

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 Yogaasanas, 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 Sirisa 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*, *kshama*, *danam*, *pitrkarma*, *karma*, *vairagyam*, *grihastha 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 disenfranchisement 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 (*Dwitiya 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*, *punyatheertha*, *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 *brahmada*. 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 *sushumnanadi*. 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*, *kuhu*, *saraswati*, *pusa*, *sankini*, *payaswani*, *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 *sushumnanadi*. 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*, *kurma*, *krikara*, *devadatta*, *dhananjaya* [17]. *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*, *pratasnanam*, *tailavidahakam*, *steya*, *himsa*, *janadweshya*, *ahankara*, *upavasa*, *pranapidana*, *sthreesanga*, *agniseva*, *bahulapam* and *ativabhojanam* should be avoided [20]. The great *yogi* is advised to observe the following *ahara* and *vihara* such as *gritha*, *kshira*, *mistanna*, *tambulachooranavarjitha*, *karpuram*, *siddhanthasravanamnithyam*, *vairagya grihasevanam*, *Vishnu namasankeerthanam*, *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

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 of the *yogi* begins to perspire. In the second stage there is trembling of the body. In the third stage he attains *bhuchari siddhi*. In the fourth stage he attains *vayu siddhi*. By perfecting the *pranayama* the *yogi* follows decrease of sleep, excrements and urine. The truth perceiving *yogi* becomes free from disease, sorrow or affliction. He never gets sweat, saliva and intestinal worms. There is neither increase of *kapha*, *pitta* and *anila*. By the practice of *pranayama*, the wise *yogi* destroys all his *karma* whether acquired in this life or past-life through the practice of *pranayama*. By the practice of *pranayama* he attains *asta-aishwarya* [26]. He is said to attain *vakya siddhi*, *kamacharitra*, *dura dhristi*, *sukshmadhrishti*, *parakayapraveshana*, converting base metals into gold, power of becoming invisible and moving in the air. By the great practice of *pranayama* the *yogi* attains *ghataavastha*, after which there is nothing which he cannot accomplish. The *ghata* is a state in which the *prana*, *apana*, *vayus*, *nada*, *vindu*, *jeevatma* and the *paramatma* combine 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 *yogi* can voluntarily detach the body from 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].

Chapter 4 (*Chaturthapatala*)

The chapter begins with the description of *yonimudra*, 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 *yonimudra* is not polluted by sin. He is said to attain perfect consciousness and he overcomes death. He also attains *vak siddhi* and he can travel anywhere at will. Thus it is said that this *yonimudra* should be kept a great secret and must not be revealed to all. Then one should practice *yonimudra* and try to awaken the *kundalini* which is asleep in the inner aspect of the *brahmarandhra*. There are various *mudras* and among them ten is considered to be very significant. They include *mahamudra*, *mahabandha*, *mahavedha*, *kechhari*, *jalandhara mudra*, *mula bandha*, *viparitakarana*, *uddana bandha*, *vajrondi mudra*, and *shakthichalana* [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*, *adhimatraka*, and *adhimatratamaha*. *Mrdu sadhakas* are entitled to *mantra Yoga*. *Madhya sadhaka* are entitled to *laya Yoga*. *Adhimatraka 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 shape of light. By practicing *raja Yoga* he hears various *nadas* or the mystical sounds [35]. There are various degrees of sounds such as hum of bee, harp, flute, ringing bells, thunder etc. It is also said that there is no posture like that of *siddhasana*, no power like that of *kumbha*, no *mudra* like *khechhari* and no absorption like that of *nada*. There is again description regarding *dharana* where the *yogi* has to sit in *padmasana* and perform *khechhari mudra* which will destroy hunger and thirst. Below the throat there is said to be *kurmanadi*, by contemplating in it he

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 *kechhari*. 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 *yonis* 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 take 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 *yakshasas*, *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 *muktiupayas* 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 *Sushumnanadi*, 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 *asta siddhis* are being explained here. Among the eighty four *asanas* highlighted, only four is being explained here which includes *siddhasana*, *padmasana*, *ugrasana* and *swasthikasana*. *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 vigna* and *jnana vigna* 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*.

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