

4. Shiva Panchakshara Stotram

Introduction:

What is the Panchaksharam? Namah Shivaya is the Panchaksharam. It has pancha (five) aksharas (letters) न म शि वा य. In the Shiva Panchaksharam stotra Adi Sanakaracharya has expanded the five letters into five shlokas. In earlier times the Panchaksharam was usually given as an upadesha.

Om is a beeja mantra and is the beeja for all other beeja mantras. Om and Hreem are the two basic beeja mantras. Om is the beeja mantra for Shiva and Hreem is for Devi, as given in the Shastras. We cannot chant these beeja mantras without receiving upadesha. Chanting Om is therefore not required for women. Men having gone through upanayanam and upadesha can chant Om Namah Shivaya. Women can chant Namah Shivaya, without the beeja mantra Om. This is in accordance with the shastras.

Namah Shivaya, which everyone can chant, is a potent mantra. You do not need to add Om or anything else to make it more potent. If something is already sufficient for us, why aspire for something else? People take upadesha for various mantras from various gurus. This is not required when they already have the Gayathri mantra which is the most important, and the most potent mantra.

Each of the letters न म शि वा य (na ma shi vaa ya) has been assigned a shloka. Not only the whole five lettered mantra, but each letter in itself has the potency of getting the blessings of Shiva. That is the teaching of this great stotra.

1. नागेन्द्रहाराय त्रिलोचनाय भस्माङ्गरागाय महेश्वराय ।

नित्याय शुद्धाय दिगम्बराय तस्मै नकाराय नमः शिवाय ॥

1. nāgendrahārāya trilocanāya bhasmāṅgarāgāya maheśvarāya ;
nityāya śuddhāya digambarāya tasmai nakārāya namaḥ śivāya .

Meaning and Explanation:

नागेन्द्र हाराय त्रिलोचनाय - nāgendrahārāya trilocanāya

नाग – nāga - serpent ; इन्द्र - Indra - chief - Vasuki, the head of the serpents; हाराय - garland;
त्रि – tri- three; लोचनाय – locanāya- eyes - the one with three eyes

The One who wears Vasuki, the head of the serpents, as a garland, and who has three eyes represented by the sun, moon, and fire.

Just as देवेन्द्र is देव + इन्द्र, the head of Gods and नरेन्द्र is नर + इन्द्र, the head of the humans, नागेन्द्र is नाग + इन्द्र, the head of the nagas or serpents, who is Vasuki. The word Indra when used alone refers to Devendra, the chief of gods.

Nagendra is sometimes interpreted as Adi Sesha. Shiva is described as wearing Adi Sesha as a ring, garland, or as an anklet. There are several descriptions of Adi Sesha & Shiva and of Vasuki & Shiva.

Vasuki is a well-known name in the puranas. Vasuki is the brother of Manasa Devi who is the incarnation of Parashakthi. Manasa Devi and her husband Jaratkaru were blessed by Shiva. Their son Astika stopped the Sarpa Yagna (snake sacrifice) that was being performed by Janamejaya to avenge the death of his father King Parikshit due to a snakebite.

Shiva has three eyes and hence he is called त्रिलोचनाय (trilochanaya). He has the sun (सूर्य surya) as his right eye, moon (चंद्र chandra) as his left eye, and fire (अग्नि agni) as his third and center eye.

Surya, Chandra, and Agni are essential to human life. Agni is essential not only for cooking but internally for digestion as well. It resides in the stomach as Jataragni (जाठराग्नि). Agni is everywhere. We cannot function without it. We cannot perform Smartha Yagna or Shruta Yagna without Agni.

Surya, Chandra, and Agni are pratyaksha devatas i.e. we can see them directly with our eyes while we can only imagine the other devatas. These pratyaksha devatas are Shiva's eyes. The eye is the most important part of the human body. The shastras say, "सर्वेन्द्रियाणां नयनम् प्रधानम्" – sarvendriyaanam Nayanam pradhanam

Nayana (eye) means "it leads". The eye leads. Without the eye we cannot go anywhere. The most important part of the body is assigned to the sun, moon, and fire.

भस्माङ्गरागाय महेश्वराय | bhasmāṅgarāgāya maheśvarāya

भस्म – bhasmā - sacred ashes; अङ्ग – āṅga - parts of the body ; रागाय rāgāya- colored or smeared - anointment; महा – Maha – great; ईश्वर – eśvarāya - lord - the great lord

The great lord Shiva, Maheshwara, who is smeared with bhasma, the sacred ashes, also known as vibhuti.

The shastras bring out the significance of bhasma. The shastras ask us to never be without vibhuti. "If I see anyone without vibhuti on their forehead, I should take a bath because it is the equivalent of visiting a shmashana," (cremation ground) say the Shastras.

A shloka in the Devi Bhagavatham contains the various names of vibhuti.

*भासनाद् भसितं प्रोक्तं भस्म कल्मषभक्षणात्।
भूतिभूतिकरी पुंसां रक्षा रक्षाकरी पुरा ॥ (11-14-32)*

*Bhasanath Bhasitham Proktham Bhasma Kalmasha Bhakshanath
Bhoothir Boothikaree Pumsaam Rakshaa Rakshakari Pura (11-14-32)*

It has been called as Bhasitham because it shines. It has been called as Bhasma because it eats away Bhakshanaath (भक्षणात्) - our sins (कल्मष). Wearing vibhuti destroys all sins. It has been called as Bhoothi (भूति) because it brings prosperity – Bhoothikari (भूतिकरी). It has been called as Raksha (रक्षा) because it protects us from evil spirits - Rakshakari - रक्षाकरी).

Another shloka in the Devi Bhagavatham explains the 'bha' (भ) and 'sma' (स्म) in 'Bhasma' (भस्म)

*भजनात् सर्वपापघ्नं स्मरणाच्च शिवंकरम् ।
भस्म चेति समाख्यातं भुक्तिमुक्ति प्रदायकम् ॥*

*Bhajanaath Sarvapaapagnam Smaranaachcha Shivankaram
Bhasma chethi samaakyaatham Bhukthimukti pradhaayakam*

Bhajanaath Sarvapaapagnam - Wearing vibhuti destroys all my sins. Smaranaachcha Shivankaram; - Vibhuti reminds me of Shiva and hence it brings me auspiciousness. Bhasma chethi samaakyaatham - That is why it is called bha-sma. Bhukthimukti pradhaayakam - the greatest auspiciousness for the human is moksha. Vibhuti gives us all enjoyments (bhukti) and final moksha (mukti).

नित्याय शुद्धाय दिगम्बराय - nityāya śuddhāya digambarāya

नित्याय – nityāya - eternal; शुद्धाय – śuddhāya - ever pure; दिक् - dik- directions ; अम्बराय – ambarāya - garment - the one who wear the directions as his garment

The One who is eternal, ever pure, and wears the directions as his garment i.e. the one without any limitations or attributes.

Nitya means, eternal, not defined or limited by time. We have a certain time of birth and a certain time of death. Shiva has neither birth nor death. He is not limited by time, nor is he limited by space.

शुद्ध (shuddha) is to be ever pure. Nobody, except Bhagavan, can claim to be ever pure.

शुद्ध बुद्ध मुक्त (shuddha buddha mukta) is to be ever pure, to be ever full of knowledge-consciousness, and to be ever liberated and never bound. Only when one is bound, does he have to be liberated. Shiva is never bound.

Shiva who wears the eight directions as his garment is called 'digambaraya'. This is to say he has no Upadhi (limitations) and he has no attributes (such as white, black, tall, short, knowledgeable, not knowledgeable, poor, wealthy etc.). He is free from all attributes. He is consciousness incarnate. Consciousness is not his attribute, it is his nature. Bliss is his nature. Being eternal is his nature. He is sat-chit-ananda. He is ever naked in that sense.

तस्मै नकाराय नमः शिवाय tasmai nakārāya namaḥ śivāya

तस्मै – tasmai - to Him; न काराय - na kārāya - to the letter 'na' न; नमः namaḥ - prostrations; शिवाय – śivāya - to Shiva

Prostrations to Shiva who is reflected in all his potency in the letter 'na' (न -नकाराय). In this shloka the letter 'na' is represented by 'Nagendra Haraya'

In Samskrit when the अव्यय (avyaya) of कार (kara) is added to a letter, it refers to that letter. For example, अकार (akara) refers to the letter अ (a). The word 'Om' consists of अकार (akara), उकार (ukara), and मकार (makara).

The letter 'na' न is called नकार (nakara). नकाराय (nakaraya) is prostrating to the letter 'na' (न) I prostrate to Shiva and I also prostrate to the letter 'na' (न) because the letter 'na' (न) has the full potency of Shiva.

2.मन्दाकिनी-सलिल-चन्दन-चर्चिताय नन्दीश्वर-प्रमथनाथ-महेश्वराय ।

मन्दारपुष्प बहुपुष्प -सुपूजिताय तस्मै मकाराय नमः शिवाय ॥

**2. mandākinī salila candana carcitāya nandīśvara pramathanātha maheśvarāya ;
mandāramukhya bahupuṣpa supūjitāya tasmai makārāya namaḥ śivāya.**

Meaning and Explanation:

मन्दाकिनी-सलिल-चन्दन-चर्चिताय - Mandākinī salila candana carcitāya

मन्दाकिनी – Mandākinī - Ganga; सलिल –Salila - waters; चन्दन - chandana - sandal paste; चर्चिताय – carcitāya - smear - the one who is smeared

The One who is given an abhishekam with the waters of Ganga (also known as Mandakini), and who is anointed with sandal paste.

Note: Shiva is fond of abhisheka (अभिषेक sacred bath) and is called abhisheka priya just as Vishnu is fond of alankara (अलंकार decoration) and is called as alankara priya. We do abhisheka for Shiva with the Ganga waters. He is anointed with sandal paste (चन्दन). Sandal is one of eleven dravyas (द्रव्य materials) used in Rudra Abhishekam.

नन्दीश्वर-प्रमथनाथ-महेश्वराय nandīśvara pramathanātha maheśvarāya ;

नन्दी -Nandī , the bull vehicle of Shiva; ईश्वर – īśvara- lord of Nandi; प्रमथ group of Shiva's attendants called Pramatha Ganas ; नाथ – nātha- lord of the Pramatha Ganas; महा - Maha great; ईश्वर – Eswara - lord

The One who is the lord of Nandi, the lord of the Pramatha Ganas, and who is the great lord. Shiva is the lord of Nandi and called is नन्दीश्वर. Nandi, the great bull is Shiva's vahana (वाहन vehicle). Nandi was born as a brahmana boy and because of his tapas, Shiva appeared before Nandi's father and said he would take his son, Nandi, as his vehicle. Nandi means always to be happy and in bliss (ananda). The worship of Nandi is a must before we worship Shiva. The worship of Nandi gives us bliss and when we go to Shiva, we are full of bliss and we have forgotten all our samsara worries.

Shiva is the lord of the Pramatha group of Ganas. Pramatha is one of the groups of Rudra Ganas. They are various groups of attendants of Shiva. Even Bhoothas and Pisachas are sometimes shown as his Ganas. Mantana means churning (as in the Samudra Mantanam in the Puranas). Pramatha means troublesome and the Pramatha Ganas churn and torture us because of our sins. Sri Rudram describes what the various Rudra Ganas do to devotees and to sinners.

Note: In the Skanda Purana there are occasions when the Devatas try to have an audience with Shiva in Kailasa but Nandi stops them and would say to the Devatas - "This is not the time for you to meet and have darshan of Shiv" go back. This is Nandi's power. He is the one who allows you to have darshan of Shiva. Vishnu too was once stopped when he led the group of Devatas to Shiva at a time when the Devatas were suffering at the hands of the asura Surapadma. The Devatas wanted to have darshan with Shiva to request him to marry Parvathi so that Subramanya could be born to vanquish Surapadma. Nandi did not allow them in since it was not

the right time yet. Surapadma was destined to have a long life and the time had not come yet for his destruction.

मन्दारपुष्प-बहुपुष्प-सुपूजिताय - mandāra-puṣpa bahupuṣpa supūjitāya *

मन्दार – Mandara – Mandara flower; पुष्प – puṣpa - flower; बहु पुष्प – Bahu puṣpa - many flowers; सु पूजिताय - well worshipped

The One who is well worshipped with many flowers such as the Mandara flower. Mandara is one of the favorite flowers of Shiva. The Arka and Drona Flowers are his favorite as well as described by Appaya Dikshitar in Atmarpana Stuti. These are simple flowers that are used in the worship of Shiva in addition to Bilva which is a leaf. (पत्र)

*We may sometimes see the following alternate version to this line of Shloka.

मकार-महिताय-सुपूजिताय – makārā Mahitaaya supūjitāya - मकार – makārā - the letter म; महिताय –Mahitaaya - one who has mahima, reveling in the glory; सुपूजिताय – supūjitāya - well worshipped

The One reveling in the glory of the letter ‘ma’ म, and who is well worshipped.

तस्मै मकाराय नमः शिवाय - tasmai makārāya namaḥ śivāya

तस्मै – tasmai - to Him; मकाराय – ma kārāya - to the letter “ma” ; नमः शिवाय namaḥ śivāya - prostrations to Shiva

I prostrate to that Shiva whose full potency is available in the letter ‘ma’ (म). In this shloka the letter ‘ma’ (म) is represented by Mandakini (मन्दाकिनी).

3.शिवाय गौरीवदनाब्जवृन्द- सूर्याय दक्षाध्वरनाशकाय ।

श्रीनीलकण्ठाय वृषध्वजायतस्मै शिकाराय नमः शिवाय ॥

3. śivāya gaurīvadanābjavrinda- sūryāya dakṣādhvaranāśakāya ; śrīnīlakaṅṭhāya vṛṣadhvajāya tasmai śikārāya namaḥ śivāya

Meaning and Explanation:

शिवाय गौरीवदनाब्जवृन्द-. śivāya gaurīvadanābjavrinda

शिवाय – śivāya - to Shiva; गौरी - gaurī- Parvathi; वदन – vadanā- face ; अब्ज Abja – lotus - lotus like face; वृन्द- vrinda- group;

शिवाय - What better way to start a word with शि than Shiva! The concept of Shiva includes Shambu who is auspiciousness incarnate and Shankara who bestows auspiciousness. The thought and name of Shiva brings auspiciousness.

Shiva, who is auspicious, is the Sun to that lotus which is the face of Gowri. Just as the lotus blooms in the presence of the sun, Gowri's face blooms in the presence of Shiva. Vrnda (वृन्द) is a group, hence ábja Vrinda' (अब्ज वृन्द) is a group of lotuses.

Notes:

Why is the face of Gowri compared to a group of lotuses instead of one? Gowri personifies the entire creation. There can be no creation without Gowri. Without Gowri, who is Shakthi, Shiva cannot create anything. Creation is manifold. Gowri's lotus face is seen in the manifold of the entire creation as many lotuses. Devi Mahatmyam says all women are the personification of Shakthi. Hence all women's faces are lotuses.

Another way to interpret this is to see the face like a poet does, and see it as several lotuses such as lotus eyes, lotus forehead, lotus cheeks. In Kamba Ramayanam, Kamban describes Rama's form as a forest of lotuses - "Thaamarai kaadu". He describes the entire body parts of Rama viz, his feet, hands, thighs, forehead, cheeks, and eyes etc. each as lotuses.

So the face itself can be seen as a group of lotuses.

सूर्याय दक्षाध्वरनाशकाय - sūryāya dakṣādhvara nāśakāya ;

सूर्याय - sūryāya - sun - दक्ष dakṣā- Dhaksha Prajapathi; अध्वराय – ādhvaraya- yaga - Daksha's yaaga; नाशकाय – nāśakāya - destroyer

The One who is the destroyer of Daksha Prajapati's yaga.

Daksha Prajapathi, the Son of Brahma and Father of Sati, in his arrogance, despises Shiva in the presence of Nandi during a yaaga conducted by Brahma. Nandi cursed Daksha that he would meet his death at hands of Shiva.

Daksha later conducted a yaaga without inviting Shiva. Shiva's consort Sati, Daakshayani, who was Dakshaputri (Daksha's daughter) took permission from Shiva and attended Daksha's yaaga. She was also disgraced by Daksha. She consigned her body to flames. Angered by this, Shiva

plucked one of his hairs and created Virabhadra and Bhadrakali, who went to the yaaga hall and dismembered many Devatas and killed Daksha. At the plea of Brahma, Daksha's father, Shiva out of his compassion brought Daksha back to life and gave him a head of a goat.

Note: The lesson here is Shiva-ninda (criticism) and Guru-ninda (criticism) should never be tolerated. The shastras explicitly say that if you are in a place where anyone criticizes the Guru or Shiva, pluck his tongue out without thinking twice. If you are incapable of doing so, go away from that place.

श्रीनीलकण्ठाय वृषध्वजाय - śrīnīlakaṇṭhāya vṛṣadhvajāya

श्री – śrī- Sri refers to haalahala poison in this context; नीलकण्ठाय – nīlakaṇṭhāya - blue throated; वृष – vṛṣa – bull; ध्वज – dhvajāya - flag - flag with the insignia of the bull

The One who is blue throated, and who has the bull as the insignia on his flag. For the welfare of the world, Shiva consumed the haalahala poison that emerged when the ocean was churned by the Devas and Asuras for getting Amrutha. The poison that he held in his throat, turned it into blue.

Shiva has the bull both as his vehicle and in his flag. The vahana (vehicle) and the flag's insignia can sometimes be the same. From a distance you can see only the flag and when you see the flag you are reminded of Shiva.

तस्मै शिकाराय नमः शिवाय - tasmai śikārāya namaḥ śivāya

तस्मै – tasmai - to Him; शि काराय - śikārāya - to the letter शि; नमः शिवाय – Namaḥ śivāya – prostrations to Shiva

My prostrations to that Shiva who manifests himself in the letter 'shi' (शि). In this shloka the letter 'shi (शि) is represented by Shiva.

4. वसिष्ठ-कुम्भोद्भव-गौतमार्य- मुनीन्द्र-देवार्चित-शेखराय ।

चन्द्रार्क-वैश्वानर-लोचनाय तस्मै वकाराय नमः शिवाय ॥

4.vasiṣṭha kumbhodbhava gautamārya- munīndra devārcita śekharāya ;
candrārka vaiśvānara locanāya tasmai vakārāya namaḥ śivāya

Meaning and Explanation:

वसिष्ठ -कुम्भोद्भव-गौतमार्य- । - vasiṣṭha kumbhodbhava gautamārya

वसिष्ठ – vasiṣṭha – Vasiṣṭha Sage; **कुम्भ** – Kumbha- pot ; **उद्भव** – Udbhava – born –(Sage Agastya- born in a pot), **गौतम** – gautama - Sage Gautama; **आर्य** –ārya- respectable,

मुनीन्द्र -देवार्चित-शेखराय - munīndra devārcita śekharāya

मुनीन्द्र – munīndra - great munis; **देव** deva – God; **अर्चित** ārcita- worshipped by the gods; **शेखराय** – śekharāya – having head

The One whose head is worshipped by Sage Vasiṣṭha, Sage Agastya, Sage Gautama, respectable great Munis, and by Devas.

Notes:

Vasiṣṭha is a great name in the Sanatana Dharma literature. He is the resplendent son of Brahma and the purohita of Rama's vamsha, the Ikshvaku (Solar) dynasty. Vasiṣṭha says he chose to become a purohita of the Ikshvaku dynasty from the very beginning of the vamsha starting with Manu because as a Trikalagnani (one who knows the past, present, and future), he knew that Rama was going to appear in the vamsha. And Rama being Paramatma, Vasiṣṭha did not want to lose the chance of being a purohita to Rama.

There are eighteen smritis in the Sanatana Dharma including Manu Smriti and a smriti authored by Vasiṣṭha called Vasiṣṭha Smriti.

Agastya, born in a pot, and hence known as Kumbhodhbhava, was the son of Mitra and Varuna. Vasiṣṭha and Agastya are considered brothers since Vasiṣṭha once had to be born in a pot too. The story goes that Vasiṣṭha was cursed by Vishwamitra to lose his body. Vasiṣṭha's father, Brahma, took pity on his son and gave him a body which was born in a pot, to Mitra and Varuna. Vasiṣṭha then regained all his glory and memory.

Agastya is known for his numerous achievements, one of them being balancing the north and south sides of the Vindhya. During Shiva's marriage a big crowd gathered in the north of India causing the northern land to sink. Agastya though short in stature came to the south of Vindhya and established balance between the north and south. He also brought down the conceit of the Vindhya that was growing in height which he brought down. He is also known for bringing the Kaveri to the south in a kamandalu as directed by Shiva

Gautama was a great sage. Gautama by his penance brought down Godavari to the earth. Godavari is a great river equivalent to Ganga in her greatness. Godavari is also known as Gautama Ganga. Gautama was a devotee of Shiva. The Mahabharata and Devi Bhagavatham describe his greatness. When the whole world was in famine, Gautama prayed to Gayathri Devi.

Gayathri Devi blessed him with an akshaya pathram and Gautama was able to feed the vast humanity. He is also the author of Gautama Smrithi.

Munis perform manana. Their manas (mind) is completely devoted to the meditation of Shiva

चन्द्रार्क-वैश्वानर-लोचनाय - candrārka vaiśvānara locanāya

चन्द्र – candrā- moon; अर्क – ārka - surya, sun; वैश्वानर- vaiśvānara – fire / agni; लोचनाय – locanāya – eyes; The One with moon, sun, and fire as his eyes.

In this shloka Shiva's eyes are explicitly mentioned as Chandra (चन्द्र moon), arka (अर्क sun) and Vaishvanara (वैश्वानर) fire).

Surya is the giver of life and is the bestower of food grains. Chandra bestows the essence of the food grains. Vaishvanara is agni and its importance has been described in Shloka 1.

तस्मै वकाराय नमः शिवाय - tasmai vakārāya namaḥ śivāya

तस्मै – tasmai - to Him; व काराय - vakārāya - to the letter Va ; नमः शिवाय - namaḥ śivāya – prostrations to Shiva

My prostrations to that letter 'va' (व) which represents Shiva in all his potency. In this shloka the letter 'va' (व) is represented by Vashishta (वसिष्ठ)

5. यक्ष स्वरूपाय जटाधराय पिनाक-हस्ताय सनातनाय ।

दिव्याय देवाय दिगम्बराय तस्मै यकाराय नमः शिवाय ॥

5. yakṣasvarūpāya jaṭādhārāya pinākahastāya sanātanāya ;

divyāya devāya digambarāya tasmai yakārāya namaḥ śivāya

Meaning and Explanation:

यक्ष-स्वरूपाय जटाधराय - yakṣasvarūpāya jaṭādhārāya

यक्ष-स्वरूपाय – yakṣasvarūpāya - form of a Yaksha; (also Yagna swaroopaya – form of Yagna)
जटाधराय – jaṭādhārāya - wearing matted hair (jata)

The One who is worshipped in the form of a Yaksha, and who wears a jata. In this shloka, Shiva is mentioned as having the form of a Yaksha. We may find this strange and wonder how this is

possible? We usually know Shiva with a form with matted tresses, with Ganga, and serpents, and sometimes in the form of ArdhaNareeshwara where he gives his left half side to Parvathi. Now let us see how Shiva can be interpreted as having a form of Yaksha. There are two possible interpretations.

First interpretation is that there are seven lokas above the earth. Between the earth and Swarga Loka is an intermediate antariksha region called Bhuvar Loka. Here, reside the demi gods like the Yakshas, Kinnaras, and Gandharvas. The head of the Yakshas is Kubera. Kubera is a devotee of Shiva. Shiva, who is fond of all his devotees devoid of any favoritism, was fond of Kubera. Kubera performed great tapas to attain Shiva. Shiva was extremely pleased and gave a corner of Kailasa to Kubera. A Yaksha who can only live in Bhuvar Loka, not even in Swarga Loka, was now given a corner in Kailasa. Shiva called him a friend. In the Sri Suktam and Puranas, Kubera is called Devasakha (friend of Shiva). In the Sri Suktham there is prayer - "May Deva Sakha (Kubera/Wealth) come to me." Kubera is in charge of Nava Nidhi, the nine forms of wealth. It was Shiva who appointed him as the custodian of wealth. We see how Shiva gave Kubera wealth, a place in Kailasa, and a status of a friend. Therefore Shiva is a Yaksha swaroopa. Shiva is represented by Kubera in all his glory.

Another interpretation for Shiva as Yaksha swaroopa is from a story in Kenopanishad and Devi Bhagavatham. The Devatas were very pleased with their victory over the asuras. They celebrated their victory in Amaravathi, which is Indra's assembly hall. While there was nothing wrong with the celebration, it soon went out of bounds, with the Devatas' pride increasing, that they had won the battle out of their own strength.

Devi wanted to teach them a lesson. She brought Shiva in the form of a Yakshas (a great column of light) to the assembly of Indra. The sudden appearance of a column of light perplexed everybody and Indra sent Agni to find out who the identity of this Yakshas.

Agni displayed his prowess to the Yakshas but he was unable to burn a small dry blade of grass that the Yakshas had challenged him to burn. Agni lost his pride and returned to Indra. Indra dispatched Vayu but Vayu was unable to shake this smallest blade of grass. Vayu lost his pride and returned to Indra.

Indra learned his lesson. He saw the Yakshas at a great distance but as Indra got closer the Yakshas disappeared. Indra prayed to Devi. "Agni and Vayu had darshan of the Yakshas but I am unable to," he lamented, "I am a worse sinner than them." He performed a tapas for many years. Devi appeared before him and taught him gnana. Devi told Indra that his arrogance was the reason Shiva came in the form of a Yakshas to teach him a lesson, and said "You are incapable of burning or shaking a blade of grass, yet you claim that you won the battle against the asuras through your own power. Your victory was because of my power." This form of Shiva as Yakshas is referred to Yakshaswaroopa in this shloka.

Shiva is known as dhoorjati, wearing a heavy jata. The shastras describe the jata as beautiful, and shining in red.

We may sometimes see the following alternate version to the first line of Shloka 5.

यज्ञ-स्वरूपाय जटाधराय - yakṣasvarūpāya jaṭādhārāya (Yajnya)

यज्ञ-स्वरूपाय – yajnyasvarūpāya - form of yagna; जटाधराय – jaṭādhārāya - wearing matted hair (jata)

The One who is worshipped in the form of Yagna, and who wears a jata.

पिनाक- हस्ताय सनातनाय - pinākahastāya sanātanāya

पिनाक – pināka- the bow called Pinaka; हस्ताय – hastāya- holding in the hand; सनातनाय – sanātanāya - – eternal

The One who holds the bow called Pinaka in His hand, and who is eternal. Shiva holds the Pinaka bow and is called Pinakapani. Vishnu holds the Saranga bow and called as Sarangapani. The two bows were made by Vishwakarma from Maharishi Dadhichi's backbone.

Shiva is eternal and ever present. There is no time when He is not present.

Note: Our religion is called Sanatana Dharma and not Hinduism. It is the eternal dharma, a dharma that is ever present, with no beginning nor end.

दिव्याय देवाय दिगम्बराय - divyāya devāya digambarāya

दिव्याय – divyāya -quality of shine; देवाय – devāya – deva -shine; दिक् - dik- directions; अम्बराय – ambarāya- in the context of this shloka it means sky instead of garment as in Shloka 1

The one who shines, who is the quality of shine itself, and who is subtle consciousness enveloping creation like the sky envelops all directions.

Deva is one who shines. Devas have an innate capability to shine. A deva is represented with an arc of light around the head. Shiva is Maha-Deva. All shine comes from Shiva. The quality of being a Deva is personified in Shiva. All devas derive their shine from Shiva.

In Shloka 1, Shiva was described, Digambaraya, wearing the directions as his dress i.e. he has no attributes and he is ever pure. We might wonder why this word is being repeated since that would be a dosha in poetry. However, we always find another meaning for this word. Shankara in his bhashya on Vishnu Sahasranamam always finds an alternate meaning for any word that is repeated.

We have seen that ambara means garment. It also means sky. The sky is the cover or sheath for all the eight directions. There is nothing higher than the sky. Shiva is the sheath for all the directions. All creation is contained in the directions. Hence Shiva is the overlord of the entire creations and he is subtle just as the sky is subtle. He is called as Chidambaram (chit-ambaram), Shiva is the envelope of consciousness enveloping the entire creation.

तस्मै यकाराय नमः शिवाय - tasmai yakārāya namaḥ śivāya

तस्मै – tasmai to Him; य काराय - ya kārāya - to the letter 'ya' नमः शिवाय - namaḥ śivāya – prostrations to Shiva.

My prostrations to that letter 'ya' (य) who represents Shiva in all his power and potency.

6.पञ्चाक्षरमिदं पुण्यं यः पठेच्छिवसंनिधौ । शिवलोकमावाप्नोति शिवेन सह मोदते ॥६॥

pañchākṣaramidaṃ puṇyaṃ yaḥ paṭhēcChiva sannidhau | śivalōkamavāpnōti śivēna saha mōdatē

Meaning and Explanation:

पञ्चाक्षरं – Panchaksharam - the Panchaksharam Stotram; इदं –Idham - this; पुण्यं – Punyam - meritorious; यः – ya: - the one who; पठेत् – pateth - reads; शिव संनिधौ – Shiva Sannidhou - in the sannidhi of Shiva; शिवलोकं Shiva Lokam – Shiva loka ; अवाप्नोति – Avapnothi – attains; शिवेन –Shivena - with Shiva; सह –Saha - along with ; मोदते – Modhare - enjoys the bliss

The one who reads this meritorious Panchaksharam Stotra in the sannidhi of Shiva attains Shivaloka at the end of his human life and enjoys the bliss of Shiva along with Shiva. There are stories of devotees for whom Shiva sends his Vimana with Rudra Ganas who take the Shiva bhakta in the Vimana to Kailasa.

There are four types of Moksha depending on the qualifications of the bhaktha –

- Salokyam, (living in the same realm (loka) as the Lord.);
- Samipyam, (living near the Lord)
- Sarupyam, (living with form same as the Lord) and
- Sayujyam (complete merger with the Lord.).

This phalasaruti can be applied to any of the four types of Moksha. For the highest type of Moksha which is Sayujyam, this shloka can be interpreted as becoming an indistinguishable part of Shiva (not being apart from Shiva) and enjoying all the bliss of Shiva.

Thus concludes the Panchakshara Stotram which is familiar to many people and which is chanted everyday in Shiva's sannidhi by many devotees.