

THE HISTORY OF YOGA

Everyone by now has heard of *yoga*, and, indeed, with millions of Americans in some form or fashion practicing *āsana*, the physical aspect of *yoga*, the teaching and practice of *yoga*, at least in the aspect of techniques of body poses and stretches, are now thoroughly mainstream activities on the Western cultural landscape. *Yoga* has popularly been translated as “union with the divine”¹ and may refer to a number of different spiritual systems. The *Bhagavad Gītā*, for example, discusses a number of practices that have been termed *yoga* in popular literature: *karma-yoga* (*buddhi-yoga*), the path of action; *jñāna-yoga* (*sāṅkhya-yoga*), the path of knowledge; *bhakti-yoga*, the path of devotion; and *dhyāna-yoga*, the path of silent meditation (which is the subject of Patañjali’s text),² and terms such as *tantra-yoga*, *siddha-yoga*, *nāda-yoga*, and so forth are now common in alternative spiritualities in the West. Typically, however, when the word *yoga* is used by itself without any qualification, it refers to the path of meditation, particularly as outlined in the *Yoga Sūtras*—the Aphorisms on *Yoga*—and the term *yogī*, a practitioner of this type of meditational *yoga*.

Patañjali was the compiler of the *Yoga Sūtras*, one of the ancient treatises on Indic philosophy that eventually came to be regarded as one of the six classical schools of Indian philosophy. He presented a teaching that focuses on realization of the *puruṣa*—the term favored by the *Yoga* school³ to refer to the innermost conscious self, loosely equivalent to the soul in Western Greco-Abrahamic traditions. The practice of *yoga* emerged from post-Vedic India as perhaps its most important development and has exerted immense influence over the philosophical discussions and religious practices of what has come to

be known as mainstream Hinduism, both in its dominant forms in India and in its most common exported and repackaged forms visible in the West. Accordingly, Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* is one of the most important classical texts in Hinduism and thus a classic of Eastern, and therefore world, thought. Along with the *Bhagavad Gītā*, it is the text that has received the most attention and interest outside of India. I might add here that Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* is not an overtly sectarian text in the sense of prioritizing a specific deity or promoting a particular type of worship as is the case with many Hindu scriptures, including the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Therefore, as a template, it can be and has been appropriated and reconfigured by followers of different schools and traditions throughout Indian religious history⁴ and certainly continues to lend itself to such appropriations, most recently in nonreligious contexts of the West.

In its exported manifestation, *yoga* has tended to focus on the physical aspect of the system of *yoga*, the *āsanas*, or stretching poses and postures, which most Western adherents of *yoga* practice in order to stay trim, supple, and healthy. Patañjali himself, however, pays minimal attention to the *āsanas*, which are the third stage of the eight stages, or limbs, of *yoga*, and focuses primarily on meditation and various stages of concentration of the mind.

There are references to awareness of *yogīs* on the Western landscape as early as Greek classical sources, Alexander being perhaps the most notorious early Westener to be fascinated with Indian ascetics. Its initial introduction to the West in modern times was by Vivekānanda at the end of the nineteenth century. More recently, generic *yoga*—particularly as *āsanas*, postures, but also as a meditative technique leading to *samādhi*, enlightenment—was popularized in the West by a number of influential Hindu teachers of *yoga* in the 1960s, most of whom came from two lineages: Sivananda (1887–1963) and Krishnamāchārya (1888–1989). Sivananda was a renunciant and his ashram tradition was transplanted by his disciples Vishnudevananda (1927–1993), Satchidananda (1914–2002), and Chinmayananda (1916–1993), each of whom founded his own independent mission in the West (the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres, the Integral Yoga Institute, and the Chinmaya Mission, respectively). Krishnamāchārya's three principal disciples took his emphasis on the practice of *āsana* in

their own direction: K. Pattabhi Jois (1915–) continued to promote his version of *astāṅga-vinyāsa-yoga*; Krishnamāchārya's son, T.K.V. Desikachar (1938–), developed *viniyoga*; and—perhaps most influential of all—Krishnamāchārya's brother-in-law, B.K.S. Iyengar (1918–) established the Iyengar method. Almost all *yoga* teachers trace their lineage to such masters, and the more serious among such teachers or practitioners of *yoga* will have a valued copy of the *Yoga Sūtras*.

YOGA PRIOR TO PATAÑJALI

The Vedic Period

In terms of *Yoga*'s earliest origins, the Vedic period is the earliest era in South Asia for which we have written records, and it provides the matrix from which (or, more typically, against which) later religious, philosophical, and spiritual expressions such as *Yoga* evolved in India, at least in the north of the subcontinent. We do not wish to invest any further energy into the ongoing debate over whether the Vedic-speaking peoples (Indo-Aryans⁵) were originally indigenous to the Indian subcontinent or Indo-European intruders from an external point of origin (for which, see Bryant 2001 and 2005), except to note the corollaries of these two positions on the protohistory of *Yoga*. Those accepting an external point of origin for the Vedic-speaking peoples tend to hold that *Yoga*, both as practice and philosophy, was originally pre-Vedic (and therefore non-Vedic) and indigenous to the subcontinent. From this perspective, since there is no explicit reference to *yogic* practices and beliefs in the earliest Vedic texts, their emergence in subsequent Vedic literature such as the Upaniṣads⁶ points to a later period when the Vedic people had long settled and absorbed themselves into the preexisting populations of the Indian subcontinent. In this process, they established their own Vedic rituals as the mainstream “high” religious activity of the day, and also eventually absorbed many non-Vedic religious elements from the indigenous peoples, such as *Yoga* philosophy and practice.

Those challenging the thesis of external origins for the original Vedic-speaking peoples tend to prefer to see both Vedic ritualism and

yogic practices as parallel internal developments evolving within Vedic- (Indo-Aryan-) speaking communities indigenous to the subcontinent. It can certainly be argued that the germs of *yogic* thought can be found in embryonic form in the (middle period) Vedic literatures themselves, the *Āraṇyakas* and *Brāhmaṇa* texts. Alternatively, there is little that can discount the possibility that Yoga emerged outside Vedic orthodoxy but nonetheless within Indo-Aryan-speaking communities. (And, of course, one can combine components of these two positions and argue for the Vedic or Indo-Aryan origins of Yoga but still hold that the Indo-Aryans were nonetheless originally immigrants into the subcontinent.) What all these positions have in common, and where our own discussion of the early history of Yoga will commence, is that Yoga evolves on the periphery of Vedic religiosity and beyond the parameters of mainstream Vedic orthopraxy. Yoga is clearly in tension with Vedic ritualism, discussed below, and its goals are in stark and explicit opposition to it (for example, *Yoga Sūtras* I.15–16).

Before considering the early literary history of Yoga, however, we must note that the arguments above are all primarily deduced from the fields of linguistics and philology. Archaeology has revealed the remains of an enormous and sophisticated ancient civilization, the Indus Valley civilization, covering modern-day northwest India and Pakistan, dating from circa 3000 to 1900 B.C.E. Mention must be made, when considering the earliest origins of Yoga, to seals found in Indus Valley sites with representations of figures seated in a clear *yogic* posture. The most famous figure is seated with arms extended and resting on the knees in a classical meditative posture.⁷ This evidence suggests that, irrespective of its literary origins, Yoga has been practiced on the Indian subcontinent for well over four thousand years.

Like other Old World cultures, the dominant religious expression in the early Vedic period within which Yoga emerges is that of the sacrificial cult wherein animals and other items are offered to various gods through the medium of fire for the purposes of obtaining worldly boons—offspring, cattle, victory over enemies, etc. A genre of texts, the *Brāhmaṇas*, describe the ritualistic minutiae of a wide variety of sacrifices, both domestic and public, each one specific to the attainment of particular goals. While the intricacies of the Vedic sacrificial

rite may seem alien to our modern worldviews and practices, the mentality that supported it—that of attempting to manipulate the external physical environment for the purpose of enjoying the pleasures of the material world through the medium of the sensual body—has remained constant throughout human history. It is for this reason that the post-Vedic reactions to this type of mentality, in the form of developments such as the various systems of *yoga*, remain perennially relevant to the human condition.

Yoga in the Upaniṣads

There is evidence as early as the oldest Vedic text, the *Ṛg Veda*, that there were *yogī*-like ascetics on the margins of the Vedic landscape.⁸ However, it is in the late Vedic age, marked by the fertile speculations expressed in a genre of texts called the *Upaniṣads*, that practices that can be clearly related to classical *yoga* are first articulated in literary sources.⁹ The *Upaniṣads* reveal a clear shift in focus away from the sacrificial rite, which is relegated to an inferior type of religiosity, replacing it with an interest in philosophical and mystical discourse, particularly the quest for the ultimate, underlying reality underpinning the external world, *Brahman*, localized in living beings as *ātman*.¹⁰ The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (I.2. 7–11) calls the performers of sacrifice “deluded” and “ignorant,” however learned and competent they may be, because the boons and fruits gained from the sacrifice—posture to be, because the boons and fruits gained from the sacrifice—modern frame of reference—are temporary. When they expire, one finds oneself frustrated once more. The *Gītā*, too, calls the Vedic ritualists “less intelligent,” since any boons accruing from such materialism do not solve the ultimate problems of life—human suffering inherent in the cycle of birth and death (II.42–45). A move toward understanding higher and more ultimate truths of reality is the prime feature of the *Upaniṣads*.

Although the *Upaniṣads* are especially concerned with *jñāna*, or understanding *Brahman*, the Absolute Truth, through the cultivation of knowledge, there are also several unmistakable references to a technique for realizing *Brahman* (in its localized aspect of *ātman*) called *yoga*, which are clearly drawn from the same general body of related

practices as those articulated by Patañjali.¹¹ As with the Upaniṣads in general, we do not find a systematic philosophy here, but mystico-poetic utterances, albeit profound in content. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* states:

When the control of the senses is fixed, that is Yoga, so people say. For then, a person is free from distraction. Yoga is the "becoming," and the "ceasing."¹² Not by words, not by the mind, not by sight, can he [the self] be grasped; how else can he be perceived except by saying: "he is!" . . . For one who perceives him as he really is, his real nature becomes manifest. When all desires lurking in the heart are removed, then a mortal person becomes immortal, and attains *Brahman* in this world. When the knots in the heart that bind one to this world are all cut, then a mortal becomes an immortal, such is the teachings . . . A *puruṣa* [ātman or soul] the size of a thumb dwells always in the hearts of men. One should extricate him with determination like a reed from *muñja* grass. One should know him as resplendent and immortal. Thus, when Naciketas had received this knowledge and the complete rules of *yoga* from Death, he attained *Brahman*; he became free of disease and death. So, too, will others who know these teachings about the self. (VI.11–18)

The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* gets a little more specific about the actual technique of *yoga* practice:

When he holds the body steady, with the three sections erect, and withdraws the senses into his heart with the mind, a wise person will cross over all the frightening rivers [of embodied existence] by means of the boat of *Brahman*. His breathing restrained here [within the body], and his energy under control, he should breathe through one nostril when his breath is depleted. A wise person should control the mind, just as one would a wagon yoked to unruly horses¹³ . . . and engage in the practice of *yoga* . . . When, by means of the true nature of the *ātman*, which is like a lamp, a person perceives the truth of

Brahman in this world, he is freed from all bondage, because he has known the Divine, which is unborn, unchanging, and untainted by all things. (II.8–15)

By the later *Maitrī Upaniṣad*, we have a much more extensive discussion of Yoga, including more specific references to the six *āṅgas*, or limbs, of *yoga*: *prāṇāyāma*, breath control; *pratyāhāra*, sense withdrawal; *dhyāna*, meditation; *dhāraṇā*, concentration; *tarka*, inquiry; and *samādhi*, final absorption in the self (VI.18). Five of these limbs correspond to the last five limbs of Patañjali's system (the *Yoga Sūtras* lists eight limbs in Chapter II¹⁴). Although, like the two older Upaniṣads quoted above, the *Maitrī* is still embedded in the Upaniṣadic context of unity of *Brahman* as the ultimate goal of *yoga* practice (*Brahman* is not mentioned in the *Yoga Sūtras*), the specifics of *yoga* technique (and Sāṅkhya metaphysics, discussed below) receive far more elaborate and technical attention here than in the older Upaniṣads.¹⁵ In this development, the *Maitrī* represents, as does the *Mahābhārata*, a transition between the old Upaniṣadic worldview and the later emergence of the systematic metaphysical traditions such as the one represented in the *Yoga Sūtras*.

Yoga in the Mahābhārata

The *Mahābhārata*, which culminates in 100,000 verses,¹⁶ is the longest epic in the world and, like the *Maitrī Upaniṣad*, preserves significant material representing the evolution of Yoga. Usually dated somewhere between the ninth and fourth centuries B.C.E., the epic exhibits the transition between the origins of Yoga in the Upaniṣadic period and its expression in the systematized traditions of Yoga as represented in the classical period by Patañjali. Nestled in the middle of the epic, the well-known *Bhagavad Gītā* (circa fourth century B.C.E.) devotes a good portion of its text to the practices of *yoga*, which it already considers to be "ancient" (IV.3); indeed, Kṛṣṇa presents himself as reestablishing *yoga* teachings that had existed since primordial times. While the *Gītā* tends to use the term *yoga* interchangeably with *karma-yoga*, and the text focuses primarily on *karma-yoga*, *jñāna-yoga*, and especially *bhakti-yoga*, the techniques of Patañjalian-type *yoga* are

outlined throughout the entire sixth chapter, albeit subsumed under devotion to Kṛṣṇa. The *Gītā* refers to this type of practice as *dhyāna-yoga*,¹⁷ as did most early Indic texts.

After establishing a firm seat in a clean place, not too high and not too low . . . there, sitting on that seat and fixing the mind on one object, with mind and senses under control, one should practice *yoga* to purify the *ātman*, self, by holding the body, neck and head straight, steady and keeping oneself motionless, focusing on the tip of the nose, and not looking about in any direction. With a peaceful self, free of fear, firm in the *brahmācarya* vow of celibacy, with mind controlled and thoughts fixed on Me [Kṛṣṇa], one should sit in *yoga*, holding Me as the supreme. (VI.11–15)

As can be seen from this verse, the *Yoga Sūtra's* *Īśvara-pranidhāna*, dedication to God, which will be encountered in I.23, becomes the essential teaching of the entire *Gītā* and of all the *yoga* systems prescribed in it, rather than the more discreet ingredient promoted by Patañjali. Nonetheless, the *Yoga Sūtras* is an inherently theistic text.

The *Mahābhārata* contains a number of references to practices that are clearly relatable to the system of *yoga* as taught by Patañjali, most of them in the *Mokṣa-dharma* section of Book 12 of the epic.¹⁸ For example, the sage Vasīṣṭha defines *yoga* as *ekāgratā*, concentration, and *prāṇāyāma*, breath control (XII.294.8), both terms and practices essential to Patañjali's system. The terms *yoga* and *yogī* occur about nine hundred times throughout the epic, expressed as noted above in terms midway between the unformulated expressions of the Upaniṣads and the systematized practice as outlined by Patañjali.¹⁹ This, of course, indicates that practices associated with *yoga* had gained wide currency in the centuries prior to the Common Era, with a clearly identifiable set of basic techniques and generic practices, and it is from these that Patañjali drew for his systemization. One passage from the epic (XII.188.1–22) particularly illustrates this, namely Bhīṣma's deliverance to Yudhiṣṭhira of the "four stages of *dhyāna-yoga*," meditation. *Dhyāna* is the term most often used to refer to meditation in the epic, not just, as with Patañjali, the seventh, penultimate, limb of *yoga*

but often as synonymous with Patañjali's eighth limb and ultimate goal, *samādhi*. What is of particular interest in this passage (quoted in the commentary for I.17 below) is that even though the final limb in Patañjali's system also contains four basic stages (two of which go by the same name as two of the states mentioned by Bhīṣma²⁰), the terminology and correlations of Bhīṣma's four stages of *dhyāna-yoga* seem to have more in common with the four stages of Buddhist *samādhi*.²¹ Scholars have long pointed out a commonality of vocabulary and concepts between the *Yoga Sūtras* and Buddhist texts.²² All this underscores the basic point that there was a cluster of interconnected and cross-fertilizing variants of meditational *yoga*—Buddhist and Jain as well as Hindu—prior to Patañjali, all drawn from a common but variegated pool of terminologies, practices, and concepts (and many strains continue to the present day).

Indeed, one might profitably begin a discussion of the relationship between Yoga and what was much later to be considered its sister school, Sāṅkhya, and for that matter Buddhism, by noting that in this formative late Vedic period, perhaps for even the best part of a millennium prior to the rise of the clearly defined classical philosophical traditions, there were no schools as such to speak of at all; Sāṅkhya and Yoga (and, for that matter, Buddhism) had yet to become systematic schools, such as what was to become known as the Patañjala Yoga, or even distinct philosophical systems.²³ Moreover, there were a number of variants going under the name of Yoga (and of Sāṅkhya). One might envision a plethora of centers of learning and practice, many ascetic and spearheaded by charismatic renunciants, where parallel and overlapping philosophical doctrines and meditative practices, many going by the name of *yoga*, were evolving out of a common Upaniṣadic-flavored core. These would become distinct schools only at a much later period of time.

Yoga and Sāṅkhya

The history of Yoga is inextricable from that of the Sāṅkhya tradition. Sāṅkhya provides the metaphysical infrastructure for Yoga and thus is indispensable to an understanding of Yoga. Usually translated as enumeration or counting due to its focus on the evolution and con-

stituents of the twenty-four ingredients of *prakṛti*, material reality, Sāṅkhya might best be understood as dealing with calculation in the sense of reasoning, speculation, philosophy, as it is defined in the *Mahābhārata*²⁴—in other words, the path striving to understand the ultimate truths of reality through knowledge, typically known as *jñāna-yoga*. While the specifics of Sāṅkhya metaphysics and Yoga practice will be discussed more elaborately below, we can briefly note here that this metaphysics is dualistic, insofar as ultimate reality is conceived as containing two distinct ultimate principles: *puruṣa*, the innermost conscious self broadly synonymous with the notion of soul, and *prakṛti*, the material world with all its variegatedness within which the *puruṣa* is embedded. While Yoga and Sāṅkhya share the same metaphysics and the common goal of liberating *puruṣa* from its encapsulation, their methods differ. Sāṅkhya occupies itself with the path of reasoning to attain liberation, specifically concerning the analysis of the manifold ingredients of *prakṛti* from which the *puruṣa* is to be extricated, and Yoga more with the path of meditation, focusing on the nature of mind and consciousness, and on the techniques of concentration in order to provide a practical method through which the *puruṣa* can be isolated and extricated. (We must note here that while on occasion we use the language, as do the commentators, more appropriate to Vedānta—of *puruṣa* being extricated or liberated—we do so rhetorically; in fact, as will be discussed, *puruṣa* is and has always been eternally free, liberated, and autonomous, according to Sāṅkhya. It is the mind, not *puruṣa*, that must become enlightened).

Sāṅkhya seems to have been the earliest philosophical system to have taken shape in the late Vedic period,²⁵ and, indeed, it has permeated almost all subsequent Hindu traditions: Vedānta, Purāṇic, Vaiṣṇava,²⁶ Śaivite,²⁷ Tāntric,²⁸ and even the medicinal traditions such as *āyurveda*. Larson goes so far as to say, “Buddhist philosophy and terminology, Yoga philosophy, early Vedānta speculation, and the great regional theologies of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism are all, in an important sense, footnotes and/or reactions to a living ‘tradition text’ of Sāṅkhya” (1999, 732). Indeed, Larson has long seen the classical Yoga of Patañjali as a type of “neo-Sāṅkhya,” an updating by those within the old Sāṅkhya tradition in an attempt to bring it into conversation with the more technical philosophical traditions that had emerged by the third

to fifth centuries C.E., particularly the challenges represented by Buddhist thought (1999, 2008).²⁹

While this may have been true for the systematized Yoga articulated by Patañjali in the second century C.E., it has also been argued that Sāṅkhya itself evolved out of much earlier primordial Yoga origins. We can refer here again to the Indus Valley seal from the third millennium B.C.E. of a horned figure sitting in a distinctly *yoga*-like pose, which points to some kind of *yoga* practice as a primordial element on the Indian subcontinent. Schreiner’s statistical analysis of the context and content of the references to Yoga and Sāṅkhya in the *Mahābhārata*—the richest literary source for considering the origins of Yoga—finds Yoga to be more original and Sāṅkhya a later appendage formulated to provide the practices with some philosophical rationale. Schreiner provides an intriguing image of the proto-Sāṅkhya philosopher:

Those [Sāṅkhya] redactors . . . were . . . probably not practicing Yogins, but rather (perhaps) meticulous scholars, scribes with archival ambitions, thinkers with a liking for numbers and classification (but afraid of the existential commitment to a path of Yoga which would lead to death and through dying, literally and spiritually). They may well have been *yogabrahṣṭa* [the “fallen” or “unsuccessful” *yogīs* of the *Gītā* 6.37–45], Yogins who did not make it but were close enough to the practices and experiences of Yoga to be able to speak about it and intellectualize it. The *yogabrahṣṭa*, one who did not reach the goal of no return, is probably the best candidate for becoming a Sāṅkhya philosopher. But he would have been a Yogin first. (1999, 776)

This provocative view might be kept in mind if we choose to wonder if Patañjali himself, and certainly his commentators, had experienced the truths of which they spoke in the *sūtras* and their commentaries, or whether some of them were even practitioners. In any event, for our present purposes, the metaphysics of Yoga is that of Sāṅkhya, and hence the history of the two traditions requires a few words.

As noted, the first important point to be stressed is that Sāṅkhya and Yoga should not be considered different schools until a very late

date. In fact, the first reference to Yoga itself as a distinct school seems to be in the writings of Śāṅkara in the ninth century C.E. (Bronkhurst 1981). There are (to be precise) 884 references to Yoga in the *Mahābhārata*, “and the common denominator of all the epic definitions of Yoga is disciplined activity, earnest striving—by active (not rationalistic or intellectual) means” rather than the more popular translation and cognate “union” (Edgerton 1924, 38). There are 120 references to Sāṅkhya,³⁰ defined, as noted, as reasoning, and none of these 1,000-odd combined references to the two approaches indicates any difference between them other than one of method in attaining the same goal: Yoga seeks the vision of *ātman*, the Upaniṣadic term for the *puruṣa*, through practice and mind control, and Sāṅkhya through knowledge and the intellect. Otherwise, “The knowers of Truth see that Sāṅkhya and Yoga are one” (XII.304.4³¹).

This is amply expressed by Bhīṣma when specifically asked by Yudhiṣṭhira to explain the difference between Sāṅkhya and Yoga: “Both the followers of Sāṅkhya and those of Yoga praise their own way as the best . . . The followers of Yoga rely on experiential methods (*pratyākṣa-hetavaḥ*), and those of Sāṅkhya on scriptural interpretation (*śāstra-viniścayaḥ*). I consider both these views true: Followed according to their instructions, both lead to the ultimate goal” (XII.289.7). And, again:

There is no knowledge equal to Sāṅkhya, there is no power (*balam*) equal to Yoga; both of them are the same path, both, according to oral tradition (*smṛtau*), lead to deathlessness. People of little intelligence consider them to be different. We however, O king, see clearly that they are the same. What the followers of Yoga perceive, the same is experienced by the followers of Sāṅkhya. One who sees Yoga and Sāṅkhya as one, is a knower of Truth. (XII.304.1–4)

While presenting Yoga as a more action-based practice, Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad Gītā* reiterates the same point: “A twofold division was established by Me of old . . . *jñāna-yoga*, the *yoga* of knowledge, followed by Sāṅkhya, and *karma-yoga*, the *yoga* of action followed by the *yogis*” (III.3). Both lead to the same goal (V.2), and anyone who con-

siders them to be different is “childish” (V.4–5—even as Kṛṣṇa clearly favors the action-based approach, III.4ff; V.6ff). Even where the *Gītā* articulates a more Patañjalian type of Yoga, which it calls *dhyāna*, it is still contrasted with Sāṅkhya merely in terms of method leading to the same goal: “Some behold the *ātman*, self, by *dhyāna*, meditation, others by Sāṅkhya” (XIII.25). Nowhere in the *Gītā* or the entire *Mahābhārata* is there any indication that these two approaches constitute different schools or metaphysical systems.³² Sāṅkhya and Yoga are merely different approaches to salvation until well into the Common Era. This continuity and confluence between Sāṅkhya and Yoga is reflected in early sources for well over a millennium, including Patañjali’s time of writing as well as that of Vyāsa, the first and primary commentator on the *Yoga Sūtras* in the fifth century C.E. Vyāsa explicitly concludes the chapters of his *bhāṣya* commentary with the colophon *śrī-pātañjale sāṅkhya-pravacane yoga-śāstre*, “Patañjali’s Yoga treatise, an exposition on Sāṅkhya.”

Another important point to consider when tracing the origins of Yoga is that in the epic, the ultimate liberation accruing from the practice of *yoga* (as with the practice of Sāṅkhya) is conceived in a number of passages (for example, XII.228.38; 231.17; 246.8) in terms of the monistic goal of unity of the individual soul, *puruṣa/ātman* with the one ultimate Absolute called *Brahman* in the Upaniṣads (expressed variously in different Upaniṣads in both personal or impersonal terms). The later classical Sāṅkhya tradition is distinctly dualistic—ultimate reality consists of two ingredients, *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, consciousness and matter—rather than monistic—subscribing to the one absolute principle called *Brahman* in the Upaniṣads. The *Mahābhārata* evidences a transitional period between the Upaniṣads and the later tradition as expressed in the *Yoga Sūtras*; the dualistic *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* principles associated with Sāṅkhya/Yoga are retained, but they are subsumed under the higher Upaniṣadic union with *Brahman*. This monistic source in the epic is expressed either in terms commonly used for the impersonal *Brahman*, or as personal *Īśvara*, God, Nārāyaṇa.³³ *Brahman* is not mentioned either in the *Yoga Sūtras* or *Sāṅkhya Kārikās* (the text that became to later Sāṅkhya what the *Yoga Sūtras* became to Yoga, that is, the primary text of the system).³⁴ Both these texts deal with the liberation of the individual *ātman* rather

than the relationship of this *ātman* with the supreme *ātman*, or *Brahman*, which was the concern of the Vedānta tradition (however, *Brahman* is mentioned by the commentators, and thus the Upaniṣadic matrix always remains as a backdrop). And, although Patañjali also accepts a personal *Īśvara*, which he equates with the sonic form of *Brahman* in the Upaniṣads, *om* (I.23ff), he introduces him in the context of meditation rather than cosmology or metaphysics.

In short, Yoga and Sāṅkhya in the Upaniṣads and epic simply refer to the two distinct paths of salvation by meditation and salvation by knowledge, respectively. Followers of both schools upheld belief in the *puruṣa*'s ultimate union with a developed form of the Upaniṣadic *Brahman*, expressed in both personal and impersonal terms, which simply points to the fact that all orthodox Hindus of the day tended to accept those beliefs. The chief difference in the trajectory that Patañjali's Yoga took was its exclusive focus on the psychological mechanisms and techniques involved in *puruṣa*'s liberation. Similarly, later Sāṅkhya concerned itself with the specificities of *prakṛti*'s ingredients from which *puruṣa* was to be extricated, "which in the earlier Upaniṣads had been rather ignored, not because its existence was denied, but because it did not interest the earliest thinkers, who were absorbed in the contemplation of the One Ultimate Reality" (Edgerton 1924, 32).

Before concluding this section on the pre-Patañjali background of Yoga, one might add, as an aside, that from the nine hundred-odd references to *yoga* in the *Mahābhārata*, there are only two mentions of *āsana*, posture, the third limb of Patañjali's system.³⁵ Neither the Upaniṣads nor the *Gītā* mentions posture in the sense of stretching exercises and bodily poses (the term is used in the *Gītā* verse above in its sense as physical seat rather than bodily postures), *āsana* is not mentioned as one of the six limbs of the *Maitrī Upaniṣad*, and Patañjali himself dedicates only three brief *sūtras* from his text to this aspect of the practice. The reconfiguring, presentation, and perception of *yoga* as primarily or even exclusively *āsana* in the sense of bodily poses, then, is essentially a modern Western phenomenon and finds no precedent in the premodern *yoga* tradition, although the fourteenth-century *Haṭhayoga Pradīpikā* does dedicate one of its four chapters to *āsana*.

PATAÑJALI'S YOGA

Patañjali and the Six Schools of Indian Philosophy

In addition to various heterodox schools such as Jainism and Buddhism, what came to be identified (in much later times) as six schools of orthodox thought also evolved out of the Upaniṣadic period (of course, there were various other streams of thought that did not gain this status but nonetheless emerged as significant presences on the religious landscape of Hinduism). As we have seen with Sāṅkhya and Yoga, the streams of thought that later became associated with these six schools were not necessarily conceived of in that way until the end of the first millennium C.E. In fact, it might be more accurate to consider these traditions distinctive religophilosophical expressions that emerged from the Vedic period with different focuses rather than actual schools in the earlier period. They shared much of their overall worldview but dedicated themselves to different areas of human knowledge and praxis, and while differing quite considerably on metaphysical and epistemological issues, they nonetheless did not necessarily reject the authority of the other traditions in other specific areas where these did not conflict with their own positions. Thus, for example, the Nyāya logician school accepts Yoga as the method to be used to realize the *ātman* as understood within that tradition,³⁶ and Vedānta objects to it only to the extent that it does not refer to *Brahman* as the ultimate source of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, not to its authenticity in meditative technique and practice.³⁷ Even a *dharmaśāstra* text like the *Yājñavalkya Smṛti*, which occupies itself exclusively with *dharma*, codes of ritual, personal, familial, civic, and social duties, states in its opening section that from the abundance of religious scriptures dealing with the plethora of human affairs: "this alone is the highest *dharma*, that one should see the *ātman* by *yoga*" (I.8). Thus, in early Sanskrit texts Yoga referred to a form of rigorous discipline and concentration for attaining the direct perception of the *ātman* and gaining liberation that was appropriated and tailored by different traditions according to their metaphysical understanding of the self, rather than a distinct school.

In any event, eventually an orthodox school of Yoga came to be

identified with Patañjali, the compiler of these *sūtras*, and took its place alongside other traditions that also had distinct *sūtra* traditions, as one of the “six schools of Indian philosophy.” These are Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta. These schools were deemed orthodox because they retained at least a nominal allegiance to the sacred Vedic texts—unlike the so-called heterodox schools such as Buddhism and Jainism, which rejected them. Since various ingredients of these schools are referred to in our commentaries, we can briefly refer to some of their salient features.

As mentioned, probably the oldest Indian speculative tradition is Sāṅkhya, later to be referred to as the sister school of Yoga insofar as they shared the same metaphysics. This featured an analysis of reality in which all categories of the created world were perceived as evolving out of a primordial matter, *prakṛti*, from which the *puruṣa*, which is the term used by Sāṅkhya and Yoga schools for the *ātman*, must be extricated. Vaiśeṣika was another metaphysical system, one that perceived the created world as ultimately consisting of various eternal categories such as atoms rather than as evolutes from a singular category of *prakṛti*. This came to be “sistered” with Nyāya, a school that accepted the basics of Vaiśeṣika metaphysics but became distinguished by the aspect of epistemology dealing with the formulation of categories and conditions of valid reasoning and the refinement of rules of logic, such that the debates between the various schools emerging from this period could be conducted according to agreed-upon conventions of what constituted valid or invalid argumentation. Vedānta was a school dedicated to another aspect of epistemology: attempting to systematize the heterogeneous teachings of the Upaniṣads through a consistent hermeneutics. Its concerns were the relationship between the manifest world; *Brahman*, the Absolute Truth and ground of all being; and *ātman*, the localized aspect of this Truth. This was associated with Mīmāṃsā, since both of these schools occupied themselves with hermeneutics, the interpretation of the ancient Vedic texts. The Mīmāṃsā was the main orthodox school that attempted to perpetuate the old Vedic sacrificial rites by composing a philosophical justification for their continued performance.

Indic schools, both orthodox and heterodox, interacted intellectually and sometimes polemically, debating and mutually enriching each

other, and their emergence pushed the old Vedic cult further into the background. From this rich and fertile post-Vedic context, then, emerged an individual called Patañjali whose systematization of the heterogeneous practices of *yoga* came to be authoritative for all subsequent practitioners and eventually reified into one of the six schools of classical Indian philosophy. It is important to stress here again that Patañjali is not the founder, or inventor, of *yoga*, the origins of which, as should be clear, had long preceded him in primordial and mythic times. Patañjali systematized the preexisting traditions and authored what came to be the seminal text for *yoga* discipline. There was never one uniform school of ur-Yoga (or of any Indic school of thought, for that matter); there was a plurality of variants and certainly different conceptualizations of meditative practices that were termed *yoga*. For example, whereas Patañjali organizes his system into eight limbs, and the *Mahābhārata*, too, speaks of *yoga* as having eight “qualities” (*aṣṭa-guṇita*, XII.304.7³⁸), as early as the *Maitrī Upaniṣad* of the second century B.C.E. there is reference to a six-limbed Yoga (VI.18), as there is in the *Viṣṇu Purāna* (VI.7.91), and this numerical schema was retained in the later *Gorakṣa-saṁhitā* and the *Dhyānabindu* and *Amṛtabindu Upaniṣads*. Along similar lines, there are various references to the twelve *yogas* and seven *dhāraṇās* (*dhāraṇā* is considered the sixth of Patañjali’s limbs) in the *Mahābhārata*.³⁹ Yoga is thus best understood as a cluster of techniques, some more and some less systematized, that pervaded the landscape of ancient India. These overlapped with and were incorporated into the various traditions of the day such as the *jñāna*, knowledge-based traditions, providing these systems with a practical method and technique for attaining an experienced-based transformation of consciousness. Patañjali’s particular systematization of these techniques in time emerged as the most dominant, but by no means exclusive, version.

Indeed, internal to his own text, in his very first *sūtra*, *atha yogānuśāsanam*, Patañjali indicates that he is continuing the teachings of *yoga* (the prefix *anu-* indicates the continuation of the action denoted by the verb), and the traditional commentators certainly perceive him in this light. In point of fact, the tradition itself ascribes the actual origins of Yoga to the legendary figure Hiranyagarbha (see commentary to I.1). Moreover, evidence that Patañjali was addressing an

audience already familiar with the tenets of Yoga can be deduced from the *Yoga Sūtras* themselves.⁴⁰ For example, on occasion, Patañjali mentions one member of a list of items followed by “etc.,” thereby assuming his audience to be familiar with the remainder of the list. Thus, he refers to *animādi*, “the mystic power of *animā*, etc.,” indicating that the other seven mystic powers were a standard, well-known group. He likewise speaks of a “sevenfold” wisdom without further explanation (II.27). But, in short, because he produced the first systematized treatise on the subject, Patañjali was to become the prime or seminal figure for the Yoga tradition after his times and accepted as such by other schools. To all intents and purposes, his *Yoga Sūtras* was to become the canon for the mechanics of generic *yoga*, so to speak, that other systems tinkered with and flavored with their own theological trappings.

As with the reputed founders of the other schools of thought, very little is known about Patañjali himself. Tradition, first explicitly evidenced in the commentary of Bhoja Rāja in the eleventh century C.E. (and continuing to this day in a verse often recited at the beginning of *yoga* classes in the Iyengar community), considers him to be the same Patañjali who wrote the primary commentary on the famous grammar by Pāṇini and also ascribes to him authorship of a treatise on medicine.⁴¹ There is an ongoing discussion among scholars as to whether this was likely or not;⁴² my own view is that there is not much to be gained by challenging the evidence of traditional accounts in the absence of evidence to the contrary that is uncontroversial or at least adequately compelling.

Patañjali's date can only be inferred from the content of the text itself. Unfortunately, most classical Sanskrit texts from the ancient period tend to be impossible to date with accuracy, and there are always dissenters against whatever dates become standard in academic circles.⁴³ Most scholars date the text shortly after the turn of the Common Era (circa first to second century), but it has been placed as early as several centuries before that.⁴⁴ Other than the fact that the *Yoga Sūtras* were written no later than the fifth century, the date cannot be determined with exactitude.

The Yoga Sūtras as a Text

The *sūtra* writing style is that used by the philosophical schools of ancient India (thus we have *Vedānta Sūtras*, *Nyāya Sūtras*, etc.). The term *sūtra* (from the Sanskrit root *sū*, cognate with sew) literally means a thread and essentially refers to a terse and pithy philosophical statement in which the maximum amount of information is packed into the minimum number of words. Knowledge systems were handed down orally in ancient India, and thus source material was kept minimal partly with a view to facilitating memorization. Being composed for oral transmission and memorization, the *Yoga Sūtras*, and *sūtra* traditions in general, allowed the student to “thread together” in memory the key ingredients of the more extensive body of material with which he or she would become thoroughly acquainted. Thus *sūtras* often begin with connecting words linking them with the previous *sūtras*, typically, pronouns or conjunctions beginning with *t* (such as *tataḥ* and *tatra*). Each *sūtra* served as a mnemonic device to structure the teachings and assist memorization. I sometimes compare them to a series of bullet points that a lecturer might jot down prior to giving a presentation, to structure the talk and provide reminders of the main points intended to be covered; thus, from a dozen shorthand phrases incomprehensible to anyone else, a lecturer might discourse for a couple of hours.⁴⁵

The succinctness of the *Yoga Sūtras*—it contains about 1,200 words in 195 *sūtras*—indicates that they were construed to be a manual requiring unpacking. That the *sūtras*, or aphorisms, are in places cryptic, esoteric, and incomprehensible in their own terms points to the fact that they were intended to be used in conjunction with a teacher: Feuerstein calls them “maps” (1980, 117). Thus, while some of the *sūtras* are somewhat straightforward, the fact is that we cannot construe meaning from many *sūtras* of Patañjali's primary text. Indeed, some are so obtuse that they are undecipherable in their own terms. Therefore, it is, in my view, an unrealistic (if not impossible) task to attempt to bypass commentary in the hope of retrieving some original pure, precommentarial set of uninterpreted (and those attempting to do so without extensive training in the philosophical universe of India at the beginning of the Common Era frequently have some sectarian or other agenda underpinning their enterprise).

Before considering the commentaries on the *Yoga Sūtras*, some mention must be made of the view of a number of earlier critical scholars that the text is a composite, composed of a number of layers. Starting with the famous Indologist Max Müller (1899), a number of scholars, including Paul Déussen (1920), Richard Garbe (1897), J. W. Hauer (1958), and Erich Frauwallner (1953), have argued that the text is a patchwork. Deussen, for example, maintains that I.1–16 forms one unit devoted to ordinary awareness; I.17–51, another unit, devoted to *samādhi*, meditative awareness; II.1–27, a third, to *kriyā-yoga*, preparatory practice; and II.29–III.55, along with Chapter IV, a fourth unit devoted to the eight-limbed process and other assorted topics.⁴⁶ Hauer, Garbe, Frauwallner, Dasgupta, and others added various nuances to the matter.⁴⁷ These efforts, while meritorious, have all been subject to critique.⁴⁸ The reason for such lack of consensus is clearly that there is insufficient evidence, hence “the task of finding various layers will always be arbitrary” (Larson 2008, 91). The oral traditions of India and their embodiment in the shape of written primary texts have proved to be remarkably resilient, stemming from the Indian reverence and respect for sacred tradition. While this certainly does not grant them immunity from text-critical scholarship, in a work such as the *Yoga Sūtras*, one is best advised to look very carefully for internal structural, semantic, or logical coherency and rationale before assuming that an apparent sudden break in (modern linear notions of) the sequencing of subject matter indicates a later insertion.⁴⁹ More recent scholarship has tended to find internal consistency in most of the text.⁵⁰

In any event, the only disjunction in the text that presents itself to my reading occurs in Chapter II and is best explained by postulating two distinct Yoga traditions that were patched together by Patañjali. The chapter begins with the introduction of a practice called *kriyā-yoga*, which is defined as consisting of *tapas*, austerity; *svādhyāya*, study; and *Īsvara-praṇidhāna*, devotion to God. This practice eliminates the *kleśas*, obstacles to *yoga*, which the text proceeds to discuss in a coherent sequential manner, and the section culminates in II.26–27 by stating that *viveka-khyāti*, discrimination, results from the destruction of *avidyā*, ignorance, the cornerstone of these *kleśas*. *Sūtras* II.28–29 then suddenly announce a new practice, the *yoga* of *aṣṭāṅga*,

eight limbs, which culminates in this same state of *viveka-khyāti*. There is no indication of the relationship between this practice and the *kriyā-yoga* outlined in the beginning of the chapter. But that they might represent different traditions is a valid consideration given that the second limb of the eight-limbed practice consists of observing five *niyamas*, ethical observances, three of which are identical to the three ingredients of *kriyā-yoga*. Why these three items comprising the entirety of a *yoga* practice called *kriyā* are then placed alongside two other items (*śauca*, cleanliness; and *santoṣa*, contentment) as the five ingredients comprising the second limb (*niyama*) of a differently arranged type of *yoga* practice called *aṣṭāṅga* is puzzling. But Feuerstein’s opinion (1979) that they most likely indicate that Patañjali had drawn upon and merged two different traditions with overlapping but differently organized schemas is certainly very plausible.

We therefore find ourselves sympathetic to an alternative and, in our opinion, fruitful way of looking at the issue that respects the historical integrity of the text without denying the likelihood of its containing various disparate strands. R. S. Bhattacharya is willing to concede that “a large part of the *sūtras* are taken by Patañjali from his predecessors either verbatim or with slight changes” (1985, 52). From this perspective, whatever different strands are contained in the *sūtras* (and we are able to feel any confidence only about the one noted above), it is Patañjali who has pieced them together; the text is not a hodgepodge of successive layers interpolated into some ur-text over the years. This point of view respects the traditional understanding of the text’s integrity of authorship (needless to say, in the perspective of the commentators, the work is a harmonious and logical whole⁵¹), while not ignoring some of the more persuasive observations of modern critical scholars, and one that fits well with the previous discussion of Patañjali as a systematizer of preexisting traditions.

The Commentaries on the Yoga Sūtras

Knowledge systems in ancient India were transmitted orally, from master to disciple, with an enormous emphasis on fidelity toward the original set of *sūtras* upon which the system is founded, the master unpacking the dense and truncated aphorisms to the students, and this

system continues in traditional contexts today. Periodically, teachers of particular prominence wrote commentaries on the primary texts of many of these knowledge systems. Some of these gained such wide currency that the primary text was always studied in conjunction with a commentary, particularly since, as noted, texts such as the *Yoga Sūtras* (and, even more so, the *Vedānta Sūtras*) were designed to be "unpacked" and hence contain numerous *sūtras* that are incomprehensible without elaboration. One must stress, therefore, that our understanding of Patañjali's text is completely dependent on the interpretations of later commentators; it is incomprehensible, in places, in its own terms.

This, of course, leaves open the possibility that later commentators might have misinterpreted, or, perhaps more likely, reinterpreted aspects of the text by filtering ancient notions through the theological or sectarian perspectives of their times. Part of the academic approach to a text involves identifying and separating diachronic and synchronic developments and philosophical context. This is of course important, as ideas are never static but develop across time and context, constantly cross-fertilizing with other currents of thought. Thus scholars have always been wary of the extent to which the commentaries are imposing later concerns and perspectives on the text that are alien to Patañjali's intentions. Modern methods of text criticism sometimes bypass the commentaries and, by comparing the context, style, terminology, content, and structure of individual *sūtras* or sequences of *sūtras* themselves, attempt to determine what an author's original intentions might have been prior to exegetical overlay. This includes comparing Patañjali's *sūtras* with other earlier texts, particularly Buddhist ones. Critical observations of this nature can often be very insightful, and I include throughout the text some of the analyses and correlations I hold to be more cogent.⁵²

In any event, in terms of the overall accuracy of the commentaries, the present commentary represents the view that there is an a priori likelihood that the interpretations of the *sūtras* were faithfully preserved and transmitted orally through the few generations from Patañjali until the first commentary by Vyāsa in the fifth century (and we will see that some commentators, both traditional and modern, even hold Vyāsa's commentary to be that of Patañjali himself). In other

words, unless compelling arguments are presented to the contrary, one must be cautious about questioning the overall accuracy of this transmission. Certainly, the commentators from Vyāsa onward are remarkably consistent in their interpretations of the essential metaphysics of the system for over fifteen hundred years, which is in marked contrast with the radical differences in essential metaphysical understanding distinguishing commentators of the Vedānta school (a Rāmānuja or a Madhva from a Śaṅkara, for example). While the fifteenth-century commentator Vijñānabhikṣu, for example, may quibble with the ninth-century commentator Vācaspati Miśra, the differences generally are in detail, not essential metaphysical elements. And while Vijñānabhikṣu may inject a good deal of Vedāntic concepts into the basic dualism of the Yoga system, this is generally an addition (conspicuous and identifiable) to the system rather than a reinterpretation of it. There is thus a remarkably consistent body of knowledge associated with the Yoga school for the best part of a millennium and a half, and consequently one can speak of the traditional understanding of the *sūtras* in the pre-modern period without overly generalizing or essentializing. One therefore has grounds to expect compelling reasons as to why this uniformity should not have been the case in the couple of centuries that may have separated Patañjali and Vyāsa.

Be all this as it may, the task we have set for ourselves in the present work is not to engage extensively in textual criticism but to attempt to represent something of the premodern history of interpretations associated with the school of Yoga as it has been transmitted for, at the very least, fifteen hundred years, and as it has been accepted by both scholastics and practitioners over this period. This, surely, constitutes a formidable realm of legitimacy and authority in its own right. One thus has grounds to speak of a tradition, and it is this Yoga tradition that the present commentary sets out to represent through some of its primary expressions prior to the modern explosion of interest in *yoga* in the West.

The first extant commentary by Vyāsa, typically dated to around the fourth or fifth century, attained a status almost as canonical as the primary text by Patañjali himself. Consequently, the study of the *Yoga Sūtras* has always been embedded in the commentary that tradition attributes to this greatest of literary figures. So when we speak of the

philosophy of Patañjali, what we really mean (or should mean) is the understanding of Patañjali according to Vyāsa: It is Vyāsa who determined what Patañjali's abstruse *sūtras* meant, and all subsequent commentators elaborated on Vyāsa. While, on occasion, modern scholarship has insightfully questioned whether Vyāsa has accurately represented Patañjali in all instances,⁵³ for the Yoga tradition itself, his commentary becomes as canonical as Patañjali's (in fact, a number of traditional sources identify Vyāsa as none other than Patañjali himself⁵⁴). Indeed, the Vyāsa *bhāṣya* (commentary) becomes inseparable from the *sūtras*, an extension of it (such that on occasion commentators differ as to whether a line belongs to the commentary or the primary text⁵⁵). From one *sūtra* of a few words, Vyāsa might write several lines of comment without which the *sūtra* remains incomprehensible. It cannot be overstated that Yoga philosophy is Patañjali's philosophy as understood and articulated by Vyāsa.

In traditional narrative, Vyāsa, also known as Vedavyāsa or Vyāsadeva, is the legendary "divider"⁵⁶ of the four Vedas. The Vedas are the oldest preserved literature in India and, indeed, in the Indo-European language family. Tradition considers that there was originally only one Veda, and at the beginning of the present world age⁵⁷ this was subdivided into four by Vyāsa. Vyāsa is also considered to be the recorder of the immense *Mahābhārata*, as well as the compiler of the *Purāṇas*, the largest body of Sanskrit writing, containing most of the stories and ritual details that underpin what has come to be known as Hinduism. Irrespective of the historical accuracy of such literary profligacy, Vyāsa's status in traditional Sanskrit sources is that of the primary literary figure of ancient India. Modern scholars, even accepting the actual existence of a sage Vyāsa, consider our Vyāsa, the primary commentator of Patañjali's text, to be a later figure who penned his commentary under the name of the legendary sage in order to invest it with indisputable authority. Be that as it may, it is essential to recognize that Patañjali's Yoga system has essentially been handed down through the centuries as Patañjali's system as understood by the commentary attributed to Vyāsa. Vyāsa's commentary, the *Bhāṣya*, thus attains the status of canon and is almost never questioned by any subsequent commentator. Later commentators base their commentaries on unpacking Vyāsa's *Bhāṣya*—rarely critiquing it

but rather expanding or elaborating on it. This point of reference results in a marked uniformity in the interpretation of the *sūtras* in the premodern period as noted above.

The next commentary considered in the present work is the *Vivaraṇa*. Although its authorship is debated, it is attributed to the great Vedāntin Śaṅkara in the eighth to ninth centuries C.E. Śaṅkara was to become the most influential commentator of the Vedānta school, and all subsequent commentators on the Vedānta, whether in agreement or disagreement with his *advaita*, nondual interpretations,⁵⁸ were constrained to define their own theologies in relation to his. It has remained unresolved since it was first questioned in 1927⁵⁹ whether the commentary on the *Yoga Sūtras* assigned to Śaṅkara is authentically penned by him. The *advaita*, nondual, aspect of Śaṅkara's thought, which is otherwise in stark opposition to the dualism and realism of Yoga metaphysics, is certainly not prominent in the *Vivaraṇa* to my eye—although one must note Hacker's intriguing theory that Śaṅkara was originally an adherent of Patañjali's *yoga* prior to becoming the famous Vedāntin.⁶⁰ There is only one surviving manuscript of this text, and all that can be determined with certainty is that it existed in the fifteenth century.

The next best known commentator after Vyāsa, Vācaspati Miśra, was a Maithila Brāhmaṇa from the Bihar region of India, whose commentary, the *Tattva-vaiśārādī*, can be dated with more confidence to the ninth century.⁶¹ Vācaspati Miśra was a prolific intellectual, penning important commentaries on the Vedānta, Sāṅkhya, Nyāya, and Mīmāṃsā schools in addition to his commentary on the *Yoga Sūtras*. Despite the differences among these schools, Vācaspati Miśra is noteworthy for his ability to present each tradition in its own terms, without displaying any overt personal predilection. Erudite scholastics of the Yoga tradition would have been familiar with other commentaries in addition to that of Vyāsa, and Vācaspati Miśra's *Tattva-vaiśārādī* is the next most authoritative for the overall tradition after the *Bhāṣya* of Vyāsa. As an aside, this eclectic scholasticism contrasts with the experiential focus of *yoga* and makes one wonder whether Vācaspati Miśra was a practicing *yogī*.⁶²

A fascinating Arabic translation of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* was undertaken by the famous Arab traveler and historian al-Bīrūnī

(973–1050), the manuscript of which was discovered in Istanbul in 1922.⁶³ Al-Bīrunī translates the *sūtras* in the form of a dialogue and interweaves it with “that over-lengthy commentary.” However, the translators hold that this commentary to which he refers and had at his disposal does not appear to have been that of Vyāsa and “had probably been written at a time when the *Bhāṣya* of Veda-vyāsa had not attained any great sanctity or authority . . . [and] may represent a hitherto unknown line of interpretation” (Pines and Gelblum 1966, 304). This is a fascinating consideration, if true, since al-Bīrunī’s commentary, which seems to be in complete accord with Vyāsa’s, adds weight to our own opinion that there is little evidence to deny the accuracy of Vyāsa’s *Bhāṣya*. (In other words, if al-Bīrunī is following another commentary almost contemporaneous with the *Bhāṣya* and it reads Patañjali with the same interpretation as Vyāsa, the notion of an intact oral lineage from Patañjali informing both commentaries is enhanced.)

Roughly contemporaneous with al-Bīrunī is the eleventh-century king Bhoja Rāja, poet, scholar, and patron of the arts, sciences, and esoteric traditions, whose clan asserted independent rule in the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh, central India, in the mid-tenth century. While Bhoja Rāja is certainly a welcome exemplar of an important political figure who engaged deeply with the Yoga tradition, his commentary, called the *Rāja-mārtanda*, essentially reiterates the work of Vyāsa without adding much elaboration, although there are occasionally very valuable insights. In contrast, in the fifteenth century, Vijñānabhikṣu wrote to my mind the most insightful and useful commentary after that of Vyāsa’s, the *Yoga-vārttika*. Vijñānabhikṣu was another prolific scholar, to whom eighteen philosophical treatises on Sāṅkhya, Vedānta, and the Upaniṣads are attributed. He is noteworthy for his attempt to harmonize Vedānta and Sāṅkhya concepts, subscribing to a metaphysical view of *bhedābheda*, difference in nondifference, with regard to the relationship between the individual soul and the Absolute Truth. (He thus periodically critiques the nondualism of the Vedāntin Śaṅkara.⁶⁴) As a Vaiṣṇava (a follower of an ancient sect holding Viṣṇu to be the supreme *Īśvara*), his commentary also enhances the devotional element and tenor of the text, as indeed do most of the commentaries. His translator, Rukmani, finds him to be “an uncompromising ascetic, steadfast in the principles of Yoga” (1997, 623).

With regard to the question whether he was a practicing *yogī* himself, despite his scholasticism, he claims in another of his publications on Yoga, the *Yoga-sāra*, that he is expounding the secrets of Sāṅkhya and Yoga as he himself directly experienced them.

In the sixteenth century, another Vedāntin, Rāmānanda Sarasvatī,⁶⁵ wrote his commentary, called *Yogamañi-prabhā*, which also adds little to the previous commentaries. But there are valuable insights contained in the final commentary considered for the present study, the *Bhāṣvatī* by Hariharānanda Āranya. While it is not always clear to what extent some of the commentators were practicing *yogīs* and to what extent they were scholastics, we can affirm that Hariharānanda certainly was a fully dedicated *yogī*.⁶⁶ From his early life, Hariharānanda lived a renounced, ascetic life as a *sannyasī*, including several years in solitude meditating in the caves of west India and the last twenty-one years of his life in a hermitage where he could be contacted by his disciples only through a window looking into a hall. Although he is technically a “modern” commentator (1869–1947), and this present commentary concerns itself with the premodern, that is, the commentaries of the precolonial period, it is included here because, as a Sāṅkhya *ācārya*, master, Hariharānanda inhabited a traditional universe in terms of his own personal perspectives of reality as well as in his lifestyle. His commentary adds useful insight to the Yoga tradition from a context nearer our own times; his is a standpoint exposed to Western thought but still thoroughly grounded in tradition.