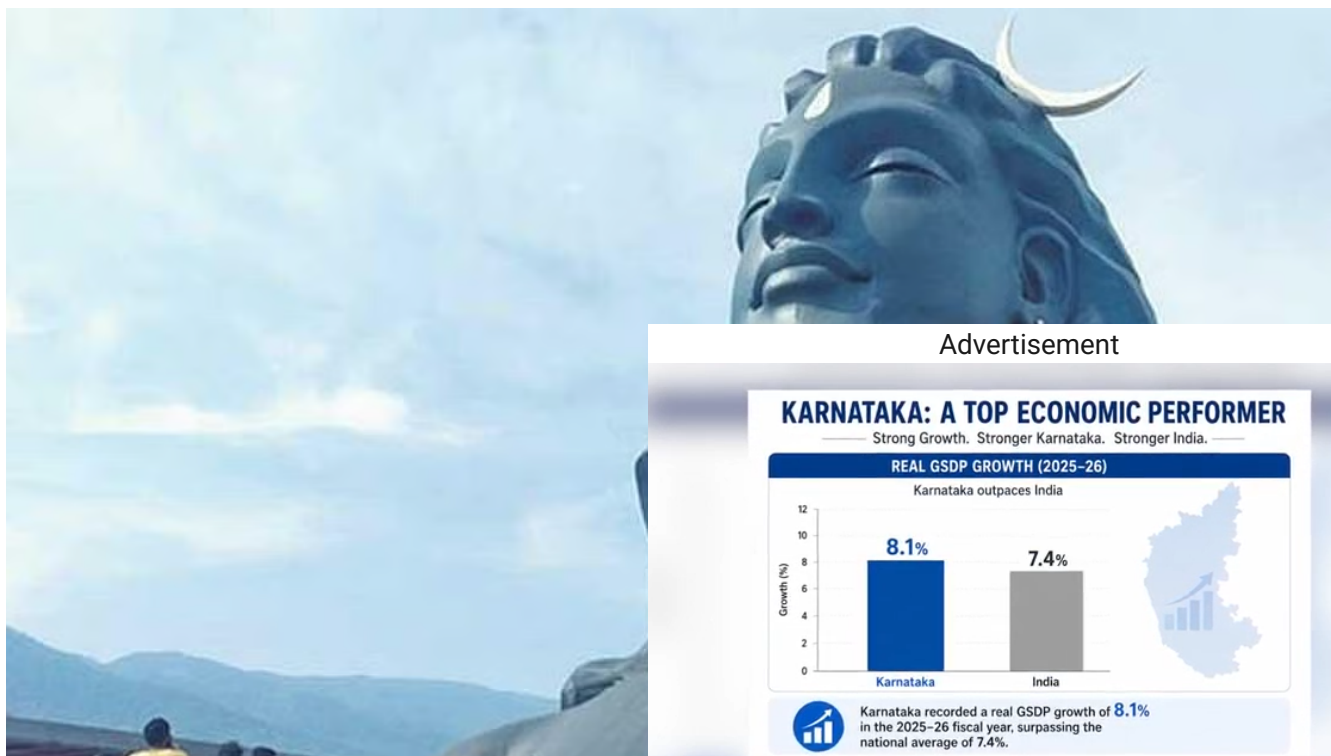




I Spirituality

The real meaning of Shiva

Let us understand the meaning of Shiva's names by going into the depths of spirituality



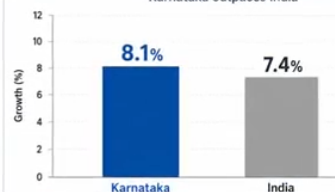
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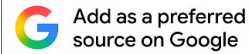
**Acharya Prashant Tripathi**

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In the public mind, Shiva and Shankar are one and the same: Shiva-Shankar, Bholenath, Kailashpati—hundreds of names. All names are beautiful. But if we understand the meaning of these names by going into the depths of spirituality, their beauty increases further. Shiva means the soul, the pure Truth. You say 'Shivoham', just as the Upanishads say, 'Aham Brahmasmi', or 'Poornoham'. You would not ordinarily say 'Shankaroham'.

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Let us understand the meaning of Shiva's names by going into the depths of spirituality

By ACHARYA **DDACHANT**

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When the Supreme Truth is known as nirgun, nitya, nirakaaar, nirvishesh (virtueless, timeless, formless, non-subjective), it is addressed by the name 'Shiva'. Shiva can have no form, no body, no abode, no gender, no family, and no virtue. This is because all the causes of human suffering are contained in this material, visible and virtuous world.

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All that comes under the purview of the senses become the content of the mind and keep the person in confusion. The Ultimate Truth must be seen as

free of form, colour and shape. If we make the Ultimate Truth also a thing of the world and start giving it form, colour and shape, then would there be any possibility left for human liberation? Therefore, Shiva has to be formless.

Now let us come to the limitations of the common man. Nirgun and Nirakaar are mere words for the ordinary mind. Since our birth, all our experiences are of shapes, forms and bodies. Therefore, most people are not aware of Nirguna-Sadhana, nor are they able to relate to the shapeless and thoughtless. For most people, trying to imagine a truth which has form becomes unavoidable.

This is where Shankar arrives. If Shiva is the Absolute Truth (Brahm-Satya), then Shankar is the God (Ishwar). Brahm and God are very different, but worship is almost always of god. The common man also considers god more useful for himself. Shiva cannot be defined, but Shankar has definite characteristics. Shiva has no family, but Shankar has a family, wife, children, everything. Shankar can be the character of a Purana or a story, but not Shiva. All that we know by the name of Shivpuran is actually Shankar's story.

Shiva is the Truth, the Brahm. Shiva is eternal, a point without beginning or end, because of which we are, and who we are. Shiva is indescribable. Even saying the word 'Shiva' is limiting Shiva. If you want to say 'Shiva', you will have to disappear in deep silence. Shiva is that which words are incapable of describing. You can say as much as you want about Shankar.

Shankar is the highest a man's imagination can reach, the biggest palace it can build, and the strongest ideal it can reach. The maximum flight of the mind is Shankar, and Shiva is the disappearance of the mind in the sky. That disappearance is the essence of Shiva.

Shiva is the open sky; Shankar is the highest flight of the mind-bird. The subtlest point of thought is Shankar, and Shiva is thoughtlessness. Even though there is unity between Shiva and Shankar, the difference between them is the same as that between the Ram of Saint Kabirdas and other Saints, and Ram, the son of Dasharath. When saints repeatedly say 'Ram', they are talking about Shiva, and the Ram of Ramayana is Shankar.



Shankar is the sublime flight of man's mind, and Shiva is the liberated sky. Both are important, and both are necessary. Worshipping Shiva is difficult. To know Shiva, one has to be Shiva. And if one has become Shiva, then whom to worship? But worship is necessary for our ego to bow down. If one wants to worship, then Shankar will also be necessary.

Shiva is the open sky; Shankar is the highest flight of the mind-bird. The subtlest point of thought is Shankar, and Shiva is thoughtlessness.

Shiva is unthinkable—cannot be captured in words, cannot be included in thought, and cannot be represented in pictures and idols. Shankar has a form and virtue, is close to the mind, and can be accepted by the intellect. Shakti is the Yogmaya contained in Shiva. The power of Shiva is the entire virtuous world, the Trinitarian nature. In the form of Shakti, Shiva is the entire world. Shakti means this entire system, this existence, this game, this movement, this flow of energy. Everything we can know is Shakti. In existence, there is only Shakti, Shiva is invisible. Only Shakti can be reflected, there can be no representation of Shiva.

Shiva-Shakti is often depicted half-and-half as Ardhanarishvar. Such a depiction is not appropriate. Shiva must be shown in a point form within the heart of Shakti if Shiva is to be depicted. If Shakti is the entire expanse, then the point sitting in the middle of that entire expanse is Shiva. Combining two halves distorts the beautiful concept of Ardhanarishvar.

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Acharya Prashant is a Vedanta teacher, author, and the founder of the PrashantAdvait Foundation

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