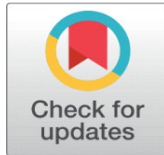
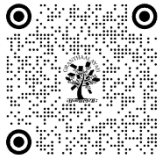


# CONTOURS OF EARLY INDIAN YOGA: A COMPARATIVE INQUIRY INTO VEDIC AND JAIN TRADITIONS

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## ABSTRACT

The origins and development of Yoga in early Indian civilization represent a dynamic confluence of ritual, philosophy, and soteriological inquiry. This paper undertakes a rigorous comparative analysis of two foundational streams of Indian spiritual praxis: the Vedic and the Jain traditions. Challenging the dominant historiographical narrative that centers Yoga solely within the Vedic or Pātañjala framework, the study foregrounds Jainism as a parallel and autonomous system of yogic thought and practice. Through a critical reading of key Jain texts such as Tattvārthasūtra, Samayasāra, Jñānārṇava, and Yogabindu, alongside core Vedic and Upaniṣadic references, the paper reveals how Jain yoga emphasizes ahimsā, karma-theory, kāyotsarga, and progressive detachment as the basis of a lifelong meditative discipline. The study also traces continuities and divergences across shared ascetic ideals within the broader Śramaṇa movement and the Upaniṣadic internalization of Vedic ritual. Furthermore, it maps the historical evolution of Jain yogic thought through its classical codifications and contemporary revivals like Prekṣā Dhyāna, Bhāvana Yoga, and Arham Yoga. By integrating textual exegesis, historical reconstruction, and doctrinal comparison, this paper offers a nuanced, pluralistic account of early Indian Yoga, positioning Jainism as not merely complementary to, but critically constitutive of, the subcontinent's yogic legacy.

**Keywords:** Jain Yoga, Vedic Tradition, Śramaṇa, Dhyāna, Tattvārthasūtra, Comparative Philosophy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Yoga has a long and multifaceted history, often regarded as a “subjective science” due to its introspective and experiential nature (Flood, 1996). Scholars continue to debate its precise origins, with multiple hypotheses pointing to distinct phases in early Indian civilization. Some propose beginnings in the Indus Valley Civilization (c. 3300 BCE),<sup>1</sup> where archaeological seals appear to depict meditative postures. Others highlight the pre-Vedic<sup>2</sup> cultural spheres or the Vedic period (c. 1500–500 BCE), particularly in the Upaniṣads, where early notions of asceticism and contemplation emerge. Moreover, the Śramaṇa traditions, including early Jain and Buddhist schools, are acknowledged for their foundational role in shaping yogic philosophy and techniques (Samuel, 2008). Each of these cultural-religious contexts contributed foundational elements to what later became codified forms of yoga.

<sup>1</sup> Crangle, Edward Fitzpatrick (1994), The Origin and Development of Early Indian Contemplative Practices, Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, Pp-6-7

<sup>2</sup> Zimmer, Heinrich (1951), Philosophies of India, New York, New York: Princeton University Press, ISBN 0-691-01758-1 Bollingen Series XXVI; Edited by Joseph Cambell. Pp 217,314

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

- Scholars like Gavin Flood (1996) caution against rigid dichotomies between Vedic and Śramaṇa (non-Brahmanical) traditions, emphasizing that renunciate ideals<sup>3</sup> such as asceticism, detachment, and introspection are found across both streams. Flood highlights that renunciation and the ideology of asceticism, while seemingly at odds with Vedic household norms, may actually share deep historical and philosophical continuities.
- Professor A. Chakravarti proposed that certain artifacts from Harappa and Mohenjodaro—particularly those depicting seated yogic postures and bulls—might symbolically represent the Jain Tīrthaṅkara Ṛṣabha. According to this interpretation, such imagery could point to a nascent tradition of ahiṃsā or nonviolence among the people of the Indus Valley Civilization, thus linking proto-Jain values with one of the oldest archaeological cultures in South Asia (Tobias, 1991).
- Similarly, Richard Lannoy (1974) argued that the nude yogi figures from Harappan art resemble later Jain motifs of ascetic nudity, meditation, and nonviolence. These interpretations suggest a continuity of ascetic and meditative traditions from pre-Vedic cultures into Jainism.
- The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali (2nd century BCE–4th century CE) systematized Yoga into a darśana (philosophical school), emphasizing chitta-vṛtti-nirodha (cessation of mental modifications). Though integrated into the broader Hindu philosophical corpus, the eightfold path (aṣṭāṅga yoga) bears notable parallels to Jain ethical and meditative frameworks.<sup>4</sup>
- Canonical texts such as Uttarādhyayana Sūtra, Ācārāṅga Sūtra, and Sūtrakṛtāṅga lay the groundwork for Jain soteriology, wherein Yoga is understood as ethical purification and experiential self-realization rather than mere physical or metaphysical speculation.
- According to the Tattvārthasūtra, Ācārya Umasvāti defines yoga as “the activities of mind, speech, and body” (manovacanakāya-yoga), which are considered the primary causes of āsrava, the influx of karmic particles that bind the soul (Umasvāti, trans. Tatia, 2011, 6.1–6.5). Interestingly, while these actions are seen as sources of bondage, their disciplined regulation through samyak cāritra (right conduct)—one of the three jewels (ratnatraya) of the Jain path—becomes a key to liberation (mokṣa).
- Furthermore, Ācārya Kundakunda, in his Niyamasāra, emphasizes yoga-bhakti, or unwavering devotion to the spiritual path, as the supreme expression of ascetic discipline and inner purification. He maintains that the true devotee practices inner detachment (viveka) and equanimity (samatā) through contemplative awareness (dhyāna) and ascetic discipline (Kundakunda, trans. Jain, 2004, verses 10–15).
- Samayasāra, Pravacanasāra (Ācārya Kundakunda): Emphasize inward detachment, soul-purity, and yoga-bhakti.
- Ācārya Haribhadra (8th c. CE) initiated comparative studies between Jain and Pātañjala Yoga, creating texts like Yogabindu and Yogadṛṣṭisamuccaya, which synthesized various systems without compromising Jain non-theism and ethical absolutism. Mainstream Hinduism’s influence on Jain yoga is evident in the works of Haribhadra, who formulated his eightfold yoga system and aligned it with Patañjali’s aṣṭāṅga yoga, while maintaining distinct Jain metaphysical foundations<sup>5</sup>.
- In the Jñānārṇava, Ācārya Śubhacandra outlines sixteen contemplative practices, asserting that “when one wakes up from the slumber of delusion and practices the virtues, supreme ecstasy sets in and truth then reveals itself” He further categorizes meditation (dhyāna) into four progressive forms—Piṇḍastha, Padastha, Rūpastha,

<sup>3</sup> Flood, Gavin D. (1996), *An Introduction to Hinduism*, Cambridge University Press, Pp77

<sup>4</sup> Whicher, Ian (2000), *The Integrity of the Yoga Darśana*, SUNY Press

<sup>5</sup> Haribhadrasūri, *Yogabindu, Yogadṛṣṭisamuccaya*

and Rūpātīta<sup>6</sup> each aimed at deepening mental absorption and purifying the mind-body complex through spiritual focus<sup>7</sup> (Śubhacandra, trans. Shah, 1994).

- Ācārya Hemacandra's *Yogaśāstra* (12th c.) further aligned Jain Yoga's eightfold path with Patañjali's, indicating an intercultural dialogue while retaining doctrinal independence.<sup>8</sup>
- As Worthington (1982) notes, "Yoga fully acknowledges its debt to Jainism, and Jainism reciprocates by making the practice of yoga part and parcel of life".<sup>9</sup>
- In recent centuries, Jain Yoga has seen a revival through teachers such as Ācārya Tulsi, Mahāprajña, and Muni Pramāṇa Sāgar, who developed Prekṣā Dhyāna, Bhāvanā Yoga, and Arham Yoga—meditation systems rooted in classical principles but adapted for modern spiritual and scientific sensibilities. These approaches integrate mindfulness, breath control, ethical reflection, and visualization to promote inner transformation

Century	Author	Text(s)	Citation
1st	Ācārya Kundakunda	<i>Samayasāra, Pravacanasāra, Niyamasāra</i>	(Kundakunda, trans. Jain, 2014)
2nd–3rd	Ācārya Umāsvāti	<i>Tattvārthasūtra</i>	(Umasvati, trans. Tatia, 1994)
4th–5th	Bhadrabāhu II	<i>Āvaśyaka Niryuṅkti</i>	(Dundas, 2002)
4th–5th	Pūjyapāda Devanandi	<i>Samādhi Tantra, Iṣṭopadeśa, Sarvārthasiddhi</i>	(Pujyapada, trans. Soni, 2016)
6th	Jinabhadragani	<i>Dhyāna Śataka</i>	(Jain, 2010)
8th	Ācārya Haribhadra	<i>Yoga Grantha Catuṣṭaya</i>	(Haribhadra, trans. Chapple & Yogi, 2003)
9th	Ācārya Jinasena	<i>Mahāpurāṇa</i>	(Jinasena, trans. Jain, 2011)
11th	Ācārya Rāmasena	<i>Tattvānuśāsana</i>	(Secondary citation recommended; see Balbir, 2006)
11th	Ācārya Śubhachandra	<i>Jñānārṇava</i>	(Shubh Chandra, trans. Shah, 1994)
11th	Somadeva Sūri	<i>Yogasāra</i>	(Dundas, 2002)
12th	Ācārya Hemacandra	<i>Yogaśāstra</i>	(Hemacandra, trans. Olivelle, 2002)
13th	Paṇḍit Āśādhara	<i>Ātmyātmā Rahasya</i>	(Jain, 2010)
15th	Sundarasūri	<i>Ātmyātmā Kalpadruma</i>	(Refer Jainendra Granthāvalī)
18th	Vinayavijayji	<i>Śāntasudhārāsa</i>	(Vinayvijayji, cited in Jain, 2010)
18th	Upādhyāya Yaśovijayaji	<i>Ātmyopaniṣad</i>	(Dundas, 2002)
20th–21st	Ācārya Tulsi & Ācārya Mahāprajña	<i>Manonushāsanam, 60+ books on Prekṣā Dhyāna</i>	(Tulsi & Mahaprajna, 2001)
21st	Muni Pramānsāgar	<i>Bhāvanā Yoga</i>	(Pramansagar, 2020)
21st	Muni Praṇamayasāgar	<i>Arhama Yoga</i>	(Praṇamayasāgar, 2021)
21st	Ācārya Nāneś	<i>Samikṣaṇa Dhyāna</i>	(Nanesh Foundation, 2020)
21st	Āryikā Jñānamati & Āryikā Chandnamati	<i>Triloka Dhyāna Paddhati</i>	(Gyanmati, 2012)

<sup>6</sup> Jñānarava – shlok-37-40

<sup>7</sup> Jñānarava – shlok-27-28

<sup>8</sup> Hemacandra, *Yogaśāstra*

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

### 3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- 1) To trace the historical and archaeological roots of yogic practices in early Indian civilizations, particularly examining evidence from the Indus Valley and its potential connections to both Vedic and Jain spiritual lineages.
- 2) To offer a critical comparative exploration of how Yoga is conceptualized in the Vedic and Jain traditions, with a focus on core principles such as renunciation, self-discipline, meditation (dhyāna), and ethical conduct.
- 3) To examine the role of the Śramaṇa movement—especially Jainism—as an independent and parallel stream in the development of early Yoga, distinct from but dialogically related to the Vedic tradition.
- 4) To analyze key Jain texts (e.g., Tattvārthasūtra, Samayasāra, Jñānārṇava, Yogabindu) to demonstrate how Jain ācāryas systematized a unique yogic soteriology grounded in karma theory, ahiṃsā, and soul-purification.
- 5) To explore the doctrinal and structural parallels and divergences between Jain Yoga and Pātañjala Yoga, particularly through the works of Ācāryas such as Haribhadrasūri and Hemacandra who engaged in cross-traditional synthesis.
- 6) To assess the historical evolution and continuity of Jain Yoga practices, from ancient asceticism and kāyotsarga to modern innovations like Prekṣā Dhyāna, Bhāvana Yoga, and Arham Yoga.
- 7) To challenge monolithic narratives that position Yoga solely within the Vedic-Hindu tradition, by foregrounding Jainism's sustained, systematized, and philosophically robust contributions to yogic thought and practice.

### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To undertake a comprehensive, scholarly comparative inquiry into the contours of early Indian Yoga as expressed in the Vedic and Jain traditions, the following multi-disciplinary methodology is proposed:

#### 1) Philosophical Analysis

##### Conceptual Categories: Compare core concepts:

- Jain: Ahiṃsā, kāyotsarga, leśyā, samvara, asrava, nirjarā, mokṣa.
- Vedic/Upaniṣadic: ṛta, brahman, ātman, nirodha, viveka, samādhi.

##### Methodological Focus:

- Use comparative philosophy to assess metaphysical pluralism.
- Analyze yoga as both praxis (sādhanā) and epistemology (jñāna).

#### 2) Doctrinal and Soteriological Mapping

- Liberation Models: Examine differing soteriologies—Jain kevala-jñāna vs. Vedāntic mokṣa and yogic kaivalya.
- Ethical Constructs: Juxtapose yamas and niyamas of Pātañjali with Jain mahāvratas and anuvratas.
- Body and Asceticism: Assess the role of the body in both traditions—from ritual soma offerings to tapas and kāyotsarga.

#### 3) Reception Studies and Modern Developments

- Continuity and Innovation: Trace the revival of Jain Yoga in modernity through Prekṣā Dhyāna, Bhāvana Yoga, and Arham Yoga.
- Pedagogical and Popular Transmissions: Analyze how Jain yoga has been adapted for global spiritual audiences while maintaining scriptural fidelity.

#### 4) Scholarly Engagement and Theoretical Frameworks

- Secondary Sources: Engage with Indological, historical, and philosophical scholarship—Flood, Lanny, Chakravarti, Samuel, Werne, etc.
- Theoretical Lenses:
- Religious Studies: Pluralism, dialogical theology, and non-theistic soteriology
- Comparative Religion: Inter-traditional dialogue and divergence

- Philosophy of Religion: Epistemic humility and metaphysical realism in spiritual praxis
- Ethical Considerations
- Avoid sectarian bias by treating both traditions with philosophical parity and contextual sensitivity.

Ensure accurate attribution and fidelity to original Sanskrit/Pāli/Prakrit sources.

## 5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND PRE-VEDIC ROOTS OF YOGA

The Harappan seals, dating back to 3000 BCE, feature figures in meditative postures that resemble later yogic iconography. At the time of the Mohenjo-daro excavations, Stuart Piggott observed, “There can be little doubt that we have the prototype of the great god Shiva as the Lord of the Beast (Pashupati) and prince of Yogis”<sup>10</sup> (Piggott, 1950, p. 122). This statement points toward the early existence of proto-Yogic practices within pre-Vedic Indian traditions. These practices—marked by asceticism, meditative stillness, and ethical renunciation—may have laid the groundwork for later developments in Vedic, Jain, and Buddhist philosophies.<sup>11</sup> Elements of such early yogic themes are also discernible in hymns of the Ṛgveda (RV 10.136), which refer to ascetic figures such as the Keśin, suggesting a shared heritage of contemplative and renunciation ideals across traditions.

## 6. VEDIC AND UPANIṢADIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO YOGA

The precise chronology of the earliest texts describing yogic practices remains debated among scholars. Some scholars trace the origins of yoga to early Hindu Upaniṣads,<sup>12</sup> while others point to notable references in the Buddhist Pāli Canon—both sets of texts likely dating to around the third century BCE or later (Werner, 1998). Within the Vedic tradition, yoga evolved through multiple phases:

Early Vedic Period: Ritual-centric, focused on sacrificial rites and cosmic order (ṛta).

Upaniṣadic Period: Shift toward internalization—meditation (dhyāna), self-inquiry (ātma-vicāra), and realization of Brahman.

Pātañjala Yoga: Systematized by Patañjali (circa 2nd century BCE to 4th century CE), Yoga became a formal philosophical system (Yoga Darśana), emphasizing chitta-vṛtti-nirodha (cessation of mental fluctuations).

The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali were later absorbed into mainstream Hindu metaphysics, but bear structural resemblances to ethical and meditative practices of Jainism and Buddhism, especially in the formulation of yamas and niyamas.

## 7. THE ŚRAMAṆA MOVEMENT AND THE RISE OF JAIN YOGA

The Śramaṇa movement, emerging in the same time frame as the Upaniṣadic shift (6th–5th centuries BCE), proposed radical alternatives to Brahmanical ritualism. Jainism—a key Śramaṇa tradition—emphasized:

- Karmic determinism
- Self-purification
- Ethical absolutism
- Rigorous asceticism

The first Tīrthaṅkara, Ṛṣabha, and his son Bahubali, are described in Jain Agamas as practicing intense kāyotsarga (body-abandonment) and dhyāna leading to liberation. Lord Mahāvīra’s own sādhanā centered on meditation, silence, and fasting for 12.5 years.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.hinduwisdom.info/Yoga\\_and\\_Hindu\\_Philosophy.htm/](http://www.hinduwisdom.info/Yoga_and_Hindu_Philosophy.htm/)

<sup>11</sup> Samuel 2008, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Singleton (2010), *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice*, Oxford University Press, ISBN 978-0-19-539534-1, pages 25–34

## 8. FOUR HISTORICAL PERIODS OF JAIN YOGA DEVELOPMENT

Based on insights drawn from both Āgamika (canonical) and post-Āgamika (later) Jain literature, scholars have broadly categorized Jain dhyāna-yoga sādhanā (meditative discipline) into four historical phases, each reflecting doctrinal and practical developments within the tradition<sup>13</sup>.

Phases	Timeline	Key Features
I. Mahāvīra to Kundakunda	6th BCE–1stCE	Kayotsarga, Bhāvanā, Vipassanā, Vicāra
II. Kundakunda to Haribhadra	1st CE – 8thCE	Scriptural codification, soteriological focus
III. Haribhadra to Yashovijay	8th–18thCE	Ācārya Haribhadra played a pivotal role by systematically comparing Jaina Yoga with Pātañjala Yoga, resulting in the composition of several significant treatises that bridged these traditions <sup>14</sup> .
IV. Yashovijay to Present	18th–21st CE	Bhakti influence, revivalist Prekṣā and modern Yoga systems

## 9. CONTEMPORARY JAIN YOGA INNOVATIONS

Modern Jainism offers practical methods rooted in ancient texts:

- Ācārya Tulsi and Ācārya Mahāprajña, the ninth and tenth leaders of the Jain Terāpanth order in the 21st century CE, were instrumental in rejuvenating and formalizing Prekṣā Dhyāna,<sup>15</sup> an ancient Jain meditative system—by framing it as a scientifically credible approach to inner transformation and ethical living. It combines breath awareness, color visualization (leśyā dhyāna), body scanning, and emotional purification.
- Bhāvana Yoga (by Muni Pramāṇa Sāgar): Integrates twelve reflections with breath-based meditation and ethical visualization integration of cognitive-behavioral ethics. Jain Yoga places emphasis on contemplative reflections (bhāvanā) to cultivate detachment, self-awareness, and ethical discipline. The twelve bhāvanās include:
  - 1) Anitya (Impermanence) – Understanding all things are transient.
  - 2) Aśaraṇa (Helplessness) – Realizing that no one can save the soul except the self.
  - 3) Ekatva (Aloneness) – The soul is ultimately alone in its journey.
  - 4) Anyatva (Otherness) – The body is different from the soul.
  - 5) Saṃsāra (Cycle of Births) – Reflecting on the suffering inherent in worldly existence.
  - 6) Loka (Cosmos) – Understanding one’s place in the vast universe.
  - 7) Aśuci (Impurity) – The physical body is impure, unlike the soul.
  - 8) Āsrava (Influx of Karma) – Reflecting on how actions attract karmic matter.
  - 9) Saṃvara (Stopping Karma) – Contemplation on halting karmic influx.
  - 10) Nirjarā (Shedding Karma) – How to eliminate accumulated karma.
  - 11) Dharmasvākhyaṭa (Right Faith) – Reflecting on the teachings of the Tirthankaras.
  - 12) Bodhi-durlabha (Rarity of Enlightenment) – Awareness of how rare liberation is.
- Arham Yoga (by Muni Prāṇamaya Sāgar): A synthesis of spirituality and science; includes chanting “Arham” to align mind and soul.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Yoga In Jain Tradition-Dr Pryadarshna ,ISJS study material

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.preksha.com/meditation/preksha225meditation.asp>

- Women ascetics (āryikās) like Āryikā Gyanmati and Āryikā Chandnamati have contributed significantly to Jain Yoga:

Newer meditative systems like Samikshan Dhyān, Trilok Dhyān Paddhati.

Lead meditation workshops, spiritual retreats, and scriptural commentaries.

Represent a lineage of female spiritual leadership, upholding the meditative and scholarly tradition of Jain yoga.

## 10. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: JAIN YOGA VS. PĀTAÑJALA YOGA

Jainism emphasizes five Mahāvratas (great vows) that mirror Patañjali's Yamas:

- 1) Ahimsā (non-violence)
- 2) Satya (truthfulness)
- 3) Asteya (non-stealing)
- 4) Brahmacharya (celibacy)
- 5) Aparigraha (non-possession)

**Jainism and Yoga Sūtras both emphasize:**

- Ethical purification
- Detachment
- Mind control
- Liberation as self-realization (kevala-jñāna / kaivalya)

Unlike Pātañjala Yoga which is mainly meditative, Jain Yoga includes ritual acts:

- Samayika (daily meditation with vows)
  - Pratikramaṇa (repentance and self-review)
  - Pūjā and pradakṣiṇā combined with breath awareness and mantric recitation
- These rituals aim at mental purification, karmic shedding, and inner awakening.

**For Jain householders, yoga is not confined to formal meditation:**

- Ethical living, mindful speech, diet, and behavior form integral yogic practices.
- Shravakācāra (householder conduct) and Mūlācāra (monastic code) are living manuals of yoga.
- Yoga in Jainism is 24x7 mindfulness, not limited to seated dhyāna.

## 11. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: JAIN YOGA VS. BUDDHIST MEDITATION

While both Jain and Buddhist systems value meditation and detachment:

- Jain Yoga is non-theistic but soul-centric, aiming at kevalajñāna (omniscience).
- Buddhist Vipassanā seeks anattā (non-self) and nirvāṇa (cessation).
- Jainism emphasizes karma as matter, to be eliminated through stillness (kāyotsarga), while Buddhism focuses on mental formations. Despite overlap, the metaphysical and doctrinal goals diverge significantly.

## 12. JAIN YOGA AND SCIENCE: A CONTEMPORARY DIALOGUE

Modern interpretations of Jain Yoga intersect with neuroscience and psychology:

- Studies on Prekṣā Meditation show benefits in stress reduction, emotional regulation, and mental clarity.
- Jain views on mind-body connection, cellular karma theory, and vibrations of the soul find new resonance in quantum biology and consciousness studies.
- Jain Yoga is increasingly taught in clinical settings, schools, and mindfulness programs globally.

### 13. CONCLUSION

This study challenges the narrow view that equates yoga solely with Hindu or Pātañjala models. Jain Yoga, with its emphasis on ahiṃsā, karma-shedding, soul purification, and lifelong ethical discipline, is a systematic and original path. From Harappan motifs to Prekṣā Dhyāna, Jainism offers a comprehensive yogic worldview that continues to evolve while retaining its ancient roots.

### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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