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RESEARCH ARTICLE



## EXAMINING THE PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS, MAJOR PROPONENTS, PRACTICES, AND CULTURAL EFFECTS OF SHAIVISM.

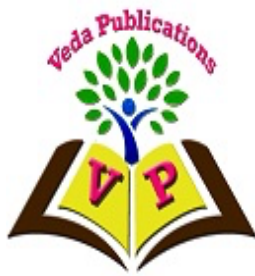
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### ABSTRACT



With its roots in Hinduism, Shaivism, also known as Shivism, is one of the world's oldest and most significant religious traditions. The worship of Lord Shiva as the highest deity is its main focus. This essay examines the philosophical principles of Shaivism, significant proponents and personalities connected to its evolution, the variety of practices adhered to by its adherents, and the philosophical, social, and cultural effects it has had throughout history and in the present. By examining its fundamental principles, notable personalities, and contributions to society, the study highlights Shaivism's continued significance in the contemporary world.

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**OVERVIEW**

One of Hinduism's oldest and most deep religious traditions is Shaivism, also known as Shivism, which is based on the veneration of Lord Shiva as the highest deity. As a spiritual tradition, it has inspired philosophical and spiritual practices around the world in addition to influencing India's religious environment. Shaivism, a vibrant and varied religion with a deep philosophical underpinning, a vast collection of sacred literature, and a variety of devotional and yogic practices, has its roots in ancient writings and has developed over thousands of years. Millions of followers worldwide are still motivated by this dynamic, living heritage today. With a primary focus on the character of Shiva, who is considered the ultimate reality and represents both creation and destruction, Shaivism offers a distinctive fusion of mystical, intellectual, and devotional aspects. Lord Shiva is regarded as the transcendent and immanent power that rules the universe. He is frequently portrayed in a variety of ways, including as the Lord of Yogis, the cosmic dancer (Nataraja), or the meditating ascetic. For Shaivites, achieving emancipation (moksha), which is attained by acknowledging one's innate bond with Shiva, the highest consciousness, is the aim of existence. This insight embraces non-dualism, in which the individual self becomes one with the divine, transcending the dualities of life and death, matter and spirit.

From the philosophy of Advaita Shaivism (non-dualism), which holds that all reality is ultimately Shiva's manifestation, to the path of Bhakti (devotion), which stresses emotional connection and surrender to Shiva as a personal god, Shaivism

encompasses a wide range of activities and beliefs. Tantric techniques are also part of the tradition, in which the practitioner connects with the divine through meditation, mantras, and rituals. Shaivism has also had a significant impact on Indian civilization, influencing many facets of Hindu culture, such as temple building, traditional dance, music, and literature.

In addition to analysing Shaivism's influence on religious and cultural domains in India and around the world, this study seeks to offer a thorough examination of its fundamental principles, notable adherents, and important activities. From its earliest writings, such as the Shiva Sutras, to its contemporary interpretations, Shaiva thought is rich, which highlights its ongoing applicability in answering queries concerning the nature of reality, the self, and the cosmos. The paper illustrates the broad influence of Shaivism on religious philosophy, society, and individual spiritual practices around the world by exploring the principles of the religion, looking at the lives of significant figures, and talking about the tradition's pervasive effects.

**BASIC TENETS OF SHIVISM'S**

A collection of fundamental philosophical and theological ideas that place an emphasis on worshipping Shiva and discovering the divine inside oneself are at the basis of Shaivism. Shaivism's core concepts are influenced by a variety of interpretations that differ throughout sects. Nonetheless, the majority of Shaivites agree on a few core principles.



### 1. Advaita, or monism

The majority of Shaivism is a monistic tradition. Advaita Shaivism is the most well-known school of philosophy within Shaivism, emphasizing the unity of the Supreme Being (Shiva) and the individual soul (Atman).

According to this perspective, there is no essential difference between God, the cosmos, and the individual. Lord Shiva is the manifestation of everything. The central thesis of this philosophy is that freedom (moksha) can be attained by an individual realizing their true identity as Shiva by self-realization. Many of the non-dualistic ideas in Shaivism have their philosophical roots in Vasugupta's Shiva Sutras. The concept that Shiva, in his absolute form, is the ultimate reality (Brahman), from which the entire cosmos arises and eventually, returns, is emphasized in these writings.

### 2. The Shakti Concept

The connection between Shiva and the divine feminine, Shakti, is a key theological aspect of Shaivism. Frequently portrayed as Shiva's consort, Shakti is characterized in several Shaiva texts as the universe's dynamic force that complements Shiva's quiet disposition. Shiva and Shakti together represent the inseparable duality of existence, with Shiva standing for consciousness (purusha) and Shakti for power or energy (prakriti). Being the origin of creation, preservation, and destruction in the universe, Shakti is revered. This idea is further explored in the Tantras, a significant collection of Shaivites' texts, which propose that the union of the divine couple gives them the ability to create and destroy the cosmos.

### 3. The Triple Path of Jnana, Kriya, and Bhakti

Three main spiritual routes are provided by Shaivism to help followers achieve emancipation:

**Bhakti:** A fundamental principle of Shaivism is the path of devotion to Lord Shiva. Shiva is worshipped by devotees through rites, mantras, and prayers. Bhakti places a strong emphasis on giving oneself over to the divine and developing a close, emotional relationship with the deity.

**Janna:** Understanding the nature of reality and the self is the goal of the knowledge path. This method entails in-depth philosophical analysis and meditation, which results in the understanding that Shiva and the self are one. The quest for knowledge entails an experiential realization of the ultimate truth in addition to intellectual pursuits.

**Kriya:** The term "Kriya," which means "action," refers to physical disciplines like yoga, meditation, and rituals that purify the body and mind and bring them into harmony with the divine. Kriya places a strong emphasis on the value of self-control, discipline, and the application of yoga methods.

### 4. Shiva as the All-Powerful God

In Shaivism, Lord Shiva is regarded as the ultimate deity and is both the universe's creator and destroyer. Shiva is regarded as existing in everything while existing outside of space, time, and form. He possesses both form (saguna) and formlessness (nirguna). While his shape as the cosmic dancer (Nataraja) or as a family man (with his consort Parvati and son Ganesha) demonstrates his immanence in the world, his formless aspect displays his limitless and transcendent nature. Shiva is frequently shown using a variety of symbols, such as the crescent moon, the drum (damaru), the trident (trishula), and



the serpent around his neck. These symbols stand for his dominance over time, life, destruction, and rebirth, among other facets of existence.

### 5. Moksha and Freedom

According to Shaivism, moksha, or freedom from the cycle of birth and reincarnation (samsara), is the ultimate aim of human existence. Realizing one's actual essence as Shiva is the path to achieving moksha. Meditation, dedication, and intellectual study are the methods that lead to this realization. According to Shaivism, liberation is a shift in consciousness when a person achieves unity with Shiva rather than just escaping the material world.

### MAJOR PROPONENTS OF SHAIVISM'S:

Many mystics, philosophers, and saints have helped Shaivism grow and proliferate throughout history. Shaivism's theological, philosophical, and devotional facets have been moulded by these proponents, guaranteeing its ongoing applicability today.

**Vasugupta:** Kashmiri philosopher who is recognized for having established the Kashmiri Shaivism school, is among the most significant individuals in Shaivism's history. A large portion of the Advaita Shaiva tradition has its philosophical roots in Vasugupta's Shiva Sutras. His teachings place great emphasis on the notion that Shiva is the essence and source of everything, and that realizing one's identity with Shiva is the first step toward emancipation.

**Abhinavagupta:** The Kashmiri philosopher and mystic Abhinavagupta, who lived in the tenth century, is another important character in the evolution of Shaivism. Abhinavagupta had a significant role in the advancement of Kashmiri Shaivism, especially the school of thought known as Pratyabhijna

(recognition). His philosophy places a strong emphasis on the notion that self-realization occurs when one acknowledges their own innate divinity and that the universe is Shiva's self-manifestation. Shaivism, Indian aesthetics, and the study of tantra have all been impacted by Abhinavagupta's writings on philosophy, aesthetics, and tantra. He is also recognized for having created an advanced philosophy of beauty and art that holds that all forms of artistic expression reveal the divine presence.

**Shankaracharya Adi:** Adi Shankaracharya made significant contributions to Shaivism, but he is more known for his work in Advaita Vedanta. He authored in-depth commentary on the Shiva Sutras and other Shaiva writings. Shaivism was included in the larger intellectual conversation in India thanks to Shankaracharya's incorporation of Shaiva thought into the Vedantic framework, which helped close the gap between Shaivism and other schools of Hindu philosophy.

**Shaiva Saints and Nayanmars:** Between the sixth and ninth centuries, a group of sixty-three Shaiva saints from Tamil Nadu were known as the Nayanmars. Through their poetry, songs, and hymns, they were instrumental in promoting Shaiva devotion. The inclusiveness of Shaivism was demonstrated by the Nayanmars' inclusion of both Brahmins and members of lower castes. Shaivism became the predominant religion in Tamil Nadu and Southern India as a result of their works and devotion. Saints like Tirugnana Sambandar, Appar, and Sankara Nayanar are regarded as very important members of the Shaiva bhakti (devotional) movement among the Nayanmars.



Shaivism adherents come from a wide range of geographical and ethnic backgrounds. A significant portion of Shaiva practitioners are regular devotees who use devotion and rituals to find spiritual fulfilment, even if many are devoted ascetics or yogis.

**Yogis Shaiva:** Devoted practitioners, Shaiva yogis follow strict ascetic routines that include physical postures (asanas), meditation, and breath control (pranayama). These yogis frequently withdraw into solitary settings in pursuit of spiritual enlightenment via focused practice. Two essential components of Shaiva yogic practices are the practice of Kundalini Yoga and the usage of mantras to communicate with Shiva.

**Worshippers and Devout People:** Ordinary devotees who worship Lord Shiva in temples, at home, or during festivals make up the majority of Shaiva practitioners. Millions of believers around the world celebrate Maha Shivaratri, the major celebration honouring Shiva. Chanting mantras, fasting, and presenting milk and water to the Shiva linga—the symbolic embodiment of Shiva—are all part of the rituals.

**International Practitioners:** Shaivism has become very popular outside of India as yoga and meditation have spread throughout the world. Shaiva spirituality is practiced by many Westerners via yoga, meditation, and intellectual study. People like B.K.S. Iyengar, Sivananda, and Swami Vivekananda have been instrumental in advancing Shaiva practices over the world.

## SHAIVISM'S EFFECT ON LITERATURE, ART AND ARCHITECTURE

**Cultural Influence:** In India, Shaivism has had a significant impact on literature, art, and architecture. Its vast artistic legacy is demonstrated by the elaborate sculptures and paintings found in Shaiva temples, including those in Chidambaram, Varanasi, and Kailash. A great deal of literature, including poetry, drama, and dance, has been influenced by the tales of Lord Shiva, his spouse Parvati, and his several incarnations.

**Spiritual and Philosophical Influence:** Indian and international philosophy have been greatly influenced by Shaivism's emphasis on non-dualism and the acknowledgment of the divinity within oneself. Its ideas on self-realization, emancipation, and consciousness are important to the evolution of Indian philosophy and have impacted other philosophical traditions like Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta.

**Political and Social Impact:** Shaivism has also been a factor for societal change throughout history. For instance, the saints of Nayanmar opposed the caste system and stressed that spiritual practices should be accessible to everyone, regardless of social standing. Shaiva temples are still important hubs for social and communal well-being today.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion Shaivism is still one of the most enduring and significant spiritual traditions in the world because of its rich philosophical, devotional, and mystical traditions. Shaivism has had a significant impact on religious philosophy, cultural customs, and worldwide spirituality, starting with its core beliefs in



monism and the veneration of Shiva as the ultimate deity and continuing via yoga and devotion. Shaivism continues to influence India's and the world's spiritual environment, whether through its many adherents and practitioners or its philosophical proponents.

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