A Critical Review of *Shiva Samhita* and its Contribution to Yoga

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**Abstract**

The *Shiva Samhita* or the compendium of Shiva is an ancient text on practice of Yoga. It is one among the lesser known texts of Yoga. It is believed that the *Shiva Samhita* is a dialogue between Lord Shiva and his consort, Parvati. The discourse includes detailed instructions on how to perform *Yogasastras*, *pranayama*, tantric practices, *mudras* and *bandhas* which is explained across five chapters. There are two standard textbooks of *Shiva Samhita* with English translation which are available; one is by Srisa Chandra Bahadur Vasu and other by James Mallinson. This review article on *Shiva Samhita* is primarily based on the English translation text by the former author. This article highlights and critically reviews the various concepts that are explained across the five chapters of the text.

**Keywords:** *Shiva Samhita*, yoga, asana, pranayama, mudras

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**INTRODUCTION**

The *Shiva Samhita* or the compendium of Shiva is an ancient text on practice of Yoga. It is one among the lesser known texts of Yoga. It is believed that the *Shiva Samhita* is a dialogue between Lord Shiva and his consort, Parvati. Author of the *Shiva Samhita* is not known. The *Shiva Samhita* is said to be written around 15th to 17th Century AD. As per the available translation of Srisa Chandra Vasu, it consists of five chapters and 517 verses in all (Excluding *Vajrondi mudra*) which deals with the practice of Yoga, ways of attaining *siddhi*, philosophy of existence, importance of Yoga, spirit and *maya*, functions of the body, principles of *pranayama*, *kundalini*. The first chapter consists of 96 verses, second chapter consists of 54 verses, third chapter consists of 97 verses, fourth chapter consists of 58 verses and the fifth chapter is the largest one which consists of 212 verses.

**AIMS & OBJECTIVES**

1. To review the contents of *Shiva Samhita*.
2. To understand the contribution of *Shiva Samhita* to Yoga.

**MATERIALS & METHODS**

A. Literature Search—Review of *Shiva Samhita* based on available literary sources.

**Chapter 1 (Prathama patala)**

The chapter deals with the various philosophical aspects of Yoga. It begins with the discussion on the modes of salvation (*Muktiupaya*) [1]. Various postulates that are opined by various experts are put forth such as *satya*, *tapa*, *shoucha*, *ksama*, *danam*, *pitrkarma*, *karma*, *vairagyam*, *grihashtha karma*, *agnihotra karma*, *mantra* and *theerthanusevanam* [2]. This is followed by the discussion on knowledge. This text emphasises that there is one knowledge and that the knowledge is eternal, there is no beginning or end. It is said that the *Yogaanushana* has been explained to dispel false knowledge and spread the truth [3]. It is for the spiritual disenthralment of persons whose minds are undistracted and fully turned towards god. It explains that world is nothing but a current of consciousness. It justifies that the *Yoga shastra* is the only true *shastra* for salvation. There is also a vivid explanation of *karma*. It is said to be of two types—*Nishedha* and *vidhipooraka* [4]. If one follows the path of *Nishedha* karma, he will end up in sin whereas if one follows the path of *vidhipooraka* he is said to achieve salvation. *Vidhipooraka* consists of three types—*Nithya* (Regular), *Naimittika* (Occasional) and *kamya* (Optional). *Jnana kanda* is also explained in the *Prathama patala*. 
It says that the wise yogi who has understood the karma kanda should renounce both punya and papa and engage in jnana kanda to find out the eternal truth and attain salvation [5].

Chapter 2 (Dvitiya patala)
The chapter 2 explains the various mystic anatomical locations and energies that work inside the body. It begins with a beautiful description of Meru which is said to be surrounded by saritha, sagara, kshaila, kshetra and kshetrapalaka [6]. It is also said to consist of rishi, muni, nakshatra, punyattheertha, peetha, sun and the moon. This knowledge is said to be only understood by the yogi. Alongside the meru there is said to be various nerve centers which are engaged in their respective functions [7]. The body is called as brahlmanda. On top of the meru is said to be nectar moon which consists of eight kalas. There is a broad description of the nadis of the body such as ida, pingala and sushumnanadi [8]. The nadi which is situated on the left side of the meru is said to be the idanadi. The nadi that enters the middle part is called as the sushumananadi. The nadi on the right side of the meru is the pingalanadi. At the bottom of the meru is said to contain suryanadi. Our body is said to consist of 350000 nadi. Among them 14 are said to be the principal nadis [9]. They include sushumna, ida, pingala, gandhari, hastijihvaka, kahu, saraswati, pusa, sankini, payswani, varuni, alambusa, Vishwodari, and yasaswini [10]. There is a brief description about the chithranadi which is present in the centre of the three nadi [11]. It is considered as the centre of sushumananadi. Following this there is a beautiful description about the adhara chakra where goddess kundalini is present in the form of a serpent [12]. The vaishwanara or the fire which is situated in the gastric region is also explained here [13]. It is said to be born from a portion of persons’ own energy and the food consumed gets digested by its power. This fire is said to increase life and provides strength and nourishment. Then there is a wonderful description about jivatma [14]. In the body jiva is said to reside with garland of endless desires and chained by karma. The jiva is said to possess various qualities and it is the agent of all events and it is said to enjoy the fruit of his karma from his past life. All the creatures are said to suffer or enjoy based on their karma.

Again at the end of the second chapter he has discussed about the significance of true knowledge. From the desires it is said that all the delusions arise which can only be eradicated with great difficulty. By true knowledge all the desires are destroyed and salvation is achieved. He concludes the chapter by saying that if the practitioner of Yoga wishes to cross the ocean of the world, he should perform all duties of his ashrama and renouncing the fruits of his work. He also says that persons who are attached to sensual objects and desirous of sensual pleasures descend from the road of nirvana through the delusion of much talk and fall into sinful deeds [15].

Chapter 3 (Tritiya patala)
Chapter 3 begins with a description on anahata chakra which is situated in the heart, it consists of 12 petals. The prana is said to be located in the anahata chakra [16]. Ten types of vayu has been described here such as prana, apana, samana, udana, vyana, naga, karma, krikara, devadatta, dhvananayya. Guru has been given great importance for learning, it is said that knowledge imparted through a guru is powerful and useful. There is a beautiful description of pranayama and the ideal place of doing pranayama has been described here. Four stages of pranayama such as arambhaavastha, Ghataavastha, parichayaavastha and nishpattiavastha are described here [18]. The ideal qualities of a yogi are described as a person with strong appetite, good digestion, cheerfulness, handsome figure, great courage, mighty enthusiasm and full strength [19]. Things to be renounced by the yogi is also described in this chapter; they include Amla, ruksha, teekshna, lavana, sarshapa, katu, bahulambramaram, pratrasnamam, tailavidahakam, steya, himsa, janadwesha, ahankara, upavasa, pranipidana, shreesanga, agnisvea, bahulapam and ativabhojanam should be avoided [20]. The great yogi is advised to observe the following ahara and vihara such as gritha, kshira, mistanna, tambulachoornavarjitha, karppuram, siddhanthasravanamnithyam, vairagya grihasevanam, Vishnu namasankheerthanam, suanandashravanam, dhriti, kshama, tapa, shoucha, hrimati, guru sevanam [21]. It is also said that one must consume food when the sun enters the air and go to sleep when moon enters.
Chapter 4 (Chaturthapatala)
The chapter begins with the description of yoni mudra, contemplating on muladhara chakra which is very bright as thousands of sun and cool as thousands of moon and shines like a bandhuka flower [29]. It is said that he who practices yoni mudra is not polluted by sin. He is said to attain perfect consciousnesses and he overcomes death. He also attains vak siddhi and he can travel anywhere at will. Thus it is said that this yoni mudra should be kept a great secret and must not be revealed to all. Then one should practice yoni mudra and try to awaken the kundalini which is asleep in the inner aspect of the brahma randhra. There are various mudras and among them ten is considered to be very significant. They include mahamudra, mahabandha, mahavedha, kechari, jalandhara mudra, mula bandha, viparitakarana, uddana bandha, vajrondi mudra, and shakhichalalana [30].

Chapter 5 (Panchamapatala)
The panchamapatala is the largest among the five chapters of the Shiva Samhita. The chapter begins with the various obstacles in the practice of Yoga which include bhogavigna, dharma vigna and jnana vigna [31]. The four kinds of Yoga is also described here such as Mantra Yoga, Hatha Yoga, Layayoga and Raja Yoga [32]. There are also four categories of sadhaka [33], they include mrdu, madhya, adhimatra, and adhimaratama. Mrdu sadhakas are entitled to mantra Yoga, Madhya sadhakas are entitled to laya Yoga, Adhimatra sadhakas are entitled to hatha Yoga and adhimatra tama are entitled to all Yogas. The practice of pratikaupasana is described in this chapter [34]. This practice involves the visualization of his own shadow in the sky. This practice is said to destroy sin and increase virtue. This is said to be very useful if performed before any auspicious work. Raja Yoga is described here where one has to close his face with fingers and he sees his soul in the sky. This practice is said to be a post of the soul [27]. Total of 84 asanas are mentioned in the text but only four asanas are described and elaborated. They include siddhasana, padmasana, ugrasana and swasthikasana [28].

the air [22]. The text also instructs that one should not do Yoga and pranayama just after the meals and nor when he is hungry [23]. The text also instructs that one should take some milk and butter before the practice of Yoga and pranayama [24]. He should follow these restrictions until he is well versed in the practice. After which the restrictions do not apply to him. Four stages of pranayama has been described here [25]. In the first stage of the pranayama, the body from the soul attains the contemplation on the six chakras. By attaining this he attains the great practice of becoming invisible and moving in the air. By converting base metals into gold, power of sukshmadhrishti and co operate. When he can retain the breath for three hours he attains pratyahara. By continuous exercise the yogi then reaches the parichayaavastha where the surya and the Chandra nadi remain unmoved. By this practice he attains kriya Shakti which can pierce through the six chakras. After which he should contemplate on Vishnu and perform dharana in each of the chakras for 5½ ghatis. By this he attains the nishpattiavastha. By attaining this, the yogi has attained Samadhi, the yoni can voluntarily detach the body from the soul [27].

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acquires chitta. If he contemplates on the third eye, he perceives a brilliant fire like lightning. By contemplating on this light, all sins are destroyed. He who contemplates on shunya, gets absorbed into ether. When sitting in Padmasana, he contemplates on the tip of the nose. He attains siddhi called kechari. Next there is a subtle description of ahara. The four types of food are explained such as Chewed, Sucked, Licked and Drink. The sara part goes to lingashareera. The middle part goes to the sthulasharira. The third or the most inferior part goes to the excrement and urine. The first two essence of the body are found in the nadis and being carried by them. They nourish the body from yellow to toe. The shad chakras and the sahasrachakra are also explained in this chapter. The location of each chakras, number of petals, bijaakshara, its functions and benefits has been mentioned here. The place where ida, pingala and saraswati meet are called as triveni; the knowledge of which is said to be kept secret. In the middle of the sahasra chakra there is said to be a yoni called as Chandra nadi. Above the Chandra is the sahasra chakra. It is the place where lord Shiva dwells. Men who discover this secret place becomes free from rebirths. Next there is a description of raja Yoga where the yogi should contemplate on the mahashoonya, whose beginning, middle and end is shoonya. It is bright as kotisurya and cool as koti Chandra. He obtains all success in life. This should be kept great secret. Following raja Yoga is a description on rajadiraja Yoga, in which the yogi must sit in swasthikasana and contemplate. He obtains mahasiddhi by making his mind functionless. After which he never uses the word ‘I’ but finds himself full of atman. To him the whole universe is one. It is also said that hatha Yoga cannot be attained without raja Yoga nor the raja Yoga be attained without hatha Yoga so one should make efforts to learn hatha Yoga from a guru. It is also said that a yogi who is willing to attain moksha should utter words of the highest good, he must eat little, and he must renounce company of men and all company. It is also advised to practice Yoga in secrecy in a retired place which is free from the company of men. For the sake of appearance, he should be in the society but he should not have his heart in it. He must not renounce the duties of his profession, caste or rank. Thus let him perform all these actions as an instrument of the lord without any thought of the event. By doing so there is no sin. Even a grihastha (householder), by wisely following this may obtain success [36]. Thus by remaining in the family, always doing the duties of the householder, he who is free from merits and demerits, and has restrained his senses achieves salvation. After which there is a description of the mantras. By knowing the highest of the mantras the yogi certainly attains siddhi. This is said to give all powers and pleasures to the yogi. In the muladharapadma is the bija of speech (aim), which is powerful as lightening. In the anahatapadma (klim) which is as beautiful as the bandhuka flower. In the ajna chakra (strim) brilliant as tens of millions of moons. These three bija mantra should be kept secret as they give enjoyment and emancipation. At the end of the sacred repetition, the wise yogi must perform homa in a triangular hollow with sugar, milk, butter and the flower of karavi. By performing the homajapahoma, the goddess Tripura bhairavi, who has been propitiated by the above mantra, become pleased and grants all desires of the yogi. It is said that by repeating this mantra in a proper way, even the most heavy burdened with past karma attains success. By concentrating and controlling his senses and chanting this mantra one hundred and thousand times gets power of attracting others. By repeating it two lakh times he can control all persons. By chanting it three lakh times all deities come under his dominion. By repeating it six lakh times, he becomes the protector of the world. By repeating it twelve lakh times the lord of the yaksahasas, nagas and rakshasas come under his control. By repeating it fifteen lakh times, siddhas, vidyadharas, gandharvas, apsaras all come under the control of the yogi. By repeating it eighteen lakh times he can rise from the ground and gets a luminous body. By repeating this 28 lakh times he becomes lord of vidyadharas. By repeating it thirty lakh times, he becomes equal to brahma and Vishnu [37]. The chapter concludes by saying that this science of Shiva is a great secret (mahavidya), it has always been kept secret [38]. The yogi desirous of success should keep the hatha Yoga a great secret.

**DISCUSSION**

The Shiva Samhita is one of the lesser known authentic classical textbooks on Yoga and pranayama. The exact date of the text remains
controversial as some scholars have dated it to 17th century, while other scholars such as James Mallinson predates the text to 1300–1500 CE. Based on the statements in the text, Mallinson also believes that the text might be composed around Varanasi since there is a reference of the same. In that context there is also reference of Trivenisangam (Prayag)—present day Allahabad. Thus it can be concluded that this text must be written somewhere around the Ganges. This text is proposed by some authors to be written by Matsyendra but there is no authentic source to verify the claim. The philosophy of Yoga is beautifully explained in this text unlike other classical texts of Ayurveda. Various muktupayas are explained here which cannot be seen elsewhere. Yoganushana has been explained as the true method of attaining moksha. Karma phala which leads to Swarga and Naraka has been explained here. Realization of the truth has been given much importance. The description of Meru and Brahmanda is unique to Shiva Samhita. Apart from Ida, Pingala and Sushummanadi, there is beautiful description of Surya nadi and Chithranadi. The Vaishwanara or the gastric fire has been given due importance in Shiva Samhita. All the six chakras are also explained along with the number of petals and the corresponding bijaakshara. Another major feature of Shiva Samhita is that there is a beautiful description of ten types of vayu. Guru has been given due importance in Shiva Samhita. All Yoga and pranayama should be preferably learnt from a guru. Pranayama and its four stages are explained. The characteristics of a true yogi are wonderfully described. Observances to be followed by a yogi are explained here in the text. It is also explained when a yogi should ideally get up and when he must go to sleep and the time of food intake is also illustrated here. Benefits of pranayama and the various aṣṭa siddhis are being explained here. Among the eighty four āsanas highlighted, only four is being explained here which includes siddhasana, padmasana, ugrasana and swastikasana. Paschimottanasana is also called as ugrasana in this text. Among the various mudras, ten mudras are considered as important which are described here. It includes some of the mudras and bandhas which are all categorised as mudra in the text. Various obstacles in the practice of Yoga such as bhogavigna, dharma vigne and jnana vigne are a characteristic feature of Shiva Samhita. Four types of Yoga and corresponding four type of sadhaka finds a special mention in Shiva Samhita. Pratikaupasana is a technique of self-visualizing his shadow on the sky is a characteristic of this text. There is also beautiful description of Raja Yoga, Rajadi raja Yoga and the mystical nadas. The dharana is also mentioned here. The four types of food stuffs find a mention here and how the food divides into three parts and nourishes the body is also being explained here. The mantra Yoga and the power of mantra is being explained at the end of the chapter which is the characteristic of this text [38].

**CONCLUSION**

Shiva Samhita is one of the important texts of the hatha Yoga. It has given unique contribution to Yoga which is not seen anywhere else. The principles explained in this text are thus explained as a true path to salvation if followed under the guidance of a proper guru.

**REFERENCES**


Cite this Article