

## Panchanan Shiva - The Five-Headed Supreme

*In Lord Sri Krishna's  
divine rasa-filled whirl,  
Unfettered bliss flows,  
infinite bhavas unfurl;  
Of countless moments,  
every moment everlasting,  
Each one a root cause,  
for a world in the making;  
Creation, his playground,  
for experiencing eternal,  
Where freedom-unity-love  
lie hidden in ephemeral;  
In the circles of Time,  
the divine dance he replays,  
From separation to reunion,  
all emotions he inlays;  
To be realized and relived  
in both dvaita-advaita,  
And relished every instant  
in a true bhagwat-vetta.*

*For the grand plan to be enacted  
he wills for the adhara,  
Paramshiva emerges from  
his sachchidananda vighraha;  
From elements of Parambrahman,  
the Shiva manifests,  
Within whom, his own spark,  
Purushottama safely rests;  
Amidst liberation or bondage  
Paramshiva remains the same,  
Through unity and diversity  
he nurtures Krishna's game;  
The great task he performs  
through his five Shiva-crests,  
Of creator, sustainer, fruit-giver,  
liberator and witness;  
Brahma-Vishnu-Ishwar-Rudra-  
Sadashiva they are named,  
As Panchanan, the five-headed  
Paramshiva, he is famed*

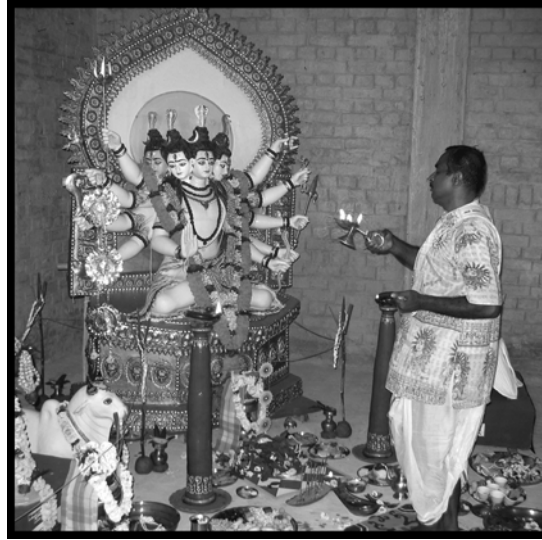
Omkar is Paramshiva's form, sachchidananda his nature. Inseparable from Shakti, he is the source of primordial impulse or vibration. From him, through his will, emanates nada (the ethereal sound) and bindu (spark of empowered light) which are pregnant with the basic units of creation in the form of aksharas (imperishable syllables) that emanate out of omkara as the varnamala or the garland of fundamental forms (varnas and akaras) symbolized through letters and connectors. These combine to form srishti-beejas (or seeds of creation) imprinted with their own characteristic chaitanya-DNA in terms of words, phrases and sentences, each embedded with their own expressive force. As the seeds sprout, they manifest themselves initially through their subtle nature of vibration, waves, sound and jyoti and then generate physical forms - all expressions of the great prana that Sri Krishna has permeated within the universe through his chosen vessel. Each flowering tells a tale, a unique story of fulfillment that enriches the grand leela. Thus is created the manifested worlds, all out of pure consciousness, in the body of Paramshiva, the supreme universal consciousness.

Again, in accordance with the will of the supreme lord, from the soul of Paramatma, impregnated in secret within Paramshiva, droplets of individual souls emerge. Encapsulated with creative Shakti-filled prana-consciousness they form individual embodiments, each empowered to attain, experience and relive the divine bhava-rasa-moments of Sri Krishna's Golaka, which he has so mysteriously implanted within creation. Each embodiment is a mirror image of the universe where individual consciousness levels merge with the

universal consciousness. The kula-kundalini Shakti within an individual is connected with and is part of Paramshiva's divine power. She is the universal mother – Adya-shakti, nityanandamoyee, achintya shaktimoyee. As one expands into the higher echelons of consciousness, and attains likeness with Paramshiva, the soul mingles with the supreme and the supreme descends into the individual satta – at which point dvaita-advaita co-exist in equal harmony.

Paramshiva is often worshipped in the form of the five-headed Lord Panchanan, depicting the guardians of some key aspects of creative consciousness. As Sadashiva, he remains the witness of all of creation, sustenance, destruction and experience – these beings acts of his

Shakti. Paramshiva inseparable with ichchha-shakti is Rudra, that with kriya-shakti is Brahma and that with gyana-shakti is Vishnu. Ishwara is the overlord who decides on fruits of action, granting the experience of happiness or affliction as the need may be. From the navel lotus of a meditative Paramshiva, firmly ensconced on the seat of Panchanan, emerges Devi Shodashi, the third fundamental Mahavidya and a manifestation of 'Sree Vidya'. Empowered with the fullness of creative power, she is the source of the majestic variety of the world, granting each item the 'kala' or power of prosperity, richness and perfection it deserves.



Arati of Lord Panchanan during Shiv-Yagna at Akhanda Mahapeeth

There are other Puranic tales of Lord Shiva becoming five headed. Once, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva taking forms of Brahmins came to bathe in the Ganga and perform their rituals. The divine mother of the universe, assuming the form of a corpse came floating across. First she came to Brahma. Perceiving her as dead, one whose soul had left the body, he pushed her aside.

Then she went to Vishnu, who also did the same considering her to be life-less – without prana – and therefore of no auspicious value. However, when she moved on to Shiva, he embraced her, perceiving her to be yet another form of consciousness, the physical embodiment being an extension of atma and prana chaitanya. Pleased at

the fulfillment of his realization, the divine Goddess christened Shiva 'Mrityunjaya' or one who has attained mastery over death. Since his knowledge surpassed the four heads of Brahma and one head of Vishnu, he is said to have been declared granted five heads, thus becoming 'Panchanan'.

In yogic terms, perceiving the inner soul in the form of the externally manifested universe and the universe in the form of the inner soul is a culminating attainment of spiritual efforts. This attainment is called Shiva-hood. It consists of three significant steps. The first is realizing everything as the atma or soul and perceiving all in existence as manifestation of the soul-consciousness or atma-chaitanya. The second is to realize

both atma and prana and perceive prana as the all-encompassing flow of the atma throughout existence. The final step is to perceive and realize the combine of atma-prana-deha in all its fullness as the vessel of the supreme. This is the fulfillment of Paramshiva-hood, embraced by purna-shakti.

Numerous other tales in the Puranas also illustrate this great truth. When Nachiketa's father gave him away as a gift to Yama, the son thought, "Among many I have achieved the knowledge of the highest level because I have realized myself as the atma or soul within; among many I have achieved the knowledge of the middle level because I have realized myself as the Conscious Life-force within; but I have not yet been able to attain the knowledge of the lowest level, that is, I have not yet been able to perceive myself as this all-encompassing physical creation and its unity with the universal soul and its (universal) Conscious Life-force. That is probably why father has sent me to the house of Lord Yama." Nachiketa had to stay in Yama's house for three days for fulfillment of realization of these three levels.

Within creation, the secrets to Lord Krishna are coded in Paramshiva. He is the

source, the solace and the 'sine qua non' of universal realization. Therefore, let us meditate on his glorious Panchanan Shiva form for grace as sages have done for ages:

*Om Dhyaye Nityam Mahesham  
Rajatagirinibham  
Charuchandraavatamsam  
Ratnakalpajwaalaangam Parashu-Mriga-  
Vara-Bheetihastam Prasannam  
Padmaasinam Samantat  
Stutamaraganyar Vyaghrakritim  
Vaasanam  
Vishwaadyam Vishwabeejam  
Nikhilabhayaharam Panchavaktram  
Trinetram*

[Om, Meditate incessantly on the Great Lord, who glows like the silvery snow clad mountains, decked with a crescent moon on his crown, adorned with shining jewels on his body, hands in Parashu, Mriga, Vara and Abhaya mudra pose, seated in lotus posture, surrounded by the celestial Gods chanting glories in worship, clothed in tiger skin – the source of the universe, its seed and one who destroys all fear – the five-headed, three-eyed Mahesa.]

**–Prof. Partha Pratim Chakrabarti,**  
*Her Blessed Child*