood drop” creates one drop of Amṛtabindu (nectar of immortality) (Smith, 2008, p. 146). The Ashtanga series concludes with certain inverted postures, and according to the above theory, inversions are applied in order to reserve Amṛtabindu; the “agni” (“digestive fire”) that is inverted in the body this helps purify the entire system (Smith, 2008, p. 146-147). Storing the semen or Amṛtabindu at the top of the head (cranium), or having them raised from root to the top (purifying the nāḍīs), is what the yogi aims for; accomplishing this is believed to bring “immortality” and all austerities are performed in order to move one step further towards this goal. However, during this practice (e.g. during Ashtanga Yoga practice), the heat created must not cause the practitioner to soak in sweat, that is not the goal; the goal is to solely create inner heat to create strength and endurance (Smith, 2008, p. 147). Achieving a desired level of internal heat during the practice suggests that the practice has been successful; it is advised in the Haṭhayogapradīpikā to “rub the body with the water born of fatigue to make it firm and light” (2.13) and Pattabhi Jois combined several teachings related to tapas

while creating his system of practice, adding from Vedic, Classical, Medieval and modern forms of yoga.

Within the practice itself, concepts of discipline and authority are highlighted; tapas regarded as “heated discipline” and guru is the source of authority (Smith, 2008, p. 151). KPJAYI attracts practitioners from many nationalities, however they all have basic characteristics to carry the lineage’s name, which are “discipline and authority”; another common aspect is the similar spiritual relationship between the lineage holder teachers and their students, as well as the yoga space with focused practitioners an environment similar to that of KPJAYI’s (Smith, 2008, p. 151). This atmosphere of mutual trust, familiarity (of people and space), and disciplined practice is the basis of tapas within the Ashtanga Yoga environment. Despite the classical purpose of tapas, that is to “destroy all barriers that limit the incomprehension of the true Self and the attainment of samādhi”, and despite Pattabhi Jois’ implementing this classical purpose into the system of Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga as a “means of creating the foundation for the higher practices of yoga”, the purpose often is shifted towards “heated body’s ability to stay fit and flexible and to progressively achieve greater heights in the performance of yoga poses” within the transnational milieu of the practice (Smith, 2008, p. 156).

3.2.3. Ashtanga Yoga practice.

The āsanās in Ashtanga Yoga practice are taught indefinite sequences and in a systematized progression; primary, intermediate, and advanced. Each series entails distinct postures, yet share the same beginning and ending sequences. Each movement between āsanās of each series has a *vinyāsa*, and this vinyāsa as a transition from one pose into another makes Ashtanga Yoga a strictly sequenced practice. Traditional

practice does not allow the sequences to ever be changed, or appropriated; although in the transnational scene some teachers or students sometimes alter the practice, which is not approved by the KPJAYI (Smith, 2008, p. 155).

The link between the breaths and the movements “produce a detoxifying sweat that cleanses the body, nervous system, and sense organs” (Byrne, 2014, p. 109). The emic view suggests that the generated heat within the practice is linked to the concept of *tapas*, as discussed above, which would grant the practitioner purification at physical and spiritual levels, destroying the obstacles on the path of yoga; these obstacles are “negative emotions, thoughts, and habitual patterns” (Byrne, 2014, p. 120).

Sjoman (1999, p. 50) briefly described the vinyāsa system and learning the āsanās as in the traditional sense: Practitioner holds the āsanās on a certain count of breath; the ease “increases with skill and endurance” as the practitioner focuses on inhaling and exhaling in and out of each āsana in the exact order taught by the teacher. Every day, the practitioners are expected to practice the same āsanās along with the breathing patterns; when the teacher decides that the practitioner is able to do the next pose, then another pose of the sequence is added to the practice routine of the person. This system allows the practitioner to memorize the sequence and keep the breathing under strict control in order to last through the two and a half hours of very active practice when the sequence is completely done.

All series (primary, intermediate, and advanced) start with the “opening invocation”⁴⁴ and end with “closing invocation”⁴⁵, and include sūryanamaskāra A &

⁴⁴ Please see Appendix A.

⁴⁵ Please see Appendix B.

B⁴⁶ (sun salutations), fundamental poses⁴⁷, and finishing sequence⁴⁸. The sequences⁴⁹ that are practised right between the standing sequence and finishing sequence determine the level of series.

“The Primary Series (Yoga Chikitsa) detoxifies and aligns the body. The Intermediate Series (Nadi Shodhana) purifies the nervous system by opening and clearing the energy channels. The Advanced Series A, B, C and D (Sthira Bhaga) integrate the strength and grace of the practice, requiring higher levels of flexibility and humility” (KPJAYI, 2017, para. 4).

“Each level is to be fully developed before proceeding to the next, and the sequential order of asanas is to be meticulously followed. Each posture is a preparation for the next, developing the strength and balance required to move further” (KPJAYI, 2017, para. 5).

David Swenson, one of the most well-known Ashtanga Yoga teachers from the United States and one of the earliest Western students of Jois, wrote in his book “The Practice Manual” the most important elements of the Ashtanga Yoga practice: “breath, locks, flow, and gaze” (1999, p. 8-12). Being a strenuous practice, these elements are the guidelines for practitioners in order to advance gradually through the dynamic sequences of every series; the breath must find a smooth rhythm of

⁴⁶ Please see Appendix C.

⁴⁷ Please see Appendix D.

⁴⁸ Please see Appendix E.

⁴⁹ Please see Appendix F & G for Primary and Intermediate Series.

inhalation and exhalation in the form of Ujjayi⁵⁰, locks⁵¹ must be consciously performed to control the current of prāṇā, flowing⁵² in and out of āsanās must be done while applying the breath and locks, as well as directing the gaze⁵³ towards certain points (Swenson, 1999, p. 8-12). Majority of Ashtanga Yoga practitioners practice the Primary Series, *yogacikitsā* (yoga therapy); as the name suggests, it is a therapeutic practice that is aimed at bringing the body to optimum health, if practised as per the method's requirement (Byrne, 2014, p. 109).

The traditional learning method of Ashtanga Yoga as performed in the historic yogaśālā is called “Mysore style”; it is a self-practice placed in a group setting, where each student practices their own series depending on their progress and in their own breathing space, and the teacher(s) assist and adjust them accordingly. The students are expected to have a respectful manner and start their practice on the first day at KPJAYI with Sūryanamaskāra A, followed by Padmāsana and deep breathing, and a few minutes of rest to finish, upon the second day, these same practices are

⁵⁰This form of breathing, when done properly, creates a soft sound in the back of the throat, and allows practitioner to lengthen their inhalations and exhalations. Ujjayi means “victorious” and it “becomes a mantra to set the mind in focus” throughout the practice (Swenson, 1999, p. 8).

⁵¹Bandhas (jālandharabandha chin lock; mūlabandha, root lock; and uḍḍīyānabandha, abdominal lock) are activated purposefully in the Ashtanga Yoga practice; they serve as regulatory points in directing and controlling the prāṇā within the nāḍīs (Swenson, 1999, p. 9-10).

⁵²Vinyāsa is the most essential and distinctive part of Ashtanga Yoga system of Jois; it means linking each body movement to an inhalation or exhalation, either in a pose or between each āsana (Swenson, 1999, p. 11).

⁵³ Dr̥ṣṭi means “gaze”; this gaze is not only an action of the eyes, but also a mental direction “towards certain points in the poses” (Räsänen, 2017, p. 27).

performed, and Sūryanamaskāra B is added. When the practitioner learns Sūryanamaskāra A & B, the teacher starts to add the āsanās of the series one by one. As the practitioner learns each āsana well enough, the next āsana is taught. It can be up to 3 months for one practitioner to learn the full primary series, according to their condition – age, skill, performance, etc. This is the traditional learning method of the Ashtanga Yoga practice; it is up to the practitioner to be present in the yoga room every day, to memorize the sequences by themselves, to be independent of the teacher or any written guidance, and to gain certainty of themselves about their daily spiritual practice (sādhana). This process of learning and practising Ashtanga Yoga might be perceived as a slow and painful activity for some; however, this method includes benefits with regards to learning (Jois S., *Traditional and Guided Classes*, 2009, para. 2-3).

A typical Ashtanga, at the KPJAYI starts on Sunday with led Primary series class, followed by a led Intermediate series class, where primary series practitioners are allowed to gather there without participating in the practice but only watching the more advanced practitioners moving all in rhythm in the second series, in order to learn visually (Byrne, 2014, p. 120). Monday through Thursday, Mysore classes continue; and Friday is for another led Primary series practice. Practitioners are to rest on Saturdays and moon days (when it's a full moon or new moon), in order to rest in the former, and observe the "heightened energy" in the latter, as it "makes spiritual practice inauspicious" (Byrne, 2014, p. 110). In the led classes, the teacher leads the group of students through a certain series in a rhythm and everybody follows it; the counting of vinyāsa in a group setting helps the students learn the breathing patterns and memorize the complex vinyāsas of the system. If a student has not yet completed

the full series, then they stop at the final āsana of their own practice and move on to the finishing sequence.

The classes; Mysore or Led, commonly start very early in the morning. Students are advised to go to bed early in the evenings, stop eating after 6 PM, and wake up early in the morning to allow the body to prepare for the upcoming practice. Students can have some warm herbal tea with some honey (depending on the teacher's method) or some coffee⁵⁴; the idea is to empty the bowels before practice and wake up completely.

Several Mysore classes are held daily between certain hours, but the students are allowed to enter the class (until a certain hour) or at a time that is more suitable for them. In the Mysore setting, when the room is full, the participants are expected to wait silently right outside the door and enter when any one practitioner in the room completes their practice and moves to the separate room to practice the finishing sequence. As the practice continues, whoever enters the room to set their mat and prepare to begin, need to remain silent. “The heat, focus, and breathing” designates the essence of the practice room (Smith, 2008, p. 152); although everybody does their own practice at their own pace, there is a togetherness, since each practitioner follows the same rules in almost the same manner. The teachers, on the first few days, might allow the newcomers to practice the same series as they do back home; however, they have the authority to stop the practitioner at a certain point and move on to the finishing sequence. It is entirely the teacher's decision whether the student is ready and prepared to continue practising the next poses; according to Pattabhi Jois,

⁵⁴ Pattabhi Jois is famously known to have said “no coffee, no prana”. There are even gift items in the yogaśālā's online shop with this quote printed on coffee mugs (Jois Yoga Products, 2019).

complaints or frustration by the student due to the teacher's commands show the lack of yogic dedication and it is the teacher's duty to help the student "break down their own ego invested pattern" (Smith, 2008, p. 153).

3.2.4. A brief note on the practice of inversions.

It has been discussed in the previous sections that inversions have been performed as part of ascetic practices in order to retain the (life-force) amṛtabindu. This life-force retention is indeed supported by other haṭhayogic practices (such as bandhas) and Pattabhi Jois implemented the headstand (*Śirśāsana*) into the series he systematized. Amṛtabindu and other haṭhayogic concepts that are related to the idea of "immortality" through control of semen or sexual bodily functions are not vocally present in modern yoga practices. Instead, the practice of inversions can have distinct physical and health-related rewards of well-being.

Pattabhi Jois described in his book (2010 [1999], p. 118-123) the benefits of and precautions for (head-stands) *Śirśāsana*: head-stands requires the kind of strength that the arms support the entire body weight in an upside-down position. The incorrect practice would fill the subtle *nāḍīs* in the brain region with an unnecessary amount of blood, which would cause serious mental and physical health problems. The correct practice of *Śirśāsana* would "nourish the body, sense organs, mind, and intellect, and thereby promote their evolution" (Jois, P. 2010 [1999], p. 118). The pose must be practised with *mūlabandha* (root lock), the body must be straight and inhalation must continue. When practised accurately, *Śirśāsana* sustains the subtle *nāḍīs* in the brain region and this strengthens the mental health, as well as the health state of the sense organs. As Ashtanga Practice helps produce clean blood in the body and 32 drops of new blood produce one drop of Amṛtabindu; in the *Śirśāsana* practice, Amṛtabindu

reaches the top of the head (crown cakra, *Sahasrāracakra*) therefore bringing “spiritual illumination” (Jois, P. 2010 [1999], p. 119). Jois recommended preserving the Amṛtabindu in order to “manifest fresh youthfulness”; wasting bindu is believed to bring death, keeping it brings vitality (Jois, P. 2010 [1999], p. 119). He opposed the practice of headstand before any other āsana; referring to Āyurvedic texts, he highlighted, bodily harm may result from a faulty practice (Jois, P. 2010 [1999], p. 121). Recommending that one must practice Sūryanamaskāra before any other āsanās, in order to purify the blood, so that the blood that is going to travel across the nāḍīs and not disturb the bodily functions (Jois, P. 2010 [1999], p. 123).

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The questions outlined for the interviews were drafted to ascertain the properties of continuing liminality and feeling of *communitas*, as well as participants' former background as yoga practitioners.

All participants had prior yoga practice before they started Ashtanga Yoga. Their decision to continue with Ashtanga Yoga, instead of their other prior yoga practices, was shaped by the physical benefits they observed. The concept of self-practice within the Mysore class setting was one of the reasons for them to continue Ashtanga Yoga practice. They all experienced the discipline, goal orientation, and rhythm of the practice. The most important aspect of their practice varied; some put more importance on their physical progress throughout each practice, some on the idea of community, some on the awareness the practice created within themselves. The practice, they all said, triggered the compassion they had inside; for themselves, and for others. They were able to see themselves better, in full transparency; and highlighted it as the best thing they did for themselves. Mysore practices brought "feeling of oneness and unity, encouragement, acceptance of the visible patterns in life" and "the recovery gripe" into their lives. Recovery from their past selves, although painful, was considered a prominent transformation, a natural accompaniment of their practice. "As the practice moves beyond physical performance, transformation follows," one of the Ashtangis emphasized.

Existentially, the practice provoked inexplicable feelings about the beginning and ending of life (and everything related to life). Some questioned what kind of person they would have been if it had not been for their Ashtanga Yoga practice; the transformation in each and every one of them, in their words, has been astounding.

Their social relationships with others became much clearer and more open. They became more compassionate and understanding.

Spiritually and religiously, some of them did not experience any major changes; however, some of them experienced a profound shift towards “believing” in something greater than themselves – not necessarily a “god”. One of the teachers, after reading the classical scriptures on yoga (like the Yogasūtras and the Bhagavadgītā), realized that in their own belief system (Islam) the teachings already existed. Because of this, one of the interviewees admitted their movement towards Sufism and the Islamic mysticism; and their yoga practice was directed naturally towards the idea of “doing every deed in the name of the Almighty one”. In others, there is “spiritual satisfaction” of being able to connect with their own self and “with the spirit world as a result of the practice”. One of the teachers already had extraordinary experiences with the “spirit world”, and her yoga practice made this connection stronger. Believing in the natural current of life, without having the urge to change things or to complain about them, is a transformation every participant experienced. The relationship between themselves and the entire universe with all living beings became stronger; they felt a greater sense of belonging to their environment, and a connection with every single being.

Eating and sleeping habits have changed for all of them; in order to wake up very early in the mornings, habits of night-life entertainments needed to be dropped. They all agree that this change was not imposed on them, but rather happened naturally as part of the process and was predicated on their own choices. They shifted to vegetarian food choices, they stopped consuming alcohol and going out late at night; they even had to stop eating after 6 PM. The change in such vital habits

resulted in a natural change of intuitive association and contact, they all agreed but was a by-product of the disciplined life shaped around their yoga practice.

The teachers taught them “commitment, discipline, surrender (to the current of practice), and freedom that comes with surrender”; motivating the students to undertake the same practices and strengthen the mutual trust that is required by paramparā. When the teachers shared everything they know with their students, it made the students feel as if they were “wearing the energy of their teacher like an outfit”. The adjustments, physical or spiritual, were “wordless transmissions”; simplicity, was the word they used to define this.

Sangha (spiritual family) is “the safe zone”; waking up every day early in the morning, the participants said, and being in that class setting practising all together allowed them to be vulnerable, to be “transparent”, “to see and be seen”. Being a member of the Ashtanga Yoga community means that even if they go to a random city in the world, where they know absolutely nobody, after rolling out the mat and starting their own self-practice, the “foreignness” disappears. They do not need to speak with words; they “share the same breath” and realize that they are not alone and everybody goes through the same struggles. Whatever they share in the practice room, whoever is present on the mat right next to them, creates the bond among fellow practitioners; the breathing, the energy, the attitude of the individual on the next mat is reflected on to one another. The idea of “being oneness” in yoga is felt mostly within the community; practice creates an identical language that only Ashtangis speak, was highlighted by one of the interviewees.

Participants openly admit that the Opening Prayer “definitely” leaves an effect on them. While everybody practices at their own rhythm and pace, they pause their

practice and stand up to chant the Opening Prayer all together, then they resume at the moment they stop. It symbolizes the “one language” that the Ashtangis speak. One interviewee said that their bodies would feel more comfortable in the postures only after the Opening Prayer. For them, chanting Opening Prayer means to be in the presence of their teachers (Pattabhi Jois, Sharath Jois, even Krishnamacharya), accompanied by their photos that decorate their practice room. One of the Ashtanga Yoga teachers – not interviewed due to his busy schedule – told me in a personal conversation that he carries the photos of the gurus everywhere he goes; so that during his practice or classes he gives they would be present. Some of the interviewees mentioned this “guru presence” as well; having their photo in the class setting provides them with devotion and discipline, as well as creating the authority of the lineage in that location.

“Ashtanga Yoga is a metaphor of life”, one of the participants quoted from another practitioner; without losing their own individual differences, they learn to become one with each other. Some people only visit Ashtanga Yoga camps and after that experience, they start their Ashtanga Yoga practices; some teachers organize events or gatherings in order to create the community feeling. One of the instructors answered that “Led sessions, chanting the Opening mantra, and collective self-practice all create a sense of belonging, a sense of community”; “people enjoy being part of a group” was an additional comment by the same instructor.

The paramparā tradition is the original foundation for the Ashtanga Yoga practice; some of the participants found this tradition to be disturbing at the very beginning, as obeying one person completely and abiding by the rules of the community created negative feelings. They questioned the “guru” concept, finding it

to be obsolete. But then, once they understood their teacher's commitment and dedication to the practice and the lineage; how they make the time to live as a householder, and as a teacher and as an employee at a firm, while also taking care of family members... All these difficult life tasks can be handled with the discipline of Ashtanga Yoga, they said. Some less experienced participants admitted that they may not understand what the practice and the tradition mean entirely yet, but they look up to their teachers for guidance and through them, they will learn. They do not doubt the teacher's intentions; they have full trust and full surrender, starting from the physical level moving into the spiritual.

Their social identities are not eradicated; their yoga practice merges into daily life. Some interviewees find this as a natural effect of the practice; some as an obligation. One instructor said that in order to observe the ethical rules if they do not come naturally, they must be enforced. These ethical rules, they added, help the practitioners understand that the social identities are not as important as "being a good person".

5. CONCLUSION

Ashtanga Yoga as a school of Modern Postural Yoga has roots that are deeply and strongly established in the classical and medieval yogic practices, as well as in the modern developments.

Practitioners of some other MPY schools might try to hold on to the claim that “Ashtanga Yoga practice is merely physical”. This research shows that well-trained practitioners gain more from their dedication to practice than what meets the eye. The practice results in a variety of transformations in many aspects of the practitioners’ lives; some practitioners choose to make transformations based on more spiritual goals, whilst other practitioners prefer to allow the practice to gradually transform their daily lives.

Roots of Ashtanga Yoga are derived from the Upaniṣadic concept of guru-śiṣya relationship, as well as the early ascetic concept of tapas (creating inner heat by performing austerities). Each breath of the Ashtangi is important in order to bring the body to a level of purification; the breath creates tapas (heat), and tapas brings transformation, as it did back in the days of the early ascetics. Patañjali is also a central figure in the Ashtanga Yoga practice; the compiler of the Yogasūtras and the ancient Gurus, are honoured and remembered – maybe even summoned – at the beginning of every Ashtanga Yoga practice, by means of chanting the Opening Prayer.

This Opening Prayer marks the beginning of Ashtanga Yoga as a “secular healing ritual”. I intended to identify the structure of the practice and its effects on the practitioners. Origins of this practice are formed from many different sources – religious or non-religious – and formed in the essence of these teachings through the

tradition of paramparā. Their healing is gradual, achieved with the support of other comrades and guidance of their teachers.

The liminality and *communitas* that is experienced within the practice remain with the practitioners outside the class setting. Ashtanga Yoga practice has an invariant set of sequences, including strenuous physical postures that require constant practice. The practitioners of Ashtanga Yoga go through this invariant set of sequences every day. They share a common language, they share a common practice, they share similar experiences, they get similar results. This ritual-like practice requires dedication, devotion, and discipline. Practising the same postures, in the same manner, in the same sequence, every single day at the same hour is a mental challenge, as well as a physical one. This challenge is overcome by every Ashtangi as soon as they step on their practice mat (or rug) and chant the Opening Prayer mentally or out loud. The Opening Prayer is only chanted by the Ashtangis, which points to the common language they share.

As the Ashtangi's practice evolves, they get in touch with the ancestral knowledge that is supported by the Opening Prayer. The photos of their Gurus adorn their practice room, dedicated only to their daily "healing ritual". Sharing a common practice, an ancestral figure, and a mantra that connects the aforementioned elements to all the Gurus that have come before them. This collaboration helps Ashtangis become "families" and continue to remain in the liminality, without having the desire to go back to the pre-liminal phase or looking forward to the post-liminal phase.

They all seem to subconsciously follow the one rule that their Guruji Sri K. Pattabhi Jois advised: "Practice and all is coming."

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Appendix A: “Opening Prayer”

वन्दे गुरुणां चरणारविन्दे सन्दर्शित स्वात्म सुखावबोधे ।
 निःश्रेयसे जाङ्गलिकायमाने संसार हालाहल मोहशान्त्यै ॥
 आबाहु पुरुषाकारं शंखचक्रासि धारिणम् ।
 सहस्र शिरसं श्वेतं प्रणमामि पतञ्जलिम् ॥

OM

vande gurūṇāṁ caraṇāravinde saṁdarśita svātma sukhāvabodhe |

niḥśreyase jāṅgalikāyamāne saṁsāra hālāhala mohaśāntyai ||

ābāhu puruṣākāraṁ śaṅkhacakrāsi dhāriṇam |

sahasra śīrasaṁ śvetam praṇamāmi patañjalim ||

OM

I bow to the lotus feet of the Gurus

The awakening happiness of one’s own Self revealed,

Beyond better, acting like the Jungle physician,

Pacifying delusion, the poison of Samsara.

Taking the form of a man to the shoulders,

Holding a conch, a discus, and a sword,

One thousand heads white,

To Patanjali, I salute.

Note: Shri K. Pattabhi Jois Ashtanga Yoga Institute. (2009). *Opening Prayer*.

Retrieved from The Practice: <https://sharathjois.com/the-practice/opening-prayer/>

Appendix B: “Closing Prayer”

स्वस्तिप्रजाभ्यः परिपालयन्तां न्यायेन मार्गेण महीं महीशाः ।
गोब्राह्मणेभ्यः शुभमस्तु नित्यं लोकाः समस्ताः सुखिनो भवन्तु ॥

svasthiprajābhyah paripālayantām nyāyena mārgēṇ mahīm mahīśāḥ |

gobrāhmaṇebhyah śubhamastu nityaṁ lokāḥ samastāḥ sukhinobhavanthu ||

May all be well with mankind.

May the leaders of the earth protect in every way by keeping to the right path.

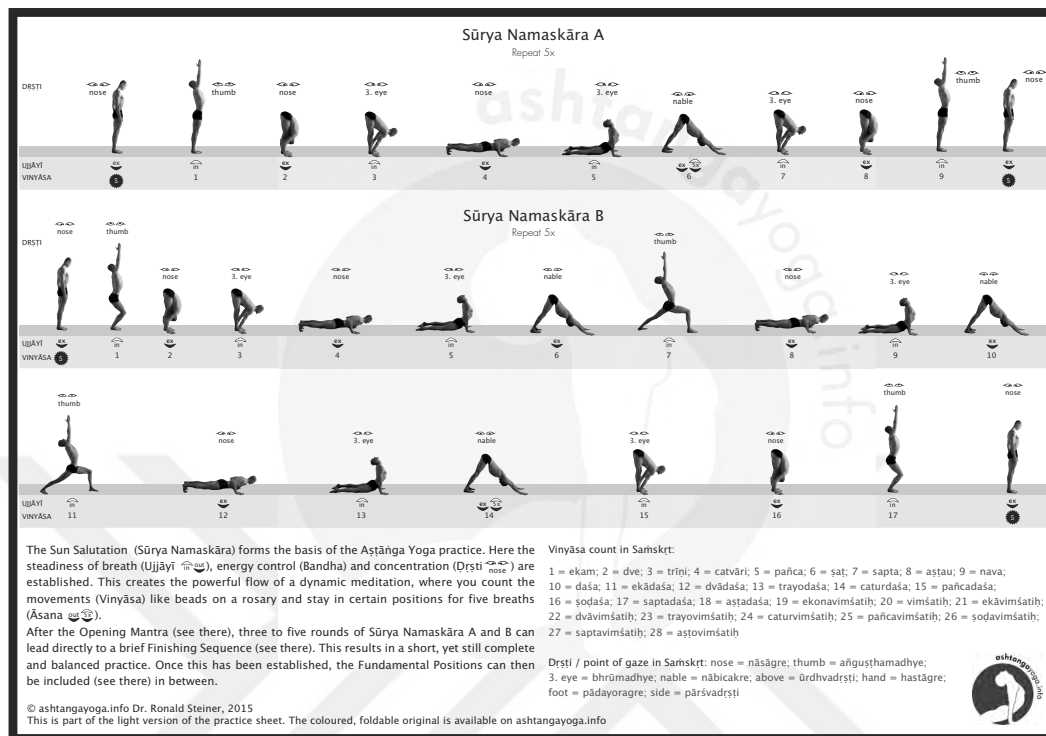
May there be goodness for those who know the earth to be sacred.

May all the worlds be happy.

Note: Shri K. Pattabhi Jois Ashtanga Yoga Institute. (2009). *Closing Prayer*.

Retrieved from The Practice: <https://sharathjois.com/the-practice/closing-prayer/>

Appendix C: Sūryanamaskāra A & B



Note: Ashtanga Yoga International. (2019). *Surya Namaskara A & B*. Retrieved from Cheat Sheets: <https://www.ashtangayoga.info/practice/downloads/cheat-sheets-pdf/>

Appendix D: Fundamental Poses

Fundamental Positions

The Fundamental Positions (Āsana) bring the energetic and physical body in balance (alignment). The dynamics of the Sun Salutations (see there) transform into new sequences of movements (Vinyāsa). Just as before each sequence begins and ends in a standing position. Counting every movement from there, you will arrive in the pictured positions with the respective numbers shown below (left side, not pictured, shown in parentheses). However once the rhythm is familiar, the sequences partially merge with each other. Once in a while you will still pass through Samasthitiḥ (Samasthitiḥ). Nevertheless the numbers for the individual movements are not changed.

Whenever you pass through the standing position (●), it is an opportunity, especially for beginners, to obtain the warmth and dynamics of the practice through a connecting sequence of movements (Basic-Vinyāsa).

You may add these six Fundamental Positions after Sūrya Namaskāra A and B (see there) once you are well familiarized with their practice.

Basic-Vinyāsa Sequence (can be integrated after every standing position)

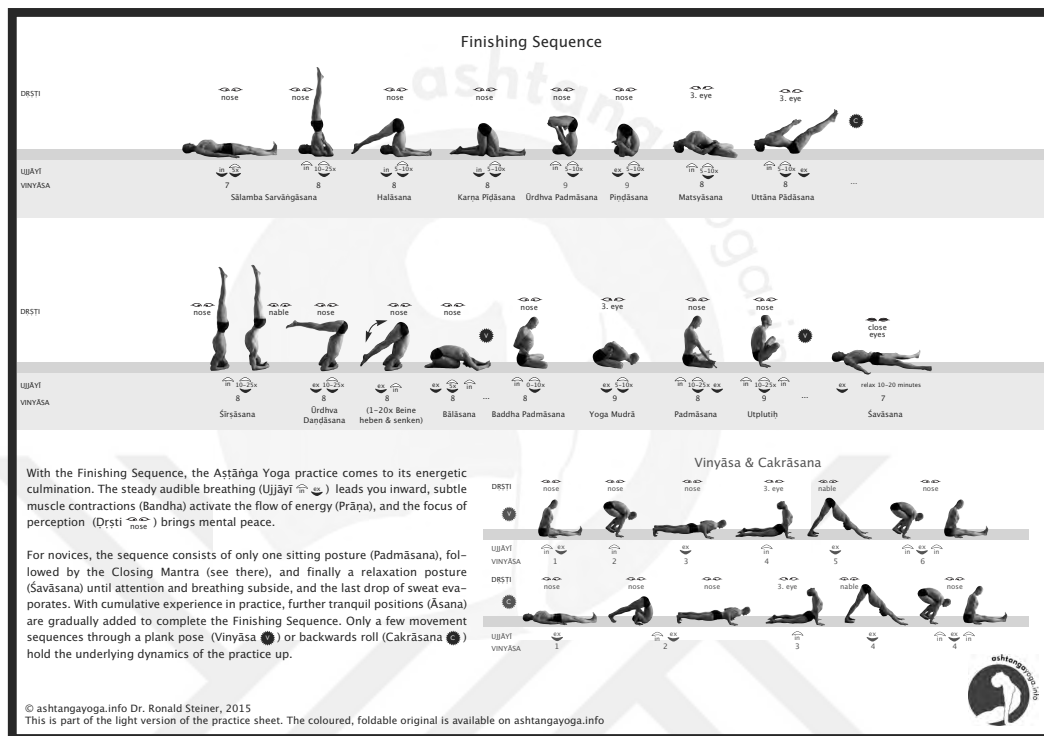
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This is part of the light version of the practice sheet. The coloured, foldable original is available on ashtangayoga.info

Note: Ashtanga Yoga International. (2019). Fundamental Positions in English.

Retrieved from Cheat Sheets:

<https://www.ashtangayoga.info/practice/downloads/cheat-sheets-pdf/>

Appendix E: Finishing Sequence



Note: Ashtanga Yoga International. (2019). *Finishing Sequence*. Retrieved from

Cheat Sheets: <https://www.ashtangayoga.info/practice/downloads/cheat-sheets-pdf/>

Appendix F: Primary Series

Yoga Cikitsā – 1st Series (Sheet 1)

Yoga Cikitsā – 1st Series (Sheet 2)

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Ashtānga Yoga is a journey from the coarse to the subtle. The practice of the 1st Series is at the beginning of this journey. Therefore strength, vitality and health of the physical body are at the center of attention. This gives her the name Yoga Therapy (Yoga Cikitsā).

As with Fundamental Positions (see there) each movement sequence (Vinyāsa) begins and ends in standing and is counted starting from there. However once rhythm is familiar, the movement sequences merge partially with each other. Every once in a while you will still pass through Samasthithi (●). But for most movement sequences the first six and last three movements are omitted. Then the practice leads you via plank pose (Vinyāsa ●) or a backward roll (Cakrāsana ●) simply through the downward dog position (Adho Mukha Śvānāsana). All positions (Āsana) are always practiced on both sides, even though only the first is pictured. A Vinyāsa sequence is also performed in between switching sides of each seated position.

After you have established your practice in the Fundamental Positions (see there), the 1st Series will be your field for learning on six days a week (Sunday to Friday, except on moon days). Following the outlined steps, you can build up your practice, together with an experienced teacher.

Vinyāsa & Cakrāsana

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Note: Ashtanga Yoga International. (2019). *Primary Series*. Retrieved from Cheat

Sheets: <https://www.ashtangayoga.info/practice/downloads/cheat-sheets-pdf/>

Appendix G: Intermediate Series

Nāḍi Śodhana – 2nd Series (Sheet 1)

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Nāḍi Śodhana – 2nd Series (Sheet 2)

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Note: Ashtanga Yoga International. (2019). Intermediate Series. Retrieved from

Cheat Sheets: <https://www.ashtangayoga.info/practice/downloads/cheat-sheets-pdf/>

Appendix H: Interview Questions for Ashtanga Yoga Instructors

1. When did you start practising Ashtanga Yoga? (Any other discipline backgrounds?) Why did you start? (Inspiration? Motive?) And what made you continue?
2. What is the most important aspect of your practice? What makes it valuable – personally?
3. Do you think yoga has transformed you over the years? In what ways? Has it changed any of your pre-existing beliefs? (Social, existential, spiritual, religious, political, cultural, etc.)
4. Did you have to leave certain habits that you used to have or environments that you used to be comfortable with? If so, did it happen naturally, as an effect of the practice? (Living conditions, eating habits, social life, etc.)
5. Which ethical goals or rules are most important for you to teach students? Exactly what do you do and say to teach those rules to your students?
6. What exactly do you do and say to create a feeling of group unity (oneness) among your students (e.g., chanting om together...)? (During the class or outside the class.)
7. Have you noticed any permanent changes in any of your students' lives or attitudes? Do you ever step in and give specific advice in order to help them remember the ethical rules?
8. Do you know about the background (educational, cultural, economic, religious, etc.) of your students? Do you think, within the group setting created after practising altogether, these backgrounds matter among them? Is it

possible to say the social bond leaves any permanent change in their reception of one another?

9. How about the gender of the students? Yoga being a historically male-dominated practice, what is the ratio of female and male students you have had over the years? Is this ratio different in Istanbul than in the practices you attend in the shala?
10. Practising by yourself, then immediately teaching... How do you transition from a household owner into a yoga practitioner, and then into a teacher? Do you think the borders between these identities are strong? Or are they all intertwined?
11. What does paramparā mean to you? What do you think is the most important aspect of it? Have you experienced any challenges in here while applying this tradition? How do students perceive the authority it gives to the teachers? What do you think strengthens the mutual trust paramparā requires between the student and the teacher?
12. Can you describe the most important compliments any students have given you?

Appendix I: Interview Questions for Ashtanga Yoga Students

1. When did you start practising Ashtanga Yoga? (Any other discipline backgrounds?) Why did you start? (Inspiration? Motive?) And what made you continue?
2. What is the most important aspect of your practice? What makes it valuable – personally?
3. Did you have to leave certain habits that you used to have or environments that you used to be comfortable with? If so, did it happen naturally, as an effect of the practice? (Living conditions, eating habits, social life, etc.)
4. Do you think yoga has transformed you over the years? In what ways? Has it changed any of your pre-existing beliefs? (Social, existential, spiritual, religious, political, cultural, etc.)
5. What are the two or three most valuable lessons you learned from yoga teachers? Could you describe the most influential ways they convey them?
6. What about spirituality? Do you think Ashtanga Yoga has had any spiritual effects on you? Any changes it may have sparked?
7. Sangha and identity – What does being an “Ashtanga practitioner” mean to you? Do you have any personal or social relationship with other people in Ashtanga Yoga classes? How does the bond happen? How does it evolve, if it ever does?
8. Could you describe any moments of group unity (oneness with other students) you felt during yoga classes?
9. What did instructors do and say to create such moments of group unity (e.g., chanting om)?

10. Should yoga instructors put more emphasis on creating group unity or facilitating individual differences?
11. What does paramparā mean to you? How does it make you feel? Have you had any challenges following this tradition in your practice? What do you think strengthens the mutual trust paramparā requires between you and your teacher?
12. There are people from different backgrounds in the classes – social, economic, cultural, etc. – do you think these create a separation within your Ashtanga community? Do you ever feel equal, without any status?
13. Early morning practices before going to work... How do you transition from a household owner into a yoga practitioner, and then into an employee/boss? Do you think the borders between these identities are strong? Or are they all intertwined?
14. Can you describe the most important compliments you have received from a) other students, b) teachers?