

ARTIBUS ASIAE

REPRINT FROM
VOL. XLVIII, 1/2



MCMLXXXVII

ARTIBUS ASIAE PUBLISHED IN ASCONA, SWITZERLAND, FOR
THE ARTHUR M. SACKLER FOUNDATION AND
THE AMS FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS, SCIENCES, AND HUMANITIES
WASHINGTON, D. C.

ARTIBUS ASIAE VOLUMEN XLVIII,1/2

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THE INDUS VALLEY ORIGIN OF A YOGA PRACTICE

For a long time it was thought that the Aryan tribes who came to South Asia somewhere around 1500 B.C. completely dominated the indigenous populations. Many scholars even today believe that Indian religions and cultural traits are rooted in Aryan/Vedic traditions. The excavations by M.S. Vats at Harappa and by John Marshall at Mohenjo-daro in the 1920s and 1930s provided evidence that seriously challenged the above concepts. Before these discoveries nobody could think that five thousand years ago, long before Indo-European tribes were heard of, India was enjoying an advanced urban civilization, very similar but in many aspects superior to that of contemporary Mesopotamia and Egypt. The discoveries at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro have proved that the Indus people of five-four thousand years ago possessed a highly developed culture in which not a trace of Indo-European influence is to be found.¹

In the introduction to his monumental work *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization*, John Marshall wrote:

“Again and again, there is nothing that we know of in prehistoric Egypt or Mesopotamia or anywhere else in Western Asia to compare with the well-built baths in commodious houses of the citizens of Mohenjo-daro. In those countries money and thought were lavished on the building of magnificent temples for the gods and the palaces and tombs of kings, but the rest of the people seemingly had to content themselves with insignificant dwellings in mud. In the Indus Valley, the picture is reversed and the finest structures are those erected for the convenience of the citizens. Palaces and tombs there may of course have been, but if so, they either are still undiscovered or so like other edifices as not to be readily distinguishable from them . . . The Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro and its roomy and serviceable houses, with their ubiquitous wells and bathrooms and elaborate systems of drainage, evidence that the ordinary townspeople enjoyed here a degree of comfort and luxury unexampled in other parts of the then civilized world.

Equally peculiar to the Indus Valley and stamped with an individual character of their own are its arts and its religion. Nothing that we know of in other countries at this period bears any resemblance, in point of style, to their Art. Taken as a whole, their religion is so characteristically Indian as hardly to be distinguishable from still living Hinduism or at least from that aspect of it which is bound up with animism and the cults of Śiva and Mother Goddess – still two most popular worships.”²

Half a century later the Indus civilization still presents an enigma, mainly because the racial and linguistic identities of the population have not been determined. Various

¹ Marshall 1931: vol. I, p. v.

² *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. v–vii.

scholars have tried to interpret the script, but none of the inscriptions are long enough for comprehensive analysis.

Apart from the technological accomplishments of the Indus civilization, nothing has created so much attention as its religious tradition. Although no temples or places of worship have been identified positively, Marshall and many subsequent scholars believed that Hinduism had its roots in the Indus Valley Civilization. Based on a few material remains and especially the so-called "Proto-Śiva" seals Marshall concluded that among many revelations of Mohenjo-daro, "nothing is more significant than the discovery that Śaivism has a history of five thousand years or perhaps even earlier and therefore it is the longest living faith in the world."³

About 2500 steatite seals and other inscriptions have been discovered; of special interest have been the "Proto-Śiva" seals. Only a few of these seals were unearthed by J. Marshall and E. Mackay, who identified the seated image on them as Śiva, depicted as Mahāyogi and Paśupati.⁴ Ramprasad Chanda went even further, suggesting that other Brahmanic gods were present there and worshipped by the Indus people.⁵ Later, Saletore thought that the image on the most famous "Proto-Śiva" seal #420, is of Agni rather than Śiva.⁶ His view was opposed by A. Aiyappan who analyzed the head-dress of the deity on the #420 seal and thought that the horns are suggestive of the trident and the fertility aspect of Śiva.⁷ As time went by opinions became more and more diverse. A.G. Moraes questioned Marshall's idea that the figure possessed Śiva's attributes.⁸ K.N. Śastri reexamined Seal #420 and concluded that "the god is neither three-faced nor even human-faced. He is a combination of various animals."⁹ Sullivan stated that the Indus religion was most likely centered around a Mother Goddess cult, and thought that the figure on the seals was a female.¹⁰

Today opinions are divided more than ever. Hildebeitel thinks that the figure, which he sees as buffalo-headed, represents the god, and his connection with sacrificial themes would thus show him as a divine counterpart to the Goddess.¹¹ A. Parpola goes further than others, suggesting that the antiquity of Hinduism over Vedism can be demonstrated independently of the Indus Valley material and without the decipherment of the Indus script.¹² Doris Srinivasan on the other hand thinks that the theory that Śaivism arose out of a non-Aryan context is invalid and may be dropped.¹³ She opposes the view that "Proto-Śiva" seals indeed portray Śiva. In her view nothing in the posture or surrounding symbols indicates that the figure is Śiva. She proposes that the deity depicted on the seal #420 could be a divine bull-man. "For a moment only one thing

³ Marshall 1931, vol. I, p. vii.

⁴ Mackay 1938, vol. I, p. 336.

⁵ Chanda 1932, p. 159.

⁶ Saletore 1938, p. 34.

⁷ Aiyappan 1939, p. 404.

⁸ Moraes 1939, p. 445.

⁹ Śastri 1957, p. 17.

¹⁰ Sullivan 1964, p. 125.

¹¹ Hildebeitel 1978, p. 789.

¹² Parpola 1971, p. 240.

¹³ Srinivasan 1983, p. 555.

seems clear to those who have studied and commented upon the seal in the last few years – the figure can no longer be considered a “Proto-Śiva”.¹⁴ Her conclusion can be challenged. On the basis of the technologically advanced and urban civilization which lasted for several hundred years in the Indus Valley, and taking in consideration numerous artifacts discovered at the cities of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, we may assume that many of the Indus cults were assimilated into Aryan practices. There is a tendency among modern scholars to look at the modern tribes as the remaining links with the pre-Aryan civilization of India. J. Marshall raised his objections to such views:

“A mistake, as it seems to me, that has too often been made, has been to take the modern jungle tribes as the lineal representatives of the pre-Aryans and to assume that they have perpetuated all that is worth perpetuating of the cultural and religious traditions of the latter. India has always had her jungle tribes. She had them five thousand years ago, as she has them today. But side by side with them she also had her cultural classes of the cities, and the gulf between the two was probably as great then as it is now. To assume, as so many have done, that jungle tribes of today represent the sum-total of pre-Aryan religion is as irrational as to suppose that the rude grass and mud hovels of these same jungle tribes are representative of the massive edifices of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa.”¹⁵

The controversy surrounding interpretation of the Indus Valley artifacts may continue until more significant and understandable material remains are found; or even more importantly, until the Indus script is deciphered. Nevertheless, while headdress, animals, and other symbols depicted on the “Proto-Śiva” seals may be given various interpretations, there is one aspect of these seal representations which has been overlooked, namely the posture itself. This posture has never been carefully examined or properly identified.

This paper proposes that Yoga was known and practiced by the people of the Indus Valley civilization. In this paper I shall identify the posture depicted on the so-called “Proto-Śiva” seals. I shall demonstrate the significance of this posture according to classical Yoga texts and modern authorities as well. Additional evidence will be brought out to support the proposed thesis.

*Five “Proto-Śiva” Seals from Mohenjo-daro:
discovered by J. Marshall and E. Mackay*

1. Seal # 420 (Fig. 1) is the best known of the seals. These seals were cut with a saw, then finished first with a knife or chisel, and finally with an abrasive. The carvings were done with a small chisel. This and seals # 222 and # 235 have a perforated boss in the back. The holes that perforate the bosses always run in the direction of the animal body so that when the seal is suspended on a cord the animal always assumes a normal position. It seems that beside being cut and engraved, seals were treated in some way

¹⁴ Srinivasan 1984, p. 81.

¹⁵ Marshall 1931, vol. I, p. 78.

with a protective coat.¹⁶ These seals date to the mature phase of the Indus civilization, toward the end of the third millennium B.C.

Seal # 420 depicts a human figure seated on a low platform; the posture is erect and frontal. His arms are outstretched and his hands with thumbs in front are placed on the knees. His soles and heels are joined together and the toes point downwards. So actually the body rests on the toes and knees. The lower limbs are bare and some scholars think that the phallus is exposed, but Mackay pointed out that what appears to be the phallus is in reality the end of the waistband.¹⁷ The arms are covered with bangles and the chest and neck of the figure are covered with ornament. Marshall considered this figure to be three-faced; however the lateral "faces" could be the artist's depiction of the ears. An elephant and a tiger are on the upper right and a rhinoceros and a buffalo on the left of the seated figure. Beneath the platform are two deer. Above the tiger is a stylized human figure. The head-dress consists of huge, curved horns attached to a high, flaring central piece. Aiyappan thinks that the horns are suggestive of Śiva's trident.¹⁸ Above the figure, across the top of the seal, there is an inscription of seven characters. Soviet archaeologists think that this seal was the property of a high government official.¹⁹

2. *Seal # 222 (Fig. 2)* This seal, discovered by E. Mackay at Mohenjo-daro, is almost perfectly square with a very few carved details. Unlike seal # 420, there are no animal figures present, and only five inscribed signs above. The position of the figure is exactly the same as on seal # 420; it is even more graphically represented. A figure is seated on a low dais similar to the one depicted on # 420, except that in this case the supports of the dais are shaped like the legs of a bull. The posture is frontal, both heels are pressed against each other, and the knees rest on the platform. The arms are covered with bangles and the hands rest on the knees with the thumbs in front. The position of the body, arms, hands, legs, and feet is clearly defined. "The head-dress is a twig with leaves like that of the pipal. The horns, if indeed they are horns, are definitely separate from the head and are represented as fastened to the base of the twig."²⁰ It is possible that the head-dress may also be a pictographic sign and therefore a part of the whole inscription. Like seal # 420 it has a perforated boss on the back, so it may have been worn by its owner, perhaps suspended from a necklace.

3. *Seal # 235 (Fig. 3)* About one third is missing but it clearly had a perforated boss on the back. There are few pictographic signs present. The head-dress is similar to the one on seal # 222 and similarly the arms are covered with bangles. The piece has one interesting detail: it shows how the hair was worn, hanging in a long pig-tail on one side of the head; we can't see how it ends because the seal has been broken. It suggests some relationship to the pig-tailed human figures seen here on Fig. 18. It is not possible to distinguish a dais on which the figure is seated, however, the posture is identical to

¹⁶ Mackay 1938, vol. , p. 347.

¹⁷ Mackay 1935, p. 70.

¹⁸ Aiyappan 1939, p. 406.

¹⁹ Kusichin 1979, p. 295.

²⁰ Mackay 1938, vol. I, p. 335.

the one on seals # 420 and # 222. The hands rest on the knees, and the soles of the feet are pressed together with the toes pointed downward. The whole body appears to rest on the knees and toes. The posture is erect and frontal.

4. *Small faience amulet or sealing (Fig. 4)* It was first published by J. Marshall.²¹ This sealing has inscriptions on both both sides; the characters on the back are very unclear. On the front side we can see a figure sitting on a low platform, flanked by two kneeling figures. Two huge cobras are depicted in a symmetrical manner, one behind each of the kneeling worshippers. Although the images on this seal are not clearly defined, it bears three additional important details:

Absence of head-dress on all three human figures; presence of the two kneeling figures whose leg and arm positions are very similar to the depictions of worshippers in later Indian art; presence of snakes.

Marshall thought that the images of snakes on this seal might represent a nāga cult (unknown in the Vedic age, but prominent in later Indian literature from the time of the Sūtras onwards). The motif of nāgas doing homage to a deity is a favorite one in Indian art.²²

The posture of the seated figure on this seal is again identical to the posture depicted on the three seals described above.

5. *Mohenjo-daro triangular prism amulet or sealing (Fig. 5)* This seal, housed in the Department of Eastern Art, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, was published recently by D. Srinivasan.²³ The images on this seal are quite blurry; nevertheless, again we can see clearly a figure seated on a low dais. It does not have a head-dress; like the figure on seal # 420, it is surrounded by four animals; however they cannot be clearly identified. There are also an animal image and a few characters of script on the other two sides of this object. The posture is identical to that on the other four seals.

Over the years, a great deal has been written on these "Proto-Śiva" seals. Various aspects have been studied in great detail; however, very little has been written about the posture of the seated figure. Marshall and a few other writers correctly recognized this posture as "yogic posture". Nevertheless this particular posture has never been properly identified or analyzed. Some scholars have even suggested that the pose seems to be natural enough and need not be yogic at all.²⁴ It is most likely that none of those who share this opinion has ever tried to sit in this fashion; otherwise they would have found that it is not exactly a "natural mode of sitting". Even among people who practice Yoga, there are only a few who can do this. It is an extremely difficult *āsana*.

Doris Srinivasan concludes that the posture depicted on the seal # 420 is *Padmāsana*.²⁵ She is obviously wrong, because *Padmāsana* is a very different posture (Fig. 8). In

²¹ Marshall 1931, vol. II, pl. CXVLI, p. 29.

²² Marshall 1931, vol. I, p. 68.

²³ Srinivasan 1976, p. 55

²⁴ Sullivan 1964, p. 120.

²⁵ Srinivasan 1983, p. 40.

Padmāsana each foot is placed on the opposite thigh.²⁶ Banerjea incorrectly identified it as *Kūrmāsana*.²⁷ *Kūrmāsana* means “a posture of a tortoise;” in it both feet are turned outward and the body rests on the ankles.²⁸ Fig. 9 shows one variation of *Kūrmāsana*.

In the most authoritative text on Yoga, Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtra*, Patañjali defines posture or *āsana*.²⁹ Vyasa in his commentary on the *sūtra* gives a few examples of *āsanas*; Vachaspati gives a few more in his commentary, including *Bhadrāsana*, which means “an auspicious posture”. He says that the soles of the feet should be brought near to each other and close to the scrotum.³⁰ *Bhadrāsana* comes close to the posture depicted on the “Proto-Śiva” seals. In it, however, one sits on one’s ankles while the toes are pointed outward.³¹ In the posture shown on the seals the whole body rests on the knees and toes, which point downward and slightly backward. After careful examination of the seals I have identified this posture as *Mūlabandhāsana* (Figs. 10–15). Professor T. Krishnamacharya, a descendant of the South Indian yogi Nathamuni, and a well-known authority on Yoga, sits in *Mūlabandhāsana* in a manner strikingly similar to the figure on the “Proto-Śiva” seals (Fig. 7). The photograph was taken in the 1930’s. One of his students, B.K. Iyengar, describes the technique of getting into this posture in the following words: (1977, p. 344)

1. Sit in *Baddhakonāsana* (Fig. 10).
2. Insert the hands between the thighs and the calves and hold the feet, each with its respective hand.
3. Join the soles and heels. Raise the heels, keep the toes on the ground and drag the feet near the perineum (Fig. 11).
4. Hold this position and move the hands, so that the palms rest on the back of the hips (Fig. 12).
5. Lift the body off the floor with the help of the hands and move the hips forward (Fig. 13), simultaneously turning the feet and the knees to push the heels forward without moving (Fig. 14 and Fig. 15).
6. Rest the body on the toes and knees.

We can see that even for the practitioners of Yoga it is not easy to hold this position.

Now that the posture depicted on the “Proto-Śiva” seals has been identified; it seems worthwhile to take a look at the role of *Mūlabandhāsana* in Yoga practice.

The word is a nominal compound consisting of three words: *Āsana* – “posture”, is derived from the Sanskrit root *as* – “to sit”. “Sitting in a peculiar posture”. *Bandha* is derived from the Sanskrit root *bandh* –to bind, to re-

²⁶ *Hathayogapradīpikā* 1972, p. 17.

²⁷ Banerjea 1956, p. 159.

²⁸ *Cherandā Sambhāṣā* 1914, p. 17.

²⁹ *Yoga Sūtra* 1980, (II-46).

³⁰ *Yoga Sūtra* 1924, II, p. 47.

³¹ *Hathayogapradīpikā* 1972, II, p. 53.



Fig. 1 Mohenjo-daro seal # 420 *National Museum of Pakistan, Karachi*; from Marshall, 1931

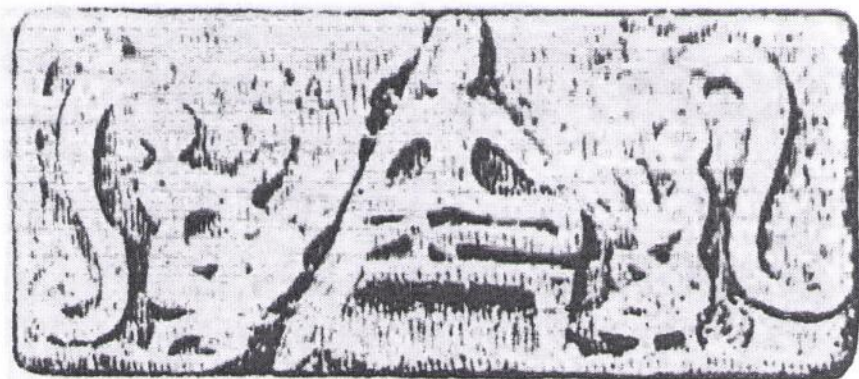


Fig. 4 Mohenjo-daro faience sealing; from Mackay, 1938



Fig. 2 Mohenjo-daro seal # 222; from Banerjea, 1956



Fig. 5 Mohenjo-daro triangular prism sealing. *Department of Far Eastern Art, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford*; from Marshall, 1931





Fig. 18 So-called "Goddess in the Tree," Mohenjo-daro seal # 430; from Sir John Marshall, *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization*, Delhi, 1931

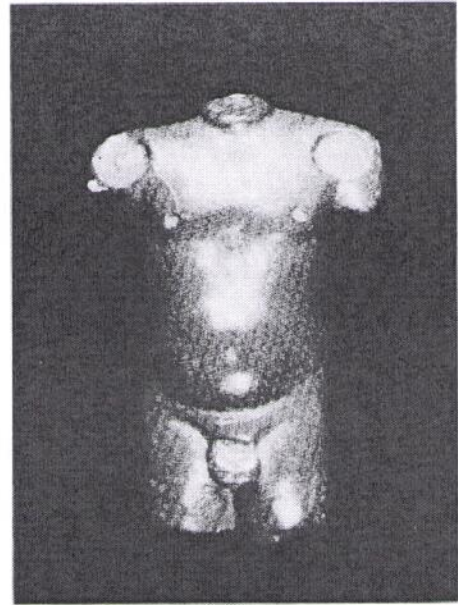


Fig. 19 Statuette of red stone from Harappa, from Marshall, *Mohenjo-daro*

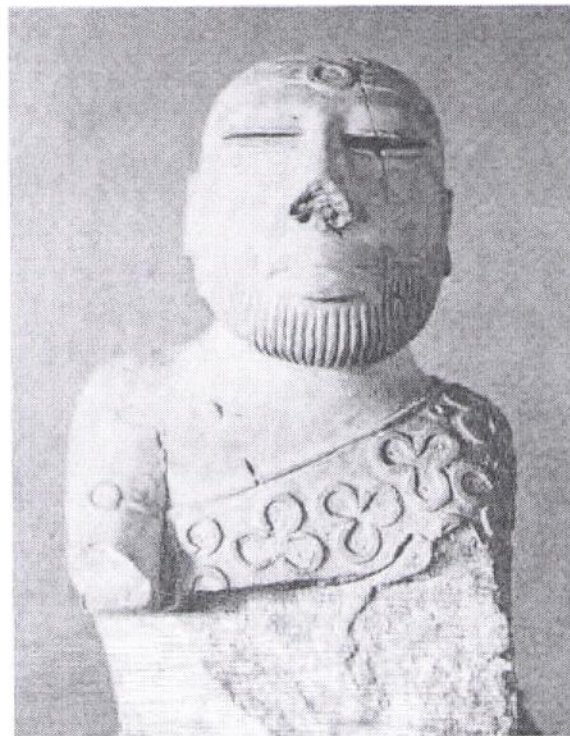


Fig. 20 The head of the male statue, from Marshall, *Mohenjo-daro*

strict," therefore *bandha* is "restriction" or "contraction". *Mūla* – "firmly-fixed, a root, the bottom of anything."³² In Yoga *mūla* pertains to the area of the lower abdomen and the base of the spine.

Mūlabandha is a particular technique and consequently *Mūlabandhāsana* is a "posture for the *Mūlabandhāsana*".

In order to have some understanding of the function of the *Mūlabandhāsana* in Yoga it is necessary to have an idea of what it is. Full understanding requires an extensive explanation and a thorough analysis of the various texts on Yoga, and is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, a brief overview of a few important concepts of Yoga will suffice for our purposes. These concepts are: *prāṇa*, *kuṇḍaliṇī*, and *bandhas*.

Prāṇa is "vital breath", it also means "that which is constantly present everywhere". T.K.V. Desikachar, an authority on Yoga, explains the concept in the following passage:

The breath is constantly coming from somewhere within the middle of us. As long as it is there we are not dead. It is almost as if *prāṇa* is radiating from the center all through the body and a little beyond. *Prāṇa*, mind, and breath are interrelated. That is why the pulse rate increases and breathing becomes faster when we are excited, and why breathing becomes very deep and the pulse is quiet when we are relaxed. The mind/breath relationship is an evident fact. Tradition tells us that an unsteady person, one who is confused, has more *prāṇa* beyond the body than within it. When *prāṇa* is not able to enter our bodies, it is because something is there that should not be. The *Yoga Sūtra* uses the word *klesā*, "defilement", but let us call it "dirt." The more a person is content or at ease, the more *prāṇa* is within. The more a person is disturbed, the more *prāṇa* is scattered. In fact, one of the definitions of the word *Yogi* is "one whose *prāṇa* is within the body". If the *prāṇa* is not within the body, one is not a yogi.³³

Consequently the goal of Yoga practice is to reduce the measure of *prāṇa* outside the body and to increase it inside.

Kuṇḍaliṇī: "an earring, something bent, a coiled snake."³⁴ According to Yoga there are many *nāḍīs* or channels inside the body. Through these passages *prāṇa* fluctuates. It is the presence of "dirt" inside them that obstructs *prāṇa* from entering. The aim of Yoga is to remove these blockages so *prāṇa* can enter. Three of the most important *nāḍīs* are *idā*, on the left, *piṅgalā* on the right, and *suṣumṇā* at the center. Usually *prāṇa* enters only through the *idā* and the *piṅgalā*; and most of the time it fluctuates in these two *nāḍīs* which start from the base of the spine and crisscross six times before they reach the top of the head (Fig. 16). *Suṣumṇā* on the other hand is straight and runs along the spine. In Yoga *suṣumṇā* is considered to be the best place for *prāṇa* to be.

"When the *nāḍīs* are full of impurities, the breath does not go into the middle *nāḍī*, *suṣumṇā*."³⁵ The main obstacle is located at the base of the spine, and it prevents *prāṇa* from entering *suṣumṇā*. This obstacle is called *kuṇḍaliṇī*, because it looks like an earring or coiled snake. "The *kuṇḍaliṇī* coiled three and a half times around the root of the

³² Monier-Williams 1956: 720

³³ Desikachar 1980, p. 136.

³⁴ Monier-Williams 1956, p. 290.

³⁵ *Hathayogapradīpikā* 1972, II, p. 6

*nāḍī*s, lying like a serpent with its tail in its mouth, and blocking the entrance of the *suṣumṇā nāḍī*.³⁶ *Kuṇḍalinī* is often called śakti because its power is so great that it is able to block the flow of *prāṇa* in the *suṣumṇā*.³⁷ The *prāṇa* enters *suṣumṇā* when *kuṇḍalinī* is removed.

The following passage from the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* (1972, IV, pp. 11, 12) states that when *kuṇḍalinī* is “awakened” (removed), then *prāṇa* is able to enter *suṣumṇā*:

“In the yogin in whom the *kuṇḍalinī* śakti is awakened and who is free from all *karmans* (objects), the truly natural state comes into being on its own. Then the *prāṇa* flows in the *suṣumṇā* and the mind is absorbed in the void; the knower of Yoga uproots all objects.”

Bandhas:

A *bandha* is a restriction or contraction of certain areas of the body. *Bandhas* are very important techniques of Yoga practice; being used in conjunction with *āsanas*, *mudrās*, and *prāṇāyamā* to control and redirect the flow of *prāṇa* through various *nāḍī*s and then slowly bring it back to *suṣumṇā*.

Mūlabandha is the contraction of the lower abdomen and the whole area below the navel. As stated in the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* (1972, III, pp. 62–68):

“Then *Mūlabandha* is described: pressing the perineum with the heels, contract the anus so that *apāna*, whose course is downward, is forced to go upward. Yogins call it *Mūlabandha*.”

Pressing the anus with the heels, compress the air forcibly and repeatedly until the breath goes upward. When the *apāna* rises upward and reaches the sphere of fire, then the flame becomes lengthened, being fanned by *apāna*. When *apāna* and fire join *prāṇa*, which is by nature hot, then the heat in the body is greatly intensified. By reason of that the *kuṇḍalinī* which is asleep, feeling the extreme heat, is awakened, just as when a serpent struck by a stick hisses and straightens itself. Therefore the yogins should every day and always practice *Mūlabandha*.”

The manual states that as a result of the constant practice of *Mūlabandha* the excess of *apāna* is reduced, *kuṇḍalinī* is removed, and *prāṇa* enters the middle *nāḍī*, *suṣumṇā*.

Mūlabandha along with other *bandhas* can be practiced in certain *āsanas*; however, *Mūlabandhāsana* is the most suitable *āsana* for the practice of *Mūlabandha*.

In the light of this it is not surprising that this posture was depicted on the “Proto-

³⁶ *Siva Samhitā* 1980, V, p. 80.

³⁷ *Desikachar* 1990, p. 244.

Śiva" seals. *Mūlabandhāsana* could be a symbol of Yoga which was practiced by the people of the Indus Valley civilization five thousand years ago. Yoga was always an oral tradition carefully transmitted from father to son, from a teacher to a student. There are only a few classical texts on Yoga and even they insist that all of the techniques should be kept in secret and learned from a competent teacher.³⁸

The fact that the posture depicted on all five "Proto-Śiva" seals is identical proves that neither an "accident", nor a play of an artist's imagination was responsible for the depiction of *Mūlabandhāsana*.

Additional Evidence:

Among the pottery discovered by George Dales in the pre-Harappan levels at Balakot, Pakistan³⁹ in 1973, is a jar (Fig. 6) with a painted drawing of a plant form. The shape depicted on this pottery although represented as a plant is very similar to the figure shown on the "Proto-Śiva" seals. This drawing could be a symbolic depiction of the *Mūlabandhāsana*. It is interesting to note that *mūla* means root. Yoga texts often describe *āsanas* in terms of plant life. For example, *Tadāsana* (Fig. 17) is very similar to the posture of a "tree goddess", depicted on another seal from Mohenjo-daro (Fig. 18). The significance of this particular terracotta vessel (Fig. 6) is that it suggests an even earlier presence of Yoga practices than that at Mohenjo-daro, perhaps several centuries before the mature Indus civilization.

Two figures depicted on the seal # 29⁴⁰ (Fig. 4) are seated in a position which is very close to another Yoga posture, *Vajrasana*. "Fold both legs and contract the muscles of the shanks making them hard as a thunderbolt. Thereafter without crossing the shins adjust them on either side of the anus. This *Vajrāsana* helps yogins to achieve success in Yoga."⁴¹

The same seal has images of two huge cobras. J. Marshall identified them as *nāgas*.⁴² The image of a snake is often used in Yoga tradition. For example the author of the *Yoga Sūtra*, Patañjali, is described as a manifestation of the snake Ananta on which Viṣṇu reclines.

The other important detail depicted on some of the "Proto-Śiva" seals is the low platform or dais supported by bull-like legs. The bull legs could represent the sense of stability and strength. A similar dais is described in Yoga literature. A low and sturdy platform was used by yogis as a bed, and a place for practice.⁴³

A fine red stone statuette from Harappa,⁴⁴ unearthed by M.S. Vats, is dated by some scholars to the mature Harappan period, although other scholars believe it belongs to

³⁸ *Hāthayogapradīpikā* 1972, p. 6.

³⁹ Dales 1974, p. 3.

⁴⁰ Marshall 1931, vol. II, pl. CXVI.

⁴¹ *Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā* 1980, p. 135.

⁴² Marshall 1931, vol. I, p. 56.

⁴³ *Hāthayogapradīpikā* 1972, p. 7.

⁴⁴ Marshall 1931: Pl. X.

the early historical period (Fig. 19). The statuette depicts a standing male figure the arms and the legs of which are lost. Marshall wrote about this figure: "This is a work of which a Greek of the fourth century B.C. might well have been proud. And yet the set of the figure with its rather pronounced abdomen is characteristically Indian, not Greek."⁴⁵ Looking at this statuette it is obvious that its stomach is pushed out as if filled with air. There is a yogic technique called *Plāvinī*, which is swallowing air so it fills out the stomach. This particular technique is supposed to enable one to float easily. "Owing to the air which has been abundantly drawn in, completely filling the interior, the yogin floats easily, even on deep waters, like a lotus leaf."⁴⁶

The bust of the male statue from Mohenjo-daro⁴⁷ was unearthed by J. Marshall who thought that it represents a priest or a king-priest (Fig. 20). Ramprasad Chanda was the first to point out that the head has its eyes concentrated on the tip of the nose, and concluded that it was portrayed in an attitude of yoga:

"It is not possible to keep the eyes unmoved unless they are fixed on a certain point. The nearest point on which the eyes can be fixed with ease is the tip of the nose. Therefore, in most of the texts it is distinctly provided that the eyes of the yogi engaged in Dhyāna should be fixed on the tip of the nose.

It was this trait of the stone head from Mohenjo-daro, that led me to identify it as the image of a yogi, and to conclude that Yoga was practiced and images in yogic postures were worshipped in the Chalcolithic period in the Indus Valley."⁴⁸

Nasal gazing is often referred to not only in the texts on Yoga, but in other texts such as the Upanishads and Epics. For example, the *Bhagavad Gītā* describes a yogi as someone who sits cross-legged and gazes at the tip of his nose, "fixing the eyes on the tip of the nose and not looking around."⁴⁹

Social Structure, Technological Advancement, and Urban Planning of the Indus Cities:

It appears that social stability was present in the Indus civilization for at least several hundred years, and that people living in Mohenjo-daro and Harappa enjoyed material well-being and social equality as well. In the classical Yoga texts the description of the society which is suitable for Yoga practitioners to live in, is very close to the realities of the Indus civilization. These texts insist on social stability. The yogi should live in a place which is free from disturbances, in a virtuous and well-ruled kingdom."⁵⁰

The Indus civilization was the first urban civilization with central planning in South Asia. Broad streets ran from south to north and were crossed by others at approximately right angles. The blocks thus formed give the distinct impression of having been consciously planned. "The houses were often substantial, consisted typically of rooms

⁴⁵ Marshall 1931, vol. I, p. 47.

⁴⁶ *Hathayogapradīpikā* 1972, II, p. 70.

⁴⁷ Marshall 1931, vol. III, pl. XCVIII.

⁴⁸ Chanda 1932, p. 158.

⁴⁹ *Bhagavadgītā* 1944, p. 78.

⁵⁰ *Hathayogapradīpikā* 1972, p. 7.

the early historical period (Fig. 19). The statuette depicts a standing male figure the arms and the legs of which are lost. Marshall wrote about this figure: "This is a work of which a Greek of the fourth century B.C. might well have been proud. And yet the set of the figure with its rather pronounced abdomen is characteristically Indian, not Greek."⁴⁵ Looking at this statuette it is obvious that its stomach is pushed out as if filled with air. There is a yogic technique called *Plāvinī*, which is swallowing air so it fills out the stomach. This particular technique is supposed to enable one to float easily. "Owing to the air which has been abundantly drawn in, completely filling the interior, the yogin floats easily, even on deep waters, like a lotus leaf."⁴⁶

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⁴⁵ Marshall 1931, vol. I, p. 47.

⁴⁶ *Haṭhāyogapradīpikā* 1972, II, p. 70.

⁴⁷ Marshall 1931, vol. III, pl. XC VIII.

⁴⁸ Chanda 1932, p. 158.

⁴⁹ *Bhagavadgītā* 1944, p. 70.

⁵⁰ *Haṭhāyogapradīpikā* 1972, p. 7.

around a courtyard, and contained stairs to a former flat roof or upper story, a bathroom, a well, and occasionally a privy on the ground or upper floor. All houses were without windows with only one small entrance and inner courtyard."⁵¹ Although texts on yoga appeared two to three thousand years later, it appears that they borrowed the idea of a house best suitable for the yogi to live in, right from the cities of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa:

"The house should have a small door, and should be without any windows; it should be level and without any holes; it should be neither too high, too low, nor too long. It should be very clean, being well smeared with cowdung and free from all insects. It should have a small hall, a raised seat and a well, and be surrounded by a wall. Living in such a place the yogin, being free in mind of all cares, should practice only Yoga all the time, in the way taught by his guru."⁵²

Personal Hygiene

None among the ancient civilizations, and even some of the present ones, surpass the Indus civilization in the development and perfection of their sanitary systems.

"It is quite evident that the people of Mohenjo-daro were proud of their drainage system. The wall round a drain-hole was often built of brick so carefully rubbed down and fitted together the joints are, even now, hardly visible. Pottery pipes were also used. The method of drainage adopted by the Indus Valley people is certainly the most complete ancient system as yet discovered."⁵³

The extreme concern with the cleanliness of yogis is well documented in various Yoga texts. The six-fold system of purification techniques of Yoga consists of external and internal cleansing of the body with water and air. These techniques range from a simple daily bath to elaborate techniques of internal cleansing similar to the modern colonics. The whole first chapter of the *Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā* is devoted to these practices. It is most likely that these techniques originated in the Indus Valley. "The emphasis on personal cleanliness of the citizens of Mohenjo-daro is demonstrated by the elaborate bathing establishment as well as by the arrangements made in private houses for the supply of water and for baths. In no city of antiquity was so much attention paid to this matter of bathing as in Mohenjo-daro."⁵⁴

Summary:

On the basis of the identification and analysis of the posture depicted on the five "Proto-Śiva" seals it is clear that Yoga was known and practiced by the people of the

⁵¹ Wheeler 1966, p. 12.

⁵² *Hathayogapradīpikā* 1972, p. 7.

⁵³ Mackay 1935, p. 41.

⁵⁴ Marshall 1931, vol. I, p. 75.

Indus civilization. Even if these seals had been found in a totally different geographical location and had belonged to a different culture, still they would have been a strong argument to support the theory that Yoga had originated there. The fact that these "Proto-Śiva" seals were found on Indian soil proves that Yoga was present in India five thousand years ago. Yoga is a unique contribution of India to the world.

Taking into consideration the analysis of these seals and additional evidence discussed above it is most likely that the system of Yoga had its origin in the Indus Civilization. Patañjali never claimed that he invented Yoga; he only systematized it by composing the *Yoga Sūtra*. Even if writing were practiced, and apparently it wasn't, the absence of any written evidence of the existence of Yoga between 2 500 B. C. and 500 B. C. would be easy to explain. Oral transmission was prevalent among all Indian traditions. The Vedas were recited and committed to memory for more than a thousand years before they were written down. The same is true about Yoga texts.

The Indus civilization in its prime possessed all the traits favorable for the appearance and development of the Yoga system. These traits are: absence of political turmoil, absence of external enemies, social stability, high level of economic advancement, and well-being of its citizens.

We are very proud of all the technological advances which have taken place during the last hundred years. However, we should not forget that this progress has its dark side. We have had two world wars during the last seventy years; new social systems have appeared that surpass in cruelty all systems of the past; we all live under the threat of nuclear annihilation. It is very difficult for us to imagine a society which for several hundred years remained unchanged, as did the society of the Indus Valley. Even houses in the cities of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa were built in exactly the same manner for several centuries during the heyday of the civilization. There were no windows to the outside world, no public stadiums, no coliseums like those in ancient Rome or Greece. On the other hand we know that the Indus people took very good care of their cities, their houses, and themselves. It is not surprising that the system of Yoga which is concerned with betterment of the individual was originated there.

No temples have been identified in the Indus cities and it is not known what deities were worshipped by the Indus people. It is interesting to note that Śiva is considered to be the father of Yoga by various texts, *Śiva Saṃhitā*. It is quite possible that this aspect of the cult of Śiva had its origins in Yoga as it was known in the Indus Valley.

The other significant conclusion which arises from the above discussion is the presence of overwhelming evidence of the continuity of Indian culture and religion from the days of Mohenjo-daro to the present. There are many basic features of Hinduism which are not traceable to an Indo-Aryan source. It seems that the Indo-Aryans who gained control of much of India, later themselves became conquered by the indigenous Indian culture. There are a number of very important features of present-day Hinduism which were absent in Vedic times; however, these features were present in the days of the Indus cities. For example, the Great Bath of Mohenjo-daro with its formal staircases, looks identical to the water tanks of Hindu temples. These tanks were absent during Vedic times.

Mahadevan comes to the conclusion that the Soma rituals of the Indo-Iranian religions were based on the pre-Aryan Harappan substratum, and that this is the reason for the remarkable resemblances between the Harappan symbolism of a "Sacred Pillar", the peculiar stand in front of animals on many seals, and the Soma ritual as described in the *Rigveda*.⁵⁵

Although the Indus Valley civilization still holds many secrets, the evidence shows that some of its traditions survived and are still alive today. The system of Yoga which originated in the Indus Valley has existed for more than five thousand years and is now moving from being an Indian tradition to becoming the common property of all humanity.

Technical Vocabulary:

Apāna "Opposed to *prāṇa*, that of the five airs which goes downward and out at the anus."⁵⁶ *Apāna* is *prāṇa* that is located and accumulated where it should not be. *Apāna* also means "defilement, dirt" which accumulates due to various factors. The aim of Yoga is to remove *apāna* by various practices. *Apāna* refers to the area of the lower abdomen and all activity there. It means that part of *prāṇa* which is in charge of evacuation."⁵⁷

Āsana "Derived from *ās*, "to sit" and means "sitting" or "posture." "Sitting in a peculiar posture."⁵⁸

Avidyā "Illusion."⁵⁹ *Avidyā* literally means "knowledge which is not right." In Yoga it is the accumulation of actions; a culmination of many thoughtless actions that we have repeated mechanically, over the years. *Avidyā* is a false state of understanding.⁶⁰

Bandha Derived from the Sanskrit root *bandh*, "to bind, to restrict": therefore *Bandha* is "restriction." "Binding, tying, a bond, tie, contraction."⁶¹

Bhadrāsana "Splendid seat, throne, a particular posture of devotee during meditation."⁶² In Yoga the specific posture shown in Fig. 13. "Next the *Bhadrāsana* is described: place the ankles below the scrotum on the sides of the perineum, the left ankle on the left and the right ankle on the right."⁶³

Iḍā "A tubular vessel, one of the principal channels of the vital spirit."⁶⁴ In Yoga *Iḍā* is one of the two principal *nāḍīs* which pass through the trunk and intersect at six points.

⁵⁵ Mahadevan 1983, p. 45.

⁵⁶ Monier-Williams 1956, p. 54.

⁵⁷ Desikachar, 1980, p. 142.

⁵⁸ Monier-Williams 1956, p. 159.

⁵⁹ Monier-Williams 1956, p. 108.

⁶⁰ Desikachar 1980, p. 5.

⁶¹ Monier-Williams 1956, p. 720.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 746.

⁶³ *Hathayogapradīpikā* 1972, p. 18.

⁶⁴ Monier-Williams 1956, p. 164.

Karman "Art, action, the person or thing for or toward whom the action is performed."⁶⁵

Kleśa "Pain, affliction, distress."⁶⁶ In Yoga *kleśa* means defilement, the expression of *avidyā*.⁶⁷ It also means dirt which has accumulated in the *nāḍīs*.

Kūrmāsana *Kūrma* is "tortoise".⁶⁸ Literally means "the posture of a tortoise" (Figs. 10, 11, 12).⁶⁹

Kuṇḍaliṇī "An earring, snake, something bent."⁷⁰ In some texts it is described as the snake that sleeps at the base of the spine. When it wakes it becomes straight and then *prāṇa* enters *suṣumṇā*. "When the sleeping *kuṇḍaliṇī* is awakened by the grace of the guru, then all *cakras* and *granthas* are pierced. Then *suṣumṇā* becomes the royal road for *prāṇa*. Then the mind remains objectless. Then death is deceived."⁷¹

Mahāyogin "Master of the Yoga system."⁷²

Mūla "Firmly fixed, a root, the bottom of anything."⁷³ In Yoga *mūla* pertains to the area of the lower abdomen and the base of the spine.⁷⁴ *Mūlabandha* is the technique of contraction of the *mūla* area; *mūlabandhāsana* is the posture that is most suitable for the practice of *mūlabandha*⁷⁵; (see Fig. 8).

Nāḍī "Any tube or pipe, a tubular organ as a vein or an artery of the body."⁷⁶ In Yoga *nāḍīs* simply mean non-physical passages through which *prāṇa* circulates. "There are 72 000 *nāḍīs*, passages in this cage (body); of these *suṣumṇā* is the power that appertains to *Śambhu*. The others are not of great use."⁷⁷

Padmāsana "Practical posture in religious meditation";⁷⁸ one of the best known Yoga *āsanas* (Fig. 9). "Draw up the right foot and place it over the left thigh; similarly the left one over the right thigh. Then, crossing your arms behind the back, firmly catch the respective big toes. Thereafter let the chin rest upon the chest and fix the gaze on the tip of the nose. This is known as *Padmāsana*, a posture that removes all the disorders of the body."⁷⁹

Paśupati "Lord of animals, name of the later Rudra-Śiva or of a similar deity."⁸⁰

Pīṅgalā "A particular vessel of the body which according to the Yoga philosophy is the chief passage of breath."⁸¹ In Yoga the second *nāḍī* which passes through the trunk and intersects at six points with *idā*.

Plāvini "Made to swim or overflow";⁸² in Yoga refers to a special technique by which the stomach is filled with air. "Then *Plāvini* is described. Owing to the air which has been abundantly drawn in, completely filling the interior, the yogin flows easily, even on deep waters, like a lotus leaf."⁸³

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

⁶⁷ Yoga Sūtra 1980, p. 223.

⁶⁸ Monier-Williams 1956, p. 300.

⁶⁹ *Gheraṇḍa-Sambhita* 1980, p. 139.

⁷⁰ Monier-Williams 1956, p. 290.

⁷¹ *Hathayogapradīpikā* 1972, p. 38.

⁷² Monier-Williams 1956, p. 799.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 826.

⁷⁴ *Hathayogapradīpikā* 1972, p. 49.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 49.

⁷⁶ Monier-Williams 1956, p. 534.

⁷⁷ *Hathayogapradīpikā* 1972, p. 65.

⁷⁸ Monier-Williams 1956, p. 585.

⁷⁹ *Gheraṇḍa-Sambhita* 1980, p. 134.

⁸⁰ Monier-Williams 1956, p. 611.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 625.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 715.

⁸³ *Hathayogapradīpikā* 1972, p. 35.

Prāṇa "The breath of life, vital breath."⁸⁴ In Yoga vital breath which fluctuates through various channels (*nāḍīs*).⁸⁵

Prāṇāyāma "Support of life, subsistence."⁸⁶ The fourth *aṅga* of Yoga, defined by Patañjali as the suspension of the normal movement of the breath which is achieved by various methods of conscious breathing.⁸⁷

Puruṣa "A man, a soul or spirit."⁸⁸ "Pur" means city, town, township. The one who stays in the town is the *puruṣa*. What is the nature of this town? It consists of the body, the mind, the senses, our culture, customs, and even *avidyā*. If we eliminate the town, all *puruṣas* are absolutely the same, but they appear different since they reside in different towns.⁸⁹

Śakti "Power, ability, strength."⁹⁰ "Śakti has a number of meanings in Yoga; one of them is *kuṇḍalinī* . . . called śakti because its power is so great that it is able to block the flow of *prāṇa* into the *suṣumṇā*."⁹¹

Suṣumṇā "The particular artery lying between those called *idā* and *pingalā*, and supposed to be one of the passages for the breath or spirit."⁹² In Yoga the main *nāḍī*, which is most of the time obstructed by *kuṇḍalinī*. The aim of Yoga practice is to remove *kuṇḍalinī* so *prāṇa* can enter into *suṣumṇā*. "The middle *nāḍī*, *suṣumṇā* becomes straight for the easy passage of *prāṇa* by the practice of *āsanas*, *prāṇāyāma*, and *mudrās*."⁹³

Vajrāsana "A diamond seat, a particular posture in sitting."⁹⁴ One of the classical yogic postures.⁹⁵

⁸⁴ Monier-Williams 1956, p. 705.

⁸⁵ *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 1972, p. 30.

⁸⁶ Monier-Williams 1956, p. 705.

⁸⁷ *Yoga-Sūtra* 1980, II, pp. 48, 49.

⁸⁸ Monier-Williams 1956, p. 637.

⁸⁹ Desikachar 1980, p. 10.

⁹⁰ Monier-Williams 1956, p. 1044.

⁹¹ Desikachar 1980, p. 224.

⁹² Monier-Williams 1956, p. 1237.

⁹³ *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 1972, p. 59.

⁹⁴ Monier-Williams 1956, p. 914.

⁹⁵ *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 1972, p. 15.

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