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Invited Paper

## Culturally Rooted Timeline of Yoga and Indian Culture

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### Abstract

*This paper critiques prevailing academic methodologies used to establish the history and chronology of Yoga and ancient Indian civilization, arguing that the imposition of an external scholarly framework subtly reduces a "timeless heritage" to arbitrary, recent timelines. Traditional Indian cultural narratives, which place the Vedas as at least 10,000 years old and contextualize figures like Lord Krishna 5,000 years ago, derive their authority from continuous oral, scriptural, and experiential transmission (Parampara). However, modern Western institutional demands for "peer-reviewed validation" often lead to the systemic dismissal of living traditions and Shastras as authoritative knowledge, constituting a profound process of epistemic colonization. This reductionism divorces Yoga from its foundational identity as an expression of Sanātana Dharma—the Eternal Law—treating it instead as a mere recent invention or a "wellness tool." Furthermore, the structure of academic authority, when built upon historically flawed initial assumptions, amplifies error and leads to a distorted understanding of Yoga frequently authored by those who lack the necessary lived experience. Ultimately, the integrity of Yoga requires its re-rooting within the Indian civilizational context, demanding cultural appreciation and humility from practitioners.*

**Keywords:** Yoga History, Epistemic Colonization, Academic Reductionism, Parampara, Cultural Appreciation

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### Introduction

The question of when Yoga began is not merely a matter of dates—it is a matter of perspective. Too often, our ancient Indian timelines are interpreted through lenses foreign to our culture. I have long questioned the academic narrative being created by western scholars to reduce our timeless heritage to a few thousand years of recorded history.

According to traditional Indian understanding, Kali Yuga began the day Lord Krishna left his mortal body—a time at least 5,000 years ago. <sup>i</sup> Some traditions hold that the Mahabharata War itself marks this transition. Either way, the life and teachings of Lord Krishna cannot be placed at a mere couple of hundred after Christ, as many modern historians claim.

To me, such reductionism is not scholarship—it is intellectual arrogance. These arbitrary timelines are disconnected from the living continuity of Indian civilization. Our cultural chronology must be respected, for it arises not from fragmented evidence but from continuous oral, scriptural, and experiential transmission.

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## Indian Cultural Ethos and the Flow of Time

Our cultural understanding places Rama’s era before Krishna’s. This is not a casual convention; it reflects the evolution of Dharma in our consciousness.

By this reckoning, the Yoga Vashishta—the dialogue between Sage Vashishta and Lord Rama—naturally pre-dates the Bhagavad Gita. This places its origin at least 6,000 to 7,000 years ago by our traditional accounts. Many astronomical correlations substantiate these assertions and hence must be considered seriously.<sup>ii</sup>

Modern academic historians, however, often dismiss such reckoning, preferring to date the Vedas at around 3,500 years ago. In contrast, every spiritual lineage in India has known for millennia that the Vedas are at least 10,000 years old, perhaps even older. <sup>iii</sup> The challenge is not a lack of data, but a lack of respect for our ways of knowing.

We live in a time when Western institutional frameworks demand “peer-reviewed validation,” while refusing to acknowledge the authority of Shastras, Parampara, or living oral wisdom. This results in a subtle, insidious but deep epistemic colonization of Indian thought.

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## The Persistence of Colonial Bias

Even today, the shadow of Eurocentrism looms large. History books still tell us that Australian history began with Captain Cook, that Goa’s history began with Vasco da Gama, as if civilizations did not exist before Europeans “discovered” them.

I often remind my students that Columbus set out to find India—for India represented not just wealth and spices, but the very heart of world culture and wisdom. Yet today, we are taught about ourselves through the same foreign gaze that once sought to exploit us.

This rewriting of history—where ancient India becomes a footnote to European discovery—is nothing less than cultural erasure.

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## Yoga and Its True Timeline

Yoga is not a recent system of exercise or relaxation. It is an expression of Sanātana Dharma—the Eternal Law of the Universe. When Yoga is studied through modern, Western frameworks that divorce it from this foundation, it loses its soul.

Modern Yoga education must therefore be re-rooted in the Indian civilizational context. Our students must know that Yoga is as old as the Vedas themselves, that it evolved through the wisdom of countless generations of Rishis, not through modern academic institutions.

In this context, I have often cited the valuable work of Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani (Ammaji), who has consistently aligned Yoga history with India’s spiritual and cultural timeline. <sup>iv</sup> Her approach honors the continuity of Sanātana Dharma rather than treating Yoga as a recent invention or a mere “wellness tool.”

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## Reflections on Academic Structures

As someone who has published over 400 scientific papers, I know how academia functions. Academic authority is built through chains of citation—each paper referencing earlier works, creating a network of mutual validation.

However, if the initial assumptions are flawed, this system only amplifies error. In time, nonsense becomes truth through repetition. This is precisely what has happened in the field of modern Yoga studies, where those who lack lived experience of Yoga become its so-called authorities, merely because their work is cited frequently.

The result is a distorted understanding of Yoga—one that excludes Indian voices and decontextualizes its spirit.

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## A Lesson from Shavasana

I recall our research on Shavasana—the Corpse Pose. <sup>v</sup> In Indian tradition, the body of the deceased is placed with the head to the North. Shavasana, being a simulation of conscious death, honours this symbolism in order to “simulate” the experience of “death” without dying.

When we attempted to publish this culturally rooted insight, reviewers asked for “references.” Our citations from Shastras and oral traditions were dismissed as “unscientific.” This reflects a systemic blindness in modern academia—one that cannot

recognize living traditions as valid sources of knowledge.

True science, however, must be inclusive of all human wisdom traditions. When it dismisses entire civilizations' knowledge systems, it ceases to be science—it becomes dogma.

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## Trust in the Sādhaka

The preservation of authentic Yoga cannot be outsourced to universities, governments, or institutions. These are necessary structures, but the spirit of Yoga lives only through the Sādhaka—the sincere practitioner who embodies it.

It is the Yogi's responsibility to transmit Yoga in its full cultural, spiritual, and historical context. Only through such grounded transmission can Yoga remain a force for awakening rather than appropriation.

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## Cultural Appreciation over Appropriation

If one truly wishes to practice Yoga, one must honor its roots. Cultural appreciation requires humility—a willingness to listen, to learn, and to acknowledge the depth of India's civilizational continuity.<sup>vi</sup>

When Yoga is torn from its source culture, it becomes diluted, distorted, and ultimately commercialized. But when it is practiced as part of Sanātana Dharma, it becomes a living path to Divine Consciousness.

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<sup>i</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kali\\_Yuga](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kali_Yuga)

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.vifindia.org/transcriptions-paper/2012/07/03/scientific-dating-of-ancient-events-from-7000-bc-to-2000-bc>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.dailyexcelsior.com/vedas-for-everyone/>

<sup>iv</sup> [http://icyer.com/documents/History\\_of\\_yoga\\_Ammaji.pdf](http://icyer.com/documents/History_of_yoga_Ammaji.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> [https://www.academia.edu/34508802/Review\\_of\\_Shava](https://www.academia.edu/34508802/Review_of_Shava)

Yoga, in truth, is not two or three thousand years old—it is as old as humanity's first aspiration toward wholeness. It is not a system to be studied; it is a way of being to be lived.

Let us, therefore, reclaim the integrity of our tradition by aligning Yoga once more with its rightful place—within the eternal flow of Indian time and consciousness.

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## Conclusion

The true essence of Yoga demands that we embrace its deep roots, recognizing it as an expression of Sanātana Dharma, the timeless law, rather than just a recent physical trend. We must challenge the academic tendency to reduce this "timeless heritage" to arbitrary, recent dates, which decontextualizes Yoga and strips it of its spiritual soul, often amplifying distortions when authorities lack lived experience. Practically, this means cultivating cultural appreciation and respect for the Parampara—the continuous transmission of wisdom that acknowledges the Vedas' antiquity and the traditional timelines of figures like Lord Krishna. We must accept that living traditions and Shastras hold valid knowledge, resisting the epistemic colonization that dismisses them, and remember that the preservation of authentic Yoga ultimately rests not with institutions, but with the *Sādhaka*, the sincere practitioner, whose responsibility is to live and transmit Yoga in its full cultural, spiritual, and historical context.

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<sup>vi</sup> <https://yogavani.info/2025/04/26/yoga-and-cultural-appreciation/>