

Decoding Life In View Of Shaivism

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Abstract :

This paper aims at bringing out the meaning of life in view of Shaivism. Śaivism is a form of non-dual spiritual practice and philosophy that originated in India. Śaivites believe that the entire creation is both an expression of conscious divinity and is non-different from that divinity which they call "Śiva". As in all Hindu denominations, Śaivism acknowledges the existence of many other deities. These deities are expressions of the Supreme Shiva but are certainly not separate from him. Hence, Shaivism sees Shiva as the creator, sustainer and destroyer.

Whose call is paramount – the flesh or the spirit, art or scientific thought, religious speculative action or contemplation? If the world that I see is unreal, why do I feel so connected to it? If there is no God, why do so many traditions have so many representations of Him or Her? Is it impossible for me to practice spirituality while giving *a meaning to life*? These queries are part of all spiritual quests, and various schools of thoughts seek to address them in their own way. The unique characteristic of Shaivism is that it provides a complete answer to all of these questions, explaining both the material and spiritual world, the lower and the higher selves, the seen and the unseen.

The philosophy is truly inclusive as there is no restriction based on caste, creed, color and sex or specie to follow this system. Shaivism, is all about enlightenment. The very core concept of Shaivism is self discovery as well as discovery of the society around us. Śaivism is a very deep, devotional and mystical philosophy which not only gives meaning to life but gives meaning to the very being of life. What we know of Shiva is much less than what we do not know of him. Shaivism refutes all such traditions and propagates one to one relationship between the devotee and the Lord without any middleman. Another remarkable feature of Shaivism is its unbiased approach to all. Shaivism considers men, women, children, animals, insects, trees and even non-living objects as not only equal but a part of the ultimate reality.

Even mythologically the depiction of Shiva is a symbol of a deep rooted philosophy. A common term in shaivism is "Shakti" which stands non-dual from shiva and operates as per the will of lord. The duality visible is an illusion created by our ignorance.

In Shaivism, liberation or mukti stands equal for men, women, animals and trees. Liberation in Shaivism is a result of not only consciously fulfilling one's role in this universe but also acquiring Lord's grace and knowledge.

Shaivism strongly believes that in order to be mukt, one need not die. Because mukti is not a place to be travelled to nor does it exist in some other world. Mukti is realization of divinity within oneself and within the whole of universe.

Shaivism is a philosophy of love, realization and divinity. It is a philosophy that has celebration of life in every of its meaning and a philosophy that gives meaning to every life!!!

Keywords : Shaivism

This paper aims at bringing out the meaning of life in view of Shaivism. Shaivism is the oldest sect that has its roots in time immemorial. The word Shaivism has been derived from the Sanskrit root "Shiva" which means "the auspicious one or Kalyaankari." The followers of Shaivism are called "Shaivites or Shaivas". Shaivism is one of the most popular sects of Sanatan Dharma which

gives a holistic view of life based on equality, Love and Karma. It clearly discards any sort of ritualism, superstitions or discrimination on the basis of cast, creed, sex, colour or species.

Śaivism is a form of non-dual spiritual practice and philosophy that originated in India. Śaivites believe that the entire creation is both an expression of conscious divinity and is non-different from that divinity which they

call "Śiva". Because he is simultaneously the created and the creator, Śiva is both immanent and transcendent. This concept contrasts with many Semitic and Abrahamic religious traditions in which God is seen as fundamentally different from the creation and transcendent, or "higher" than the creation. As in all Hindu denominations, Śaivism acknowledges the existence of many other deities. These deities are expressions of the Supreme Shiva but are certainly not separate from him. This type of spiritual view is called Monistic Theism, which means that the cosmos is a "monad" or single consciousness that expresses itself dualistically, but is fundamentally one. Hence, Shaivism sees Shiva as the creator, sustainer and destroyer.

Whose call is paramount – the flesh or the spirit, art or scientific thought, religious speculative action or contemplation? If the world that I see is unreal, why do I feel so connected to it? If there is no God, why do so many traditions have so many representations of Him or Her? Is it impossible for me to practice spirituality while giving *a meaning to life*? These queries are part of all spiritual quests, and various schools of thoughts seek to address them in their own way. The unique characteristic of Shaivism is that it provides a complete answer to all of these questions, explaining both the material and spiritual world, the lower and the higher selves, the seen and the unseen.

At first, the word 'Shaivism' suggests a theology based on the worship of Shiva. However, Shiva in Shaivism is universal consciousness or the Supreme Being in this monistic philosophy that seeks to explain the process and layers of His manifestation.

Dr Madhu Khanna is Associate Professor at the Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts, New Delhi, and author of Yantra, the Tantric symbol of cosmic unity. While studying the Tantra philosophy, she was struck by the sheer clarity and lucidity of one of the foremost advocates of Shaivism, Abhinavagupta's expositions, and gained a deep insight into her own consciousness. Inspired by these shastras, she moved on to spiritual practices of concentration on breath

and then, Chakra meditation. She finally stated that 'Shaivism is the first step of recognizing my own place in this vast cosmos, was crucial in helping me integrate spirituality with this worldly life,'.

The philosophy is truly inclusive as there is no restriction based on caste, creed, color and sex or specie to follow this system. It does not prescribe sanyas but advises one to live the life of a householder and to practice, along with this life, the Shaiva yoga for the sake of self-realization. According to Shaivism not only all emotions must be experienced to be a realized soul but a soul must go through all forms of yonis as an micro-organism, insect, animal, tree, woman, man and eunuch to be a self realized soul.

It is this inclusive and all-embracing aspect of Shaivism that Lata Krishnamurthi, a leading advocate in Delhi, found most appealing. She feels that by accepting worldly life as valid and not focusing on rituals but on philosophy, Shaivism is extremely practical. She says 'Shaivism is not just an esoteric topic of discussion, but something that one can understand and apply in one's own life,'.

Shaivism, is all about enlightenment. The very core concept of Shaivism is self discovery as well as discovery of the society around us. We are here to evolve, discover, and grow, and share our insights. Shaivism is not about imposition of morals and stand points. Your actions have their own corresponding consequence. The truth that we know is dynamic, and we are still on a search towards the infinite. Śaivism is a very deep, devotional and mystical philosophy which not only gives meaning to life but gives meaning to the very being of life. What we know of Shiva is much less than what we do not know of him. Shaivism is for sure the heart of Sanatan Dharma, which is based upon equality, love and karma. While in other sects ie: Vaishnavism, Shaktism and religions ie: Jainism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity etc one approaches the divine through the priest and through karmkand or ritualism, it is Shaivism alone that refutes all such traditions and propagates one to one relationship between the devotee and the Lord without any

middleman. Another remarkable feature of Shaivism is its unbiased approach to all. Shaivism is the only philosophy in the world that considers men, women, children, animals, insects, trees and even non-living objects as not only equal but a part of the ultimate reality. Hence, according to the Shaiva Philosophy an animal or tree is as much righteous to attain mukti as any human, saint or gyani. It is because of this that Shiva is also called Ardhanareshwari, Shishu, Pashupati, Vriksheshwara and Vishweshwara. The Shaivite ardhnareshwari philosophy, for the longest time, has been presented to promote gender equality by showing that both genders complement each other. There is no superior or inferior gender. Similarly, Shiva's Pashupati roop promotes sensitivity and equality to animals, birds and insects and his Vriksheshwara roop promotes ecology by sending a message in the society to respect and regard trees. Shaivism is a holistic philosophy that takes into account the wellbeing of everything and everyone in totality. We must remember that we all are bound to each other and this balance will ensure happiness and grace. Shaivism is focused on the idea that we are the God that we seek. Our ultimate perfection is realized when we see ourselves one with the universe, and therefore connect and share compassion, love and humanity. We all evolve together with this universe. We cannot leave behind a strata, a gender, a specie or the ecology behind and advance on a material level or on a spiritual level

According to Saivism, Siva is the one, indivisible, eternal, ultimate, absolute self, the highest reality, infinite consciousness and a state of unfettered freedom. He is the self of all animate and inanimate beings and objects, who is both immanent and transcendent. He is also the changeless, subjective reality underlying the universe from which everything emerges and into which everything dissolves. He is the supreme beyond which there is nothing else. Saivism does not emphasize the need for devotional and ritualistic worship for self-realization. If one can see Shiva in each spec of the universe and

approach all with love...he is a true devotee of Shiva. The relationship between Siva and the individual soul is not that of a servant and master but of equality and essential identity. Devotional worship may be suitable for certain types of people who have had a cultural influence of Vaishnavism, Shaktism, Islam or other sects and religions. However, in Shaivism devotional worship decorated with ritualistic practices and karmkands are considered comparatively inferior to the devotional approach of surrender and trust prescribed for the most promising and advanced seekers.

Though Shiva is considered Nirakar Brahaman yet mythologically Shiva is seen as ash clad yogi who is a composition of the poles of opposite. He is beautiful and yet fearsome. He is a synthesis between Roop-kurup symbolizing that the universe is a reflection of poles of opposites and that beauty cannot be merely defined as what appears. Shiva Mythologically is worshipped by devas, pashus, asuras and even pishach/bhoot. In this depiction, Lord Shiva is shown as a God who does not judge or have any bias against anyone and thus favors everyone. He holds an unbiased attitude of being just and fair regardless of his devotee being a human, animal, sage or demon. Being covered in cremation ashes is a significant trait that represents his transcendence over death. This largely controversial act is a symbol of liberation from fear of death. Each symbol of mythological depiction of Shiva from trisul that is a symbol of 3Kaal to the third eye which is a symbol of awakening of gyan has a deep rooted philosophy.

A common term used in Shaivism is "Shakti". Shakti is the dynamic aspect or energy of Siva. She has an infinity of aspects such as chit-Shakti (the power of consciousness), Maya-Shakti (The power of material maya) ananda-Shakti (the power of delight), iccha-Shakti (the power of will), gnana-Shakti (the power of knowledge) and Kriya-Shakti (the power of creative action). The objective world or universe that we perceive as ours, with all its constituent and disparate objects, is an expansion of Shakti.

Since Siva is the ultimate reality, Shakti should not be mistaken as something different from him. There is no difference between Siva and Shakti. Shakti is an indistinguishable aspect of Siva performing a specific set of tasks with no direction of her own, she acts on the direction of Shiva. Whatever distinction we perceive between shiva and shakti exists, because we cannot understand Siva or we try to understand him as per television dramas or misinterpretation of scriptural texts. The duality is an illusion created by our ignorance and limitations. In the highest absolute self all is one without a second and without any movement.

According to Saivism the world in which we live and with which we interact is a projection of Siva's dynamism and as real as Siva himself. If God is real, everything that emanates from him must be as real. By his free will Siva manifests the objective reality within himself using himself as the qualities of nature, the source (tattvas) and substratum. Siva and his creation are as inseparable as the ocean and the waves. The waves in the ocean exist in the ocean and because of the existence of the ocean. Similarly the manifested worlds of Siva and their constituent parts exist in Shiva and because of Shiva. Thus according to Saivism, Siva and his creation are both real and inseparable.

Saivism stresses that there is no difference between Siva and the jivas. The Jiva may be a human, animal, insect, tree or an organism of any kind. Since Shiva is omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent and all pervasive, he exists equally in all without any *bheda*. Thus the Jiva and Shiva are considered *advait*. The soul/ Jivaatma is of the nature of Siva. It is pure consciousness. However, because of the concealing power / *Tirobhaav* of Shiva, the individual jivas become ignorant of their original nature and fail to experience their true consciousness which remains hidden within them. Through his dynamic shakti he creates temporary ignorance in the jivas and subjects them to the three impurities of *anava malla* (*Mal arising out of "I, ME, MYSELF"*), *karma malla* (*Mal arising out of "I AM THE DOER"*) and *maya malla* (*Mal arising out of*

"I AM ALL AND ALL IS MINE"), because of which they believe themselves to be finite and separate and subject themselves to the laws of karma. The purpose of each Jiva is therefore to recognize its true nature and experiences its original state of consciousness.

Though it is tough to understand from our limited senses as to why the lord creates but a close *anuman* is that Siva creates the worlds through his dynamic Shakti for the sake of pure joy (*ananda*) of rediscovering himself through his individual selves. He enacts the dance of creation and dances it within himself, repeatedly from one creative cycle to another, using himself as the Dancer, the Dance and the Danced, the subject as well as the object, the goal as well as the means for his own joy. Mr Jaidev Singh, in his book *Pratabhijnahrdayam*, a translation of the sage Utpala's sutras, explains that Shaiva philosophy views Parama Shiva as a supreme artist. Just like a musician who bursts forth in a song or an artist pours his creative energies in his painting, Shiva pours out his creativity in his creation, through Shakti. In this process, a veiling takes place. So, the Supreme Consciousness hides from itself through its own veiling power, and then liberates itself by seeing itself as it really is. This veiling takes place in 36 steps or tattvas. These progressively trace the veiling of the original Absolute Reality, moving it from the five limitationless states of Shiva tattva, Shakti tattva, Sadashiva tattva, Isvara tattva and Sadvidya (also known as Shuddvidya or kriya) tattva to the Maya tattva, where the limitations begin. Man becomes a finite being, *nara*, motivated by a passion for objects of enjoyment. Maya expands into the next five tattvas, Kala, Avidya (*ashudh*), Raga, Niyati and Akala – collectively called *kuncukas* or cloaks which cover the real nature of the knowing objects. With this, *maya* subtly develops our sense of ego. Then follow the Purusha and Prakriti tattva that puts the final seal on man's finitude leading to the lower tattvas.

These include faculties of the individual being such as the three interior instrumental elements (*antah-karnas*) *Buddhi* (intellect),

faculty of judgement, Manas, faculty of imagination, Ahamkara, personal ego. Then follow the five exterior elements of perception (jnanendrayas) five elements of action (karmendreyas), five subtle objective elements (tanmatras) and finally, five objective elements (bhutas).

By understanding these tattvas, we realize that though the individual self (atman) is identical with the Supreme Lord, due to the influence of maya (ignorance/ illusion) the individual self forgets its divine nature, becomes liable to limitation and bondage, and thinks itself to be different from the Supreme Lord.

As long as one resides in the lower tattvas, one is the victim of sadness and sorrow and is entangled in the wheel of repeated births and deaths.

However, this system does not just stop at showing the nature of life but also specifies the path of ascent or trika yoga through which an aspirant may go to the higher tattvas from the lower. In fact, the practice emphasizes that one should not stop with mere knowledge but put one's knowledge into action, through which one gains awareness or self-recognition.

In Shaivism, liberation or mukti stands equal for men, women, animals and trees. Liberation in Shaivism is a result of not only consciously fulfilling one's role in this universe but also acquiring Lord's grace and knowledge. Knowledge is subjective to the yoni that one may be born in and the capabilities that one holds and develops to know. Knowledge must not be interpreted in terms mental capacities. In Shaivism knowledge means the experience of a soul at various levels. Just as the knowledge of an infant, a class 4th student, a 12th standard adolescent and a working professional cannot be disregarded; similarly the experiences of knowledge of an ant, a dog, a lion, a man or a rishi cannot be disregarded at any level. It is rightly said, nothing in the world comes free...even grace needs to be earned through the dint of karma. The aim of moksha or liberation in Shaivism is to be free of any karma that may get us back in the circle of life

and death. Hence, one aims at breaking free from the process of birth and death by incurring no karmas and by dedicating all karmas to Shiva. This is possible only and only when one realized that he is the karak, Katra and the bhokta. This realization leads a person to *mumukshutvaa* and one regains his original identity of being Shiva.

Saivism is of the view that, Siva and the individual soul are one and the same reality. So when a Jiva is created or liberated, we cannot say that it has lost or gained its true consciousness, for it has never lost or gained its true consciousness, even for a second. The Siva consciousness has always been there in each Jiva and was never lost or transformed. Just like on a rainy day the sun appears not to be visible but the truth is that the sun is forever there, right in its place. The covering of sun by the clouds creates a visual maya and we believe that the sun has disappeared. Therefore the use of any of the words that imply gain or loss of Siva consciousness is an anathema in Saivism. It denotes duality between Siva and jiva which is not acceptable in Shaiva philosophy. Even such expressions as process or journey or path to denote the progress of the jiva on the spiritual path would imply the movement of the soul from one point to another in space and time which means duality and separation in space and time between Siva and the individual soul. From this philosophical perspective the state of liberation is best described as becoming filled with wonder to know suddenly what one has always been and all along. In liberation nothing has been truly gained or nothing has been truly lost but simply one realizes the process of being and becoming. As in the words of Abhinavagupta it is only a change in the point of view or in the words of Gaudapada, "a change in vision". Finally, *mumukshutva* or *moksha* is the unexplainable reality of the liberated soul who knows that nothing was lost and therefore, nothing is gained.

One can reach this ultimate state only through God's grace. As Mr Om Prakash Mahajan, an ardent practitioner of this system, says, 'You may knock many times at a

person's door but only if the person answers your call can you enter.' He explains that all effort is just a preparation. 'Udam bhairon', a key tenet of the Shiva sutras, explains that only when udam, effort and bhairon, the Godhead, converge, there is realization. In other words, 'When God wills, your prayer will be answered'.

Shaivism strongly believes that in order to be mukt, one need not die. Because mukti is not a place to be travelled to nor does it exist in some other world. Mukti in accordance to shaivism can be achieved by an animal, plant or human at this very point. Mukti is realization of divinity within oneself and within the whole of universe. Once a being is aware of the Mahavakyas- *aham brahmasmi*,

*tat tuvam asi, prajnanam Brahman, ayatmam Brahman.....*he is considered Jivan mukta. Once a person is jivan mukt, he continues with his natural functions but the consciousness remains firmly fixed in Siva with no karmas of his oneself. This is the state of anupaya or no other means. The soul has regained its true consciousness and complete independence. There is nothing else to be done or nothing else to be realized. Finally when it leaves the human body called *Videhimukti*, it becomes the mirror, Siva Himself.

Shaivism is a philosophy of love, realization and divinity. It is a philosophy that has celebration of life in every of its meaning and a philosophy that gives meaning to every life!!!

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