

## Shaivism: Confusion of Identity



***Shivo Bhokta, Shiva Bhojya***

***Shivo Karta, Shivah Karma***

***Shivah Karanatmakah***

*Shiva is the experiencer and the highest object of experience.*

*Shiva is the goal of sadhana.*

*There is nothing apart from Shiva.*

*There is nothing other than Shiva.*

*Whatever there is, is Shiva.*

*There is nothing which is not Shiva.*

*There is no place which is not Shiva.*

*There is no time which is not Shiva.*

*To be aware of this is to be aware of Shiva.*

— *Shiva Dhun Mantra*



Shaivism is a very ancient path that is said to have existed even before the Vedas, and its followers claim independence from Vedic religious rules and regulations. While Shaivism has developed into a variety of schools, all of them view lord Shiva as the supreme reality. For them, Shiva is the lord of all manifestation and the supreme ruler of all gods. He is beyond the visible and the known, dwelling timelessly in the perfection of his unfathomable consciousness and yet lives in the totality of creation through the light of his countless souls. He is source of our spiritual light and the bestower of grace and emancipation. He is the lord of five powers: creation, preservation, dissolution, concealment (self-oblivion or ignorance), and revelation (salvation, self-recognition or enlightenment).

It is difficult to give a unified interpretation of the philosophy of Shaivism because of its numerous schools and tendency toward high intellectualism. In the West, it is a relatively unknown path that has recently been revived and brought to the attention of Western seekers through a prominent scholar of Kashmir Shaivism, Swami Lakshmanjoo. It is not the intention here to analyze this philosophy in depth, because it is exceedingly complicated. Rather, it is to present a very general picture of Shaivism in order to gain a better understanding of Indian spirituality.

Kashmir Shaivism is also known as 'trika' (triad) because it posits three main components of existence: Shiva (the absolute reality), shakti (the power of creation), and para (the bound soul). In Shaiva Siddhanta philosophy, that triad is seen slightly differently, which is as: Pati (lord of souls) pasam (bondage) and pasu (that which is under bondage). Pasam is caused by the three impurities, or 'malas': anava, maya, and karma (individuality, empirical reality, and the chain of action and reaction). When the universe and 'jiva' (the individual soul) come into existence, the pure nature of Shiva becomes veiled from himself through identification with the world of perception – and this is the original cause of bondage. The development of this bondage happens in three stages: anava mala (the original sense of separation), mayiya mala (identification with physical and subtle bodies), and karma mala (the accumulation of vasanas or subconscious tendencies due to one's actions). According to the Saiva Siddhantha School, liberation is attained by means of charya (service), kriya (worship), yoga (practice and meditation), and jnana (self-knowledge).

Some schools of Shaivism created an interesting distinction between Anadi Shiva (the aspect of Shiva that is never touched by mala) and the Shiva that assumes mala and descends into bondage. According to that line of thought, a liberated Shiva that reaches the freedom and bliss of truth will



still remain inferior to Anadi Shiva. Ksemaraja, a sage of Kashmir Shaivism, contested this theory, saying that in non-duality there can be no distinction between a liberated Shiva and Shiva himself, who is the lord of creation. While on the surface, this appears to be more logical, this is only because of the deceptive logic of non-duality that stems from the sophistry of the linear mind and its inherent lack of imagination. Shiva's deepest purpose in manifesting an individual soul is not merely to put her into bondage (as part of himself) so that she can seek liberation and realize him as her own self. Rather, it is to enable him to be in a relationship of recognition, love, and intelligence with his transcendental subjectivity through the vessel of his own individuation. Those who do not see this are failing to understand the very reason for creation.

The most prominent texts of Shaivism are the *Shiva Sutras*, which were revealed to an Indian sage, Vasugupta, in the ninth century CE. They were probably compiled at the time in order to give a succinct summary of Shaivism and to unify its various often contradictory teachings into one system. In addition, there may have been a second motivation, which was to counter the effects of dualism in Indian metaphysics and other schools of Shaivism. The *Shiva Sutras* are composed of three sections – Sambhavopaya, Saktopaya, and Anavopaya – each of which deal with different levels of realization. Sambhavopaya (divine means) speaks of the realization of supreme consciousness through the pure grace of a master or of Shiva. Shaktopaya (empowered means) speaks of realization through contemplation, enquiry, or radical insight into one's pure nature. Finally, Anavopaya (individual means) speaks of the lowest form of realization, to which end a variety of relative methods are employed, such as the repetition of mantras, control of the breath, and concentration on chakras.

### *Shaivism and Tantra*

Shaivism is often referred to as 'Tantra'. Due to its superficial association with certain sexual practices, there are many misconceptions about Tantra in the West. Even though some tantric sects did include sexual practices (or ritualistic intercourse) with the intention of purifying the body and accelerating spiritual transformation, these were very rare, rather than mainstream, cases. The reason behind these sexual connotations is that Tantric philosophy revolves around the unity of two primal energies: Shiva and Shakti. Shiva is the passive, non-moving principle, and Shakti is the active, creative energy. It is interesting to note the opposite associations prevail in the West: the male energy is seen as active, while the female is passive or receptive. This shows that the perception of male and female characteristics is more culturally determined than absolute. We should not



forget that, in the past, women were socially oppressed and hardly any spiritual scriptures were written by them.

In truth, the relationship between male and female energies is much more complex than is commonly presumed. For instance, we need to employ both male and female energies in order to actualize our pure nature, which in itself is beyond male and female characteristics. In practical terms, we use masculine energy to establish a permanent center beyond the mind and to cut through the unconscious, while we then employ feminine energy to dissolve that center into the universal reality through surrender, thereby reaching absorption in I am. So samadhi is attained through the equal application of both energies.

Tantra is directly connected to *Agama*, which are the ancient revelatory scriptures of Shaivism. The root of the word Tantra is 'to expand' or 'to weave,' but there have been countless subsequent interpretations of what the term actually signifies (for instance, Tantra is also often associated with Tibetan Buddhism, notably the Vajrayana sects). It is commonly assumed that Tantra is a path of energy which works through the opening of various channels in the body, raising kundalini energy, and practice with mantras. In another contrary interpretation, the work of Tantra is to separate purusha (soul) from prakriti (manifestation) – the Shiva principle from the Shakti principle – in order to reach liberation. It is possible to generalize and define Tantra as any path that works with relative energies, vibrations, or psychic channels to awaken our pure nature. However, on a higher level, Tantra is an approach that is based on sudden awakening to the Shiva principle, followed by its integration with our body, human consciousness, and the world of perception.

### *Shaivism and Advaita*

Even though the original Shaivism was dualistic, it gradually evolved into absolute monism or non-duality, where jiva is no different than Shiva. The non-dual view states that to reach enlightenment is to go beyond the illusion of being someone other than Shiva: Shiva is the one-consciousness – all and everything. He is both the cause and creative source of the manifested universe. The energy through which manifestation comes into existence is Shakti, who represents the dynamic aspect of Shiva and the power of creation. Through Shakti, the homogenous state of existence becomes divided into 'aham' and 'idam' ('I' and this, subject and object). Kashmir Shaivism is what is called 'realistic idealism.' It is idealistic because it believes that objects in the external world exist only because they are perceived to exist. It is realistic because it believes the world to be a real



manifestation of Shiva's consciousness and vibration as opposed to a mere illusion of perception that veils our pure nature.

The aspect of realism in Shaivism is what makes it so distinct from Advaita Vedanta and other Vedic traditions. The vision of reality that Shaivism presents is richer and more dynamic. While Advaita perceives the ultimate to be the formless and inactive, 'Nirguna Brahman', the concept of the ultimate in Shaivism is much more multidimensional. He has power to manifest the universe and, among many other attributes, is the supreme creator who is in possession of unimpeded free will, absolute knowledge, and intelligence. In Advaita, Brahman is not responsible for creation, Ishvara is, and that creation is regarded as 'avidya' (ignorance). As was noted, in Shaivism the manifested world is not seen as 'maya' (illusion) alone, but as a real manifestation of Shiva's vibrant energy and consciousness (Shakti). The physical world in Shaivism is a real living expression of Shiva. Their concept of enlightenment, therefore, includes both becoming one with the absolute consciousness and the realization of the world as Shiva. Shiva is not just within but also without; he is all and everywhere.

Even though Shaivism is much more interesting and life affirming than Advaita, it failed to reach out to the majority of seekers, mostly because it is so intellectually and esoterically convoluted. The rather simplistic and one-dimensional Advaita offered a much more comprehensible vision of reality to the average seeker, one which could be assimilated into the collective mind. Shaivism is indeed 'practiced' by millions of people in India, but only as a religion, not as an actual path to self-realization.

### *Pashupata Shaivism and Shaiva Siddhanta: Original Shaivism*

Pashupata Shaivism and Shaiva Siddhanta are among the most ancient traditions of Shaivism. They both posited the duality between the soul and Shiva. The Pashupatas (from 'Pashupati', a name of Shiva that means 'lord of souls') are the oldest known sect of Shaivite ascetic monks. Their original philosophy was dualistic, but gradually (mainly due to the influence of one sage, Lakulisha) it evolved into dualistic cum non-dualistic monism ('bheda-abheda'). According to Lakulisha, following liberation, the soul does not merge with Shiva; it continues to exist separately, but it is free from pain. In other words, a liberated being maintains closeness ('sayujya') with Shiva but does not dissolve into him.



Siddhanta means "the settled view," as it was seen to be the final vision of Shaivism at the time. Shaiva Siddhanta can be translated as 'perfected Shaivism.' Shaiva Siddhanta posited a dual non-duality, or what is called 'qualified duality', meaning one can reach unity with Shiva while still remaining distinct from him. Here, one reaches sameness with Shiva but not oneness, meaning we realize our nature as the light of Shiva while retaining our individual sense of self. After liberation, jiva (or individual soul) enjoys a special relationship with Shiva called 'bheda-abheda' (separation and non-separation), which literally means "the duality in unity between the two." The duality between the 'linga' (shiva) and 'anga' (soul) continues to exist, one being the whole and the other being the part, while unity still prevails. While this is a more correct view of reality than non-dual Shaivism, its understanding of the soul still remains very limited. To speak of the soul outside of the context of her evolution into embodying her complete individuality and becoming whole is meaningless. Our spiritual actualization is not only about reaching unity with Shiva, but above all, awakening our higher subjectivity. Initially, there is no soul to speak of, just a fragmented illusion of personal identity.

### *Kundalini Path and the Dark Side of Shaivism*

In its higher form, Shaivism was based on the principle of sudden awakening either through grace or transmission from a master. Some yogic practices were also included. For instance, there is a concept of the 'eight limbs of yoga' in Shaivism, although they are interpreted differently than in yoga itself. However, we should also note that in the original Shaivism (of the Pashupatas) the concept of the spiritual path was exceedingly mystical, bizarre, and controversial. Pashaputa sadhus wore little clothing, smeared their bodies with ash, and performed a variety of austerities, often in a madly religious fervor. The association between sadhus and the practice of smoking 'charas' (a hashish form of cannabis) and probably taking other mind-altering substances started with them. They also used techniques, including laughing, singing, and dancing, as means to becoming intoxicated with Shiva. According to Pashupatas:

*A yogi must appear as a lunatic, a beggar, with the body dirty, grown beard, long hair and nails, with no care whatsoever to the body. Thus, the devotee cuts off his or her access to fortunes (varna) and possessions (ashrama), and only thus the power of detachment is genuinely produced.*



Interestingly, at the more advanced stages, a yogi was meant to disappear back into society, live incognito, and then perform shocking actions to attract disapproval and condemnation (such as making strange sounds in public or pretending to be crippled). The intention behind this was to go beyond the need for social acceptance and attain annihilation of ego.

Shaivism was always associated with complicated esoteric rituals and magical practices, and as a result, tended to be very ungrounded spiritually. One of the expressions of that trend was the concept of kundalini awakening, which is supposed to occur through 'shaktipat' (literally, the transmission of the Shakti-energy). In the West, this rather strange concept was popularized by Swami Muktananda. Muktananda was a somewhat confused teacher of Siddha Yoga (a path which has its roots in Shaivism) who wished to spread the 'good news' of kundalini. However, a true initiation is not shaktipat, but 'shivapat': a direct transmission of the light and consciousness of Shiva into a seeker's soul. It is certainly nothing to do with any hocus pocus practices relating to kundalini energy.

Kundalini energy is the primal energy of the vital force that can be manipulated and sent as a kind of electric current up to the higher centers. There is nothing particularly divine in that energy and it has no wisdom of its own. To use it as the means of awakening is highly risky because it can easily damage one's nervous system. Even if one is fortunate and this energy does produce an opening of one of the centers of consciousness in the headspace, it can very often damage the brain, and what's more, it is unpredictable what kind of awakening it will manifest. In most cases, awakened kundalini energy only serves to make people unnaturally 'high', inducing a kind of mystical condition.

The path of kundalini is designed for those who lack the maturity to evolve directly into consciousness and meet their essential self. What this really means, however, is that they are simply not ready to evolve spiritually. Forcing such people to awaken through artificial energetic means is to miss the whole point; rather than seeking transcendence, they need to mature and evolve on the level of their basic me. Any teacher who promises awakening through these types of means does not represent a true teaching that is rooted in the direct transmission of the light of the self. The use of kundalini energy to initiate awakening is highly irresponsible. The chances of reaching self-actualization are negligible and, as was noted, these practices can inflict permanent damage to our delicate psychic and energetic systems.



Additionally, bringing energy up past the crown chakra (on the very top of the head) is also spiritually damaging, as it opens the soul to the subconscious realm (although ignorant people believe this to be absolute consciousness). Whatever the origin of the concept of kundalini awakening was, it was a clear expression of the deterioration of the spirit of self-realization. It expresses a lost ability to transmit the light of our pure nature directly into the consciousness of another soul or to initiate a direct path to self-realization through the awakening of me.

### *Kashmir Shaivism and the Decline into Non-duality*

While the original Shaivism was more in touch with reality and embraced the presence of duality, Kashmir Shaivism, under the influence of Advaita and Buddhism, leaned towards a non-dual interpretation of reality. This is commonly seen to be a positive development in Shaivism, but from a higher standpoint, actually represents a regression. Non-duality is solely a mental construct. It is in conflict not only with the nature of evolution and reality, but with basic common sense. It is what happens when the science of spirituality comes to be dominated by intellectuals. Instead of perfecting the art of reaching enlightenment, the scholars of Shaivism were engaged for centuries in useless intellectual debates. Due to this, Shaivism has become more of a philosophy than an actual path to awakening. The fact that the original Shaivism degraded into non-duality and lost its grasp of the inherently dual relationship between soul and the absolute negatively impacted its understanding of the nature of spiritual evolution. How can we comprehend the laws of self-realization if we live in denial of our individual existence?

Why did the original Shaivism decline into non-duality? One possible explanation is that, as was noted, it was always inclined toward mysticism, fanatical devotion, manipulating energies and psychic channels, and the use of hallucinogens or other intoxicants. One example is the infamous soma, the 'nectar of gods.' According to archeological speculation, soma was an intoxicating drink prepared from a combination of opium, cannabis, and ephedra. The combination of these three elements must certainly have caused the teachers of these traditions to lose touch with reality. Another cause for Shaivism's decline was its over-intellectualization. For the linear mind, putting reality into the non-duality box is cleaner and much more orderly. It also appears to make more sense from the perspective of those who do not possess a refined intelligence and imagination. Above all, when the soul is absent, perhaps non-duality is indeed a better option than the lower, false duality of ignorance.





## Limitations of Shaivism

Although Shaivism, even in its non-dualistic form, represents a higher vision of reality than Advaita, it is still incomplete on many levels. Its limitations are not so much philosophical, but rather on the level of how it can assist an average seeker in his quest toward peace and completion. The truth is that Shaivism has a very narrow view in this more practical respect: it all comes down to the grace of Shiva, which in turn comes down to the grace of the guru. The role of the master is certainly very important on the path, but first of all, that master has to be skilled and competent, and secondly, each seeker has to learn for himself how to cooperate with his own awakening. Playing with kundalini energy is not a path to spiritual illumination. There are other relative practices, presented in the third section of the *Shiva Sutras* that are also designed for less mature seekers. These practices involve repeating mantras, performing breathing exercises, and opening energetic channels. But it is wishful thinking to believe that they can bring one any closer to the self.

So the science of awakening is very limited in Shaivism, as is the knowledge of consciousness. Shaivism does, of course, go into great detail about various states of consciousness and self-realization, but this knowledge is more intellectual speculation than a practical description of reality. Furthermore, their contemplations of consciousness are disconnected from the knowledge of the evolution of me into its own subjectivity. Any system of knowledge that fails to embrace the multilayered nature of me and its evolution towards embodying its own light of higher subjectivity also fails to grasp the truth of consciousness. Shaivism speaks about the unity of the soul with Shiva, but it shows no understanding of what the soul actually is. As such, it does not support the evolution of the soul into her completion. Rather, it sees the spiritual path as a process (or even sudden event) of identification with Shiva or as the removal of the illusion of being anything other than Shiva. When the individual consciousness of a yogi becomes absorbed in the absolute consciousness of Shiva, he is not meant to remain as the experiencer of the ultimate – he is meant to become Shiva. Shiva actually becomes Shiva, or in other words, the manifested aspect of Shiva becomes one with his original nature. In its intention to produce such a radical identification with the absolute reality, Shaivism falls into the pitfall of impersonal enlightenment.

In addition to having a simplistic vision of consciousness, Shaivism also excludes evolution into both being and heart. The heart ('hrdayam') is often mentioned, but this term is used to refer to the nature of pure consciousness rather than the center of love. Being ('sat') is also mentioned, but



it does not represent the state of being that is linked to the absolute (and realized through the portal in tan t'ien). Rather, it points to the isness of pure consciousness. The general tendency in Indian spirituality is to pull energy upwards, away from the source, due to the completely false idea that the absolute reality is reached through the crown chakra. Therefore, there is often an absence of the energy of being. Can one really realize the 'I-consciousness' of Shiva without having access to the absolute state? For consciousness to reach perfection it must surrender downwards and reach vertical samadhi in the source; otherwise its inherent fluctuations will lock it in the dimension of presence.

For more mature souls, Shaivism often speaks of self-realization as a direct insight into our true nature. However, it over-simplifies this insight, portraying it as a single event and failing to see that we must realize our true self on many different levels before we become truly complete. In this way, Shaivism is not an answer for those who seek to become whole.

### *The Oversimplification of the Nature of Shiva*

Shaivism has deeply contemplated the nature of Shiva. As was noted, it considers him to be much more dynamic than in other Hindu teachings. He is described as the absolute I-consciousness, endowed with self-reflection, self-awareness, bliss, absolute knowledge, unhindered free will, and the creative force to manifest the universe. His nature is consciousness, light, knowledge, and bliss. How did those who spoke of Shiva in these terms know these things? They knew them because they experienced his nature through their samadhi in his universal subjectivity. Does this mean that they really knew Shiva? No, it does not. If they had really known Shiva, they would have realized that they could never reach unity of identity with his transcendental presence. All that they knew was what they experienced, and to that they added their speculations and oversimplifications.

By reaching samadhi in Shiva, a yogi begins to experience the universal subjectivity of the ultimate reality directly, but this is not the end. He may have a taste of the nature of Shiva, but he still does not *know* Shiva. Universal subjectivity is merely a doorway to the transcendental subjectivity of the beyond, and no one can enter transcendental subjectivity and live to tell the tale. It is the eternal beyond, the unreachable heart of the mystery of the beloved. To identify with universal subjectivity and then to claim that this is all there is in the realm of Shiva is a serious error of judgment. A yogi



can neither become Shiva, nor can he truly penetrate the knowledge of his transcendental presence. To understand this is not only humility, but wisdom.

### *The Need for Freedom from the Tyranny of Philosophers*

The Indian mind has always been attracted to metaphysical speculation. To have a conceptual vision of reality is important, but to be overinvolved in endless intellectual debates is spiritually useless and even harmful. The sages and scholars who wrote countless volumes describing the philosophy of Shaivism were exceptionally bright individuals with enormous intellectual capacities. And yet in the end, they became trapped in that very intellect, in the virtual reality of the mind. Trying to conceptualize all the elements of existence (from the absolute I-consciousness to objectivity and diversity, and then back to the source) can be a fascinating exercise for the mind. Ultimately however, it becomes a distraction from the real purpose of self-actualization. Buddha warned against such speculations on many occasions, saying they were totally irrelevant to the more pressing matter of human suffering.

To be intelligent is not to seek all the answers and explanations, but to seek those answers which can help us to grasp the practical laws of our evolution. The answers and concepts that we do not need are just a burden. Humanity would have benefited much more had these sages brought a higher understanding into the practical nature of the path itself. That energy could have been spent unraveling all the steps of awakening, instead of being caught up in endless debates and futile intellectual pursuits, such as creating a 'perfect' doctrine of Shaivism. There is no perfect philosophy, because the mind cannot grasp the breathtaking complexity of existence; it cannot reveal the secrets of creation.

No one can ever come close to understanding the mystery of Shiva, for he is the very essence of the transcendence of the known. He is eternally steeped in the unknown, in the unfathomable. For a soul in samadhi, Shiva is like a horizon that can never be reached, the horizon of the infinity that is illuminated by the light of his love and magnificence. The reaching, and not reaching, of the horizon of Shiva's supreme presence is the undying journey of the soul into his ever-receding transcendental subjectivity. This is her love, for love is both reaching and not-reaching. Love, in order to exist, can never arrive at its destination – it is always arriving. To think that by realizing one's pure nature one has become Shiva is not only ignorant, but even arrogant. In that sense, the



original Shaivism (Shaiva Siddhanta) was closer to truth, for it embraced the duality between the soul and her creator. One could even say that it was close enough to serve as a foundation upon which a true science of spiritual illumination could have been created. And yet, nothing of that nature was done. The knowledge of the path to self-realization has been frozen since ancient times. It has stopped evolving because people are more interested in theories, metaphysics, and useless cosmological models than in how to actualize their complete self beyond the illusion of partial awakening. If we have any love for our soul, and if we truly honor her supreme creator, Shiva, the lord of all souls – this must now change.

Blessings,

Anadi

*For a full glossary of terminology please visit our website [www.anaditeaching.com/glossary](http://www.anaditeaching.com/glossary)*