

॥ ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ॥

॥ श्री कृष्णाय नमः ॥

Shiva ≡ The Supreme

It is a foregone conclusion in Advaita Vedanta that Vishnu = Shiva. Why then point to scriptural passages that extol Shiva (also) as the Supreme? There is one purpose, though not very lofty. Most Hindus grow up in families that read the Ramayana and the Gita, celebrate festivals like Ramanavami and Gokulashtami, and make a pilgrimage to Tirupathi. This does not go unnoticed by *some* Vaishnavas, who time and again selectively quote the scriptures to ‘prove’ that Vishnu alone is the Supreme, and that Shiva is an ‘inferior’ deity. They (often) go on to claim that Vishnu is to be *exclusively* worshipped, suggesting that worshipping Shiva is less recommended in the Scriptures – or worse, that it may actually be ‘wrong’ to do so! As this issue keeps popping up repeatedly, this present write-up will (hopefully) end any doubts in that regard.

Only two Scriptures will be cited here, which are accepted by all Hindus – the Mahabharata and the Yajur-Veda. The English translation of a verse will be supplied first, after which will follow (in most cases) its Sanskrit transliteration (saMskRRitam) in the ITRANS format. The translation of the Mahabharata by Kisari Mohan Ganguli has been used almost verbatim, with negligible changes.

Unless otherwise specified, “Shiva” will refer to the Being who resides in Kailasa, has a Blue Throat, uses Nandi for a vehicle, etc.; and “Vishnu” will denote the Being who resides in Vaikuntha, bears the Kaustubha gem, uses Garuda for a vehicle, etc.

If one wants to skip the explicit details and directly obtain the conclusion, please visit the last Section V below.

Sections:-

- I. Shiva as Supreme in the Mahabharata
- II. Glorification of the Sata-Rudriya in the Mahabharata
- III. Shiva as Supreme in the Veda
- IV. Dispelling Myths
- V. Conclusive view of Shiva and Vishnu in the Scriptures

I. Shiva as Supreme in the Mahabharata

The Mahabharata offers numerous references to Shiva as the Supreme Being. A few examples are given below, but this is by no means an exhaustive compilation!

I.1 The most obvious instance of Shiva being accepted as the Supreme Deity in the Mahabharata occurs in the Shiva Sahasranama that is part of the Anushasana Parva.

The Sahasranama reveals these Titles of the Supreme Being:

paraM-brahma = Supreme Brahman
paramaM-brahma = Supreme Brahman
paramAtmA = Supreme Soul
sarvAtmA, sarvabhUtAmA = The Self of All (Beings)
vishva, vishvarUpa = One who is (of the Form of) the Universe
Ishvara, maheshvara = The (Great) Supreme Lord
sarvaGYa = The All-knowing One

These Names in the Sahasranama are unambiguously describing Shiva, as they are *literally never* used in the Mahabharata (or probably any Scripture) to address Vishnu:

kailAsagirivAsI = One who Resides in Mount Kailasa
nIlakaNTha = The Blue-throated One
nandIshvara = The Lord of Nandi (Shiva's vehicle)
shmaShAnachArI = One who Dwells in cremation grounds

The Sahasranama contains many other Names specifically applied to Shiva that are also found in the Vedic literature on Rudra (more on this later):

hiraNyabAhu = One with Golden Arms
umApati = Husband of Uma (appears *twice*)
pashupati = Lord of living beings (appears *twice*)
kRRiShNapi~Ngala = One who is Black-Tawny
Urdhvaretas = One who is Accomplished in Yogic Celibacy (appears *twice*)

One particularly interesting Name:

viShNuprasAdita = One who is Propitiated by Vishnu!

I.2 Krishna worships Shiva as the Supreme, several times in the Mahabharata. The following narrative is in the Drona Parva, when the most powerful Pashupatastra is requested from Shiva, who is venerated as “yoginAM paramaM brahma vyaktaM brahma vidAM nidhim” (The Supreme Brahman That is seen by Yogins and the Refuge of the Knowers of Brahman).

“Trident in Hand, Matted Locks on the Head, of Snow-white colour, He was robed in bark and skin. Endued with Great Energy, His Body seemed to be Flaming with a Thousand Eyes. And He was seated with Parvati and many creatures of brilliant forms (around Him). And His attendants were engaged in singing and playing upon musical instruments, in laughing and dancing, in moving and stretching their hands, and in uttering loud shouts. And the place was perfumed with fragrant odours, and Rishis that worshipped Brahman adored with excellent hymns of unfading glory, That God who was the Protector of All creatures, and Wielded the (great) bow (called Pinaka). Beholding Him, Vasudeva of righteous soul, with Partha, touched the earth with his head, uttering the eternal words of the Veda. And Krishna adored, with speech, mind, understanding, and acts, That God who is the First Source of the Universe, Himself Uncreated, the Supreme Lord of Unfading Glory: who is the Highest Cause of the mind, who is space and the wind, who is the Cause of All the luminous bodies (in the firmament), who is the Creator of the rain, and the Supreme, Primordial Substance of the earth, who is the Object of Adoration, with the gods, the danavas, the yakshas, and human beings; **Who is the Supreme Brahman That is seen by Yogins and the Refuge of the Knowers of Brahman**, who is the Creator of All mobile and immobile creatures, and their Destroyer also; who is the Wrath that burns everything at the end of the Yuga; who is the Supreme Soul; who is Sakra and Surya, and the Origin of All Attributes. And Krishna sought the protection of That Bhava, whom men of knowledge, desirous of attaining to That which is called the Subtle and the Spiritual, behold; That Uncreated One is the Soul of All Causes. And Arjuna repeatedly adored That Deity, knowing that He was the Origin of All creatures and the Cause of the past, the future, and the present. Beholding those two, viz., Nara and Narayana arrived, Bhava of Cheerful Soul, smilingly said unto them, ‘Welcome are ye, ye foremost of men! Rise up and let the fatigue of your journey be over. What, O heroes, is the desire in your heart? Let it be uttered quickly. What is the business that has brought you hither? I will accomplish it and do what would benefit you. I will grant everything ye may desire.’ Hearing those words of the God, they both rose. And then with joined hands, the faultless Vasudeva and Arjuna, both of great wisdom, began to gratify That High-Souled Deity with an excellent hymn. And Krishna and Arjuna said, ‘We bow to Bhava, to Sarva, to Rudra, to the Boon-giving Deity. We bow to the Lord of All creatures endued with life, to the God who is always Fierce, to Him who is called Kapardin! We bow to Mahadeva, to Bhima, to the Three-eyed, to Him who is Peace and Contentment. We bow to Isana, to Him who is the Destroyer of (Daksha's) sacrifice. Let salutations be to the Slayer of Andhaka, to the Father of Kumara, to Him who is of Blue

Throat, to Him who is the Creator. Let salutation be to the wielder of Pinaka, to One Worthy of the Offer of libations of clarified butter, to Him who is Truth, to Him who is All-pervading. To Him who is Unvanquished! To Him who is always of Blue Locks, to Him who is armed with the Trident, to Him who is of Celestial Vision!”

shUlinaM jaTilaM gauraM valkalaJinavAsasam ||
nayanAnAM sahasraishcha vichitra~NgaM mahaujasam |
pArvatyA sahitaM devaM bhUtasa~Nghaishcha bhAsvaraiH ||
gItavAditrasaMhrAdaistAlalAsyasamanvitam |
valgitAsphoTitotkruShTaiH puNyagandhaishcha sevitam ||
stUyamAnaM stavairdivyairmunibhirbrahmavAdibhiH |
goptAraM sarvabhUtAnAmiShvAsadharamachyutam ||
vAsudevastu taM dRRiShTvA jagAma shirasa kShitim |
pArthana saha dharmAtmA gRRiNanbrahma sanAtanam ||
lokAdiM vishvakarmaANamajamIshAnamavyayam |
manasaH paramAM yoniM khaM vAyUM jyotiShAM nidhim ||
sraShTaraM vAridhArANAM bhuvashcha prakRRitiM parAm |
devadAnavayakShANAM mAnavAnAM cha sAdhanam ||
yoginAM paramaM brahma vyaktaM brahmaividAM nidhim |
charAcharasya sraShTaraM pratihartArameva cha ||
kAlakopaM mahAtmAnaM shakrasUryaguNodayam |
avandata tada kRRiShNo vA~NmanobuddhikarmabhiH ||
yaM prapashyanti vidvA.nsaH sUkShmAdhyAtmapadaiShiNaH |
tamajaM karaNAtmAnaM jagmatuH sharaNaM bhavam ||
arjunashchApi taM devaM bhUyo bhUyo.abhyavandata |
j~nAtvaikaM bhUtabhavyAdiM sarvabhUtabhavodbhavam ||
tatastAvAgatau sharvaH provAcha prahasanniva |
svAgataM vAM narashreShThAvuttiShThetAM gatakلامau ||
kiM cha vAmIpsitaM vIrau manasaH kShipramuchyatAm ||
yena kAryeNa samprAptau yuvAM tatsAdhayAmi vAm |
vriyatAmAtmanaH shreyastatsarvaM pradadAni vAm ||
tatastadvachanaM shrutvA pratyutthAya kRRitA~njali |
vAsudevArjunau sharvaM tuShTuvAte mahAmatI ||
namo bhavAya sharvAya rudrAya varadAya cha |
pashUnAM pataye nityamugrAya cha kapardine ||
mahAdevAya bhImAya tryambakAya cha shambhave |
IshAnAya bhagaghnAya namo.astvandhakaghAtine ||
kumAragurave nityaM nIlagrIvAya vedhase |
vilohitAya dhUmrAya vyAdhAyAnaparAjite ||
nityaM nIlashikhaNDaya shUline divyachakShuShe |

L3 During the Mahabharata war (Drona Parva), Arjuna wonders who the Mysterious Being might be that is slaying the enemies before Arjuna's arrows strike them! Vyasa replies that It is Shiva – the “sarvalokeshvara” (Lord of All the Worlds), and “vishveshvara” (Lord of the Universe).

“Vyasa said, ‘Thou hast, O Arjuna, seen Sankara, That First Cause from which have sprung the Prajapatis, That Puissant Being endued with Great Energy, He That is the Embodiment of heaven, earth and sky, the Divine Lord, the Protector of the Universe, the Great Master, the Giver of boons, called also Isana. O, seek the protection of That Boon-giving Deity, That **Lord of the Universe**. He is called Mahadeva (the Supreme Deity), of Supreme Soul, the One only Lord, with Matted Locks (on Head), the Abode of Auspiciousness. Of Three Eyes and Mighty Arms, He is called Rudra, with His Locks tied in the shape of a crown, and His Body attired in skins...who is armed with Trident; who is Boon-giving; who Wieldeth the sword and the shield, and who is Highly Auspicious, who Wieldeth the bow called Pinaka, who is divested of the battle axe, and who is the Protector and Lord of the Universe. I place myself in the hands of That Divine Lord, That Grantor of protection, That God attired in deerskins...The person who always attentively reads or listens to the recitation of this excellent and auspicious account, appertaining to battle, of the Illustrious Deity, and he worships with Devotion That Illustrious **Lord of the Universe**, obtaineth all the objects of desire, in consequence of the Three-eyed God being gratified with him.’”

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vyAsa uvAcha||  
prajApatInAM prathamaM taijasaM puruShaM vibhum |  
bhuvanaM bhUrbhuvaM devaM sarvalokeshvaram prabhum ||  
IshAnaM varadaM pArtha dRRiShTavAnasi sha~Nkaram |  
taM gachCha sharaNaM devaM sarvAdiM bhuvaneshvaram ||  
mahAdevaM mahAtmAnamIshAnaM jaTilaM shivam |  
tryakShaM mahAbhujaM rudraM shikhinaM chIraVAsasam ||  
...  
trishUlapANiM varadaM khaDgacharmadharaM prabhum |  
pinAkinAM khaNDaparashuM lokAnAM patimIshvaram ||  
prapadye sharaNaM devaM sharaNyaM chIraVAsasam ||  
...  
charitaM mahAtmano divyaM sA~NgrAmikamidaM shubham |  
paThanvai shatarudriyaM shRRiNva.nshcha satatotthitaH ||  
bhakto vishveshvaraM devaM mAnuSheShu tu yaH sada |  
varAnsa kAmA.Nllabhate prasanne tryambake naraH ||
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I.4 The title “Ishvara” means the Supreme Lord. In the Anushasana Parva of the Mahabharata, Krishna provides at least two reasons why Shiva is the “Ishvara”.

“Vasudeva said, ‘O mighty-armed Yudhishthira, listen to me as I recite to thee the many Names of Rudra as also the High Blessedness of that High-souled One. The Rishis describe Mahadeva as Agni, and Sthanu, and Maheswara; as One-eyed, and Three-eyed, of Universal Form, and Shiva or Highly Auspicious...**Because He is Great (Mahat) and the Supreme Lord of All (Iswara), therefore He is called Maheswara...**Since He is the Foremost of All the deities, and since His dominion and acquisitions are very extensive, and since He protects the extensive Universe, therefore He is called Mahadeva...If the Lingam is worshipped, Maheswara becomes highly gratified with the Worshipper. Affectionate towards His Devotees, He bestows happiness upon Them with a Cheerful Soul...The Brahmanas always recite the excellent Sata-Rudriya in His Honour, that occurs in the Vedas...**In consequence of His Fullest Control over All objects of enjoyment He is called Iswara (the Supreme Lord or Master). Since, again, He is the Master of the vast Universe, He is called Maheswara.** The Whole Universe is Pervaded by Him in Diverse Forms.’”

vAsudeva uvAcha ||
yudhiShThira mahAbAho mahAbhAgyaM mahAtmanaH |
rudrAya bahurUpAya bahunAmne nibodha me ||
vadantyagniM mahAdevaM tathA sthANuM maheshvaram |
ekAkShaM tryambakaM chaiva vishvarUpaM shivaM tathA ||
...
IshvaratvAnmahattvAchcha maheshvara iti smRRitaH ||
...
devAnAM sumahAnyachcha yachchAsya viShayo mahAn |
yachcha vishvaM mahatpAti mahAdevastataH smRRitaH ||
...
li~NgamevArchayanti sma yattadUrdhvaM samAsthitam ||
pUjyamAne tatastasminmodate sa maheshvaraH |
sukhaM dadAti prItAtmA bhaktAnAM bhaktavatsalaH ||
...
vede chAsya vidurviprAH shatarudrIyamuttamam |
...
aishvaryAchchaiva kAmAnAmIshvaraH punaruchyate ||
maheshvarashcha lokAnAM mahatAmIshvarashcha saH |
bahubhirvividhai rUpairvishvaM vyAptamidaM jagat ||

II. Glorification of the Sata-Rudriya in the Mahabharata

The Sata-Rudriya, commonly known as “Shri Rudram” or “Rudraprashna”, is a highly revered Vedic Hymn for Lord Shiva (shankara, shambhu, mahAdeva, nIlagrIva, tryambaka, tryAkSha, kapardin, pashupati, ...). More than any other prayer from the Vedas (including the Purusha-Suktam), this one receives lavish praise multiple times in the Mahabharata – here are some such instances.

II.1 Krishna confesses that he recites the Sata-Rudriya every morning, and explains how it is the best way to please Shiva (Anushasana Parva).

“Vasudeva said, ‘I shall recite to thee the good that I have acquired and the fame that I have won through the Grace of That High-Souled One. Verily, I shall discourse to thee on the topic, after having bowed unto Kapardin. **O king, listen to me as I recite to thee that Sata-Rudriya which I repeat; with restrained senses, every morning after rising from bed..**O sire, It is Sankara who Created All the creatures in the Universe, mobile and immobile. There is no being that is higher, O monarch, than Mahadeva. Verily, He is the Highest of All beings in the three worlds...Formerly, when Sankara became angry, the deities trembled with fear and bent their heads to Him. Without being appeased, Rudra placed on His bow-string a sharp and blazing arrow. Beholding His Prowess, the deities and the Rishis became all alarmed. Those foremost of gods began to pacify Him! **Joining their hands in reverence, they began to recite the Sata-Rudriya Mantras. At last, Maheswara, thus praised by the deities, became gratified.**”

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vAsudeva uvAcha ||
hanta te kathayiShyAmi namaskRRitvA kapardine |
yadavAptaM mahArAja shreyo yachchArjitaM yashaH ||
prayataH prAtarutthAya yadadhIye vishAM pate |
prA~njaliH shatarudriyAM tanme nigadataH shRRiNu ||
...
sha~NkarastvasRRijattAta prajAH sthAvaraja~NgamAH ||
nAsti ki~nchitparaM bhUtAM mahAdevAdvishAM pate |
iha triShvapi lokeShu bhUtAnAM prabhavo hi saH ||
...
tataH praNemurdevAste vepamAnAH sma sha~Nkaram |
punashcha sa.ndadhe rudro dIptaM sunishitaM sharam ||
rudrasya vikramaM dRRiShTvA bhItA devAH saharShibhiH |
tataH prasAdayAmAsuH sharvaM te vibudhottamAH ||
jepushcha shatarudriyAM devAH kRRitvA~njaliM tataH |
sa.nstUyamAnastridashaiH prasasAda maheshvaraH ||
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II.2 Vyasa also speaks highly of the Sata-Rudriya (Drona Parva).

“Vyasa said, ‘Many are the Blazing and Terrible Forms of This God that men speak of and Worship in the world. Many also are the Names, of Truthful Import, of This Deity in All the worlds. Those Names are founded upon His Supremacy, His Omnipotence, and His Acts. **In the Vedas, the Excellent Hymn called Sata-Rudriya hath been sung in Honour of That Great God called the Infinite Rudra.** That God is the Lord of All wishes that are human and heavenly. He is Omnipotent, and He is the Supreme Master. Indeed, That God Pervadeth the vast Universe.’”

vyAsa uvAcha ||
asya dIptAni rUpANi ghorANi cha bahUni cha |
loke yAnyasya kurvanti manuShyAH pravadanti cha ||
nAmadheyAni lokeShu bahUNyatra yathArthavat |
niruchyante mahattvAchcha vibhutvAtkarmabhistatha ||
vede chAsya samAmnAtaM shatarudrIyamuttamam |
nAmnA chAnantarudrete upasthAnaM mahAtmanaH ||
sa kAmAnAM prabhurdevo ye divyA ye cha mAnuShAH |
sa vibhuH sa prabhurdevo vishvaM vyApnuvate mahat ||

II.3 Sage Upamanyu recounts an incident when Brahma, Vishnu and Indra together worshipped Shiva, and Indra chanted the Sata-Rudriya in adoration of Shiva (Anushasana Parva).

“The deities were engaged in singing the praises of Mahadeva by uttering diverse hymns. The Grandsire Brahma, uttering a Rathantara, praised Mahadeva. Narayana also, uttering the Jyestha Saman, sang the praises of Bhava. **Sakra also did the same with the aid of those foremost of Vedic Mantras, viz., the Sata-Rudriyam.** Verily, Brahma and Narayana and Sakra – those three high-souled deities – shone there like three sacrificial fires. In their midst, Shone the Illustrious God Shiva like the Sun in the midst of His corona, emerged from autumnal clouds.”

astuvanvividhaiH stotrairmahAdevaM surAstada ||
brahma bhavaM tada stunvanrathantaramudIrayan |
jyeShThasAmnA cha deveshaM jagau nArAyaNastada ||
gRRiNa~nshakraH paraM brahma shatarudrIyamuttamam ||
brahma nArAyaNashchaiva devarAjashcha kaushikaH |
ashobhanta mahAtmAnastrayastraya ivAgnayaH ||
teShAM madhyagato devo rarAja bhagava~nshivaH |
sharadghanavinirmuktaH pariviShTa ivA.nshumAn ||

III. Shiva as Supreme in the Veda

Two Upanishads belonging to the Krishna-Yajur-Veda – Mahanarayana and Shvetashvatara – equate the Supreme Brahman to Lord Shiva.

III.1 Mahanarayana Upanishad.

A series of verses in this Upanishad identify Shiva with the Supreme Brahman:

“May we Know or Realize the Supreme Person. For that, may we meditate upon Mahadeva and to that meditation may Rudra Impel us.

May the Supreme who is the Ruler of All Knowledge, Controller of All created beings, the Preserver of the Vedas and the One Overlord of Hiranyagarbha, be benign to me. I am the Sadasiva described thus and denoted by Pranava.

Salutations again and again to Hiranyabahu [One who has ornaments of gold on the Arms or possessing a Form having the golden hue], Hiranyavarna [He who is the Source of the syllables of the Vedas which are as precious as gold], Hiranyarupa [He who is shining in Splendour], Hiranyapati [the Lord of Riches wholesome and charming], Ambikapati [the Consort of Ambika, the Mother of the Universe], Umapati [The Master of Uma, Brahma-vidya personified as such], Pasupati [the Lord of All created beings].

Supreme Brahman, the Absolute Reality, has become an androgynous Person in the Form of Umamaheshvara, dark blue and reddish brown in hue, Absolutely Chaste and possessing Uncommon Eyes. Salutations to Him alone who is the Soul of the Universe or whose Form is the Universe.

All this verily is Rudra. To Rudra who is such we offer our salutation. We salute again and again That Being, Rudra, who alone is the Light and the Soul of creatures. The material Universe, the created beings and whatever there is manifoldly and profusely created in the past and in the present in the form of the world, All that is indeed This Rudra. Salutations be to Rudra who is such.

We sing a Hymn that confers on us happiness in the highest degree to Rudra who is Worthy of Praise, who is Endowed with the Highest Knowledge, who Rains objects to the worshippers most excellently, who is more Powerful and who is Dwelling in the Heart. Indeed All this is Rudra. Salutations be to Rudra who is such.”

tatpuruShAya vidmahe mahAdevAya dhImahi | tanno rudraH
prachodayAt.h ||
IshAnaH sarvavidyAnAmIshvaraH sarvabhUtAnAM
brahmAdhipatirbrahmaNo.adhipatirbrahma shivo me astu
sadAshivom.h ||

namo hiraNyabAhave hiraNyavarNAya hiraNyarUpAya
 hiraNyapataye.ambikApataya umApataye pashupataye namo namaH ||
 R^ita{\m+} satyaM paraM brahma puruSha.n kR^iShNapi~Ngalam.h |
 UrdhvaretaM virUpAkShaM vishvarUpAya vai namo namaH ||
 sarvo vai rudrastasmai rudrAya namo astu | puruSho vai rudraH
 sanmaho namo namaH |
 vishvaM bhUtAM bhuvana.n chitraM bahudhA jAta.n jAyamAna.n
 cha yat.h |
 sarvo hyesha rudrastasmai rudrAya namo astu ||
 kadrudrAya prachetase mIDhuShTamAya tavyase | vochema
 sha.ntama{\m+} hR^ide |
 sarvohyesha rudrastasmai rudrAya namo astu ||

In the foregoing set of *consecutive* verses, the Supreme Brahman is worshipped by these Names, all of which are present in the Shiva Sahasranama, but *conspicuously absent* in the Vishnu Sahasranama:

hiraNyabAhu = One with Golden Arms
 umApati = Husband of Uma
 pashupati = Lord of living beings
 kRRiShNapi~Ngala = One who is Black-Tawny
 Urdhvaretas = One who is Accomplished in Yogic Celibacy

The first three of the Names above occur also in the Shri Rudram. Furthermore, Shiva is constantly called “umApati” and “pashupati” in the Mahabharata. One of the eleven Rudras is “virUpAkSha” – the Virupaksha Temple, Virupaksha Linga and Virupaksha Cave are all dedicated to Lord Shiva. The Mahabharata (Anushasana Parva) relates a story for Shiva attaining the epithet of “Urdhvaretas”:

“After the wedding was over of the Illustrious and High-Souled Rudra armed with the Trident...the Illustrious and High-Souled Deity wished to unite Himself with the Goddess. Thereupon all the deities, penetrated with anxiety, approached Rudra...saying, ‘Thou, O Illustrious One, art of Energy that is Irresistible. The Goddess Uma, also is possessed of Energy that is equally Irresistible. The offspring that will result from a union like this, will, without doubt, O Illustrious Deity, be endued with very great might. Verily, O Puissant Lord, that offspring will consume all things in the three worlds without leaving a remnant...Do Thou, with patience, restrain Thy fiery and puissant Energy!’ Unto the deities that said so, the Holy Mahadeva having the bull for His sign, O regenerate Rishi, answered, saying, ‘So be it!’ Having said so, the Deity that has the bull for His vehicle, drew up His vital seed. From that time, He came to be called by the Name of Urdhvaretas (One that has drawn up the vital seed).”

III.2 Shvetashvatara Upanishad.

This Upanishad contains several Prayers to Rudra-Shiva, revealed to be the Supreme Divinity. The first of the following two verses quoted therefrom is *word-for-word identical* to a verse in the Shri Rudram, while the second is nearly so:

“Lord Rudra, who Dwells on the Mount (Kailas) and who Confers happiness, by That Form of Yours which is not terrible, which will not injure us, and which is Highly Auspicious, behold and illuminate us.

O Lord who Dwells on Mount (Kailas) and Confers gladness to all! You, who Fulfills Your vow of Protecting All who serve You and take Refuge in You; that arrow of Yours which You hold ready to let fly, Withhold it and Make it tranquil and auspicious.”

yA te rudra shivA tanUragherA.apApakAshinI |
tayA nastanuvA shantamayA girishantAbhichAkashIhi ||
yAbhiShu.n girishanta haste bibharShyastave |
shivA.n giritra tA.n kuru mA hi.nsiH puruSha.n jagat ||

The tasks of Creation, Preservation and Destruction of the Universe, are all performed by Rudra:

“Rudra is Truly One; for the Knowers of Brahman do not admit the existence of a second. **He alone Rules All the worlds by His Powers.** He Dwells as the Inner Self of every living being. After having Created All the worlds, He, their Protector, Withdraws them into Himself at the end of time.”

eko hi rudro na dvitIyAya tasthu-rya imA.nllokAnIshata
IshanIbhiH|
pratya~N janAstiShThati sa~nchukochAntakAle sa.nsr^ijya vishvA
bhuvanAni gopAH||

Rudra is the Ultimate Cause – of the Universe and All the deities:

“May the All-knowing Rudra, the Basis of the Universe, the Creator of Brahma and the Devas and Grantor of their powers, Bless us with an auspicious intellect.”

yo devAnAM prabhavashchodbhavashcha vishvAdhipo rudro maharShiH |
hiraNyagarbha.n janayAmAsa pUrva.n sa no buddhyA shubhayA
sa.nyunaktu ||

IV. Dispelling Myths

This section will debunk commonly held myths among a few of the Vaishnavas.

Myth #1: “All Devotees of Vishnu are good people who are always protected by Vishnu. (While the same cannot be said about the Devotees of Shiva, e.g. Ravana.)”

Fact: Vritra was an Asura and a great Devotee of Vishnu – but killed with the help of Shiva.

Event narrated in the Mahabharata, Shanti Parva:

“Yudhishtira said, ‘How great was the love of virtue possessed by Vritra...whose devotion to Vishnu was so great. The status occupied by Vishnu of immeasurable energy is exceedingly difficult of apprehension. How, O tiger among kings, could Vritra (who was an Asura) comprehend it (so well)?...**How, indeed, was Vritra, who was virtuous, devoted to Vishnu...vanquished by Indra, O foremost of men?...**My curiosity to hear it is very great.’

Bhishma said, ‘In days of yore, Indra, accompanied by the celestial forces, proceeded on his car, and beheld the Asura Vritra stationed before him like a mountain...Beholding that form of Vritra, which was incapable of being vanquished by the three worlds united together, the celestial became penetrated with fear and full of anxiety. Indeed, suddenly seeing that gigantic form of his antagonist, O king, Indra was struck with palsy in the lower extremities...**Then Vrihaspati, the son of Angiras, and those foremost of Rishis possessed of great prosperity, beholding the prowess of Vritra, repaired to Mahadeva, and impelled by the desire of benefiting the three worlds, urged Him to Destroy the great Asura. The Energy of That Illustrious Lord of the Universe thereupon assumed the character of a fierce fever and penetrated the body of Vritra the lord of Asuras...**

When the great Asura or Daitya was overtaken by that fever (born of Mahadeva's Energy), the deities and the Rishis, filled with joy, uttered loud cheers. At the same time, drums and conchs of loud blare, and kettle drums and tabors began to beat and blow by thousands. Suddenly all the Asuras became afflicted with the loss of memory. In a trice, their powers of illusion also disappeared. The Rishis and the deities, ascertaining the foe to be thus possessed, uttered the praises of both Sakra and Isana, and began to urge the former (to make no delay in destroying Vritra)...

While the Asura was yawning Indra hurled his thunderbolt at him. Endued with exceedingly great energy and resembling the fire that destroys the creation at the end of the Yuga, that thunderbolt overthrew in a trice Vritra of gigantic form. Loud shouts were once more uttered by the gods on all sides when they beheld Vritra slain, O bull of Bharata's race!”

Myth #2: “Vishnu sometimes defeats Shiva in battle (e.g. Banasura episode) – therefore Vishnu is superior to Shiva.”

Fact: It is due to Shiva’s Grace that Vishnu wins *every* victory!

Vishnu performs intense Penance to obtain the Grace of Shiva, upon which Shiva grants Vishnu the boon to prevail in any battle (including between the two, if such a situation should ever arise). Vide the Mahabharata, Drona Parva:

“Vyasa said, ‘The Blue-throated God, of Inconceivable Soul, that Wielder of Pinaka, That Divine Lord ever praised by the Rishis, then gave boons unto Vasudeva who deserved them all. **The Great God said, 'O Narayana, through My Grace, amongst men, gods, and Gandharvas, thou shalt be of immeasurable might and soul. Neither gods, nor Asuras, nor great Urugas, nor Pisachas, nor Gandharvas, nor men, nor Rakshasas, nor birds, nor Nagas, nor any creatures in the Universe, shall ever be able to bear thy prowess. No one amongst even the celestials shall be able to vanquish thee in battle. Through My Grace, none shall ever be able to cause thee pain by the weapon of thunderbolt or with any object that is wet or dry, or with any mobile or immobile thing. Thou shalt be superior to Myself if thou ever goest to battle against Me.'”**

vyAsa uvAcha ||
tasmai varAnachintyAtmA nIlakaNThaH pinAkadhRRik |
arhate devamukhyAya prAyachChadRRiShisa.nstutaH ||
nIlakaNTha uvAcha ||
matprasAdAnmanuShyeShu devagandharvayoniShu |
aprameyabalAtmA tvaM nArAyaNa bhaviShyasi ||
na cha tvA prasahiShyanti devAsuramahoragAH |
na pishAchA na gandharvA na narA na cha rAkShasAH ||
na suparNastathA nAgA na cha vishve viyonijAH |
na kashchittvAM cha devo.api samareShu vijeShyati ||
na shastreNa na vajreNa nAgninA na cha vAyunA |
nArdreNa na cha shuShkeNa trasena sthAvareNa vA ||
kashchittava rujaM kartA **matprasAdAtkatha~nchana |**
api chetsamaraM gatvA bhaviShyasi mamAdhikaH ||

Moreover, it is Shiva who awards the Sudarshana Chakra to Vishnu. The Mahabharata, in the Anushasana Parva, discloses that “viShNoshchakraM” or the discus of Vishnu, is really “mahAdevavarAchChakraM” – implying that the weapon is a boon of Shiva.

Thus, Vishnu owes *all* his triumphs on the battlefield to none other than Lord Shiva!

Myth #3: “It is said that Shiva arose from Vishnu’s anger – hence Shiva is inferior to Vishnu.”

Fact: Krishna originated from Shiva.

As mentioned in the Drona Parva of the Mahabharata:

“**Keshava** is that Devoted Worshipper of Rudra who **has sprung from Rudra Himself**. Krishna always Worships the Lord Shiva, regarding the Lingam to be the Origin of the Universe.”

sa eSha rudrabhaktashcha **keshavo rudrasambhavaH** |
kRRiShNa eva hi yaShTavyo yaj~naishchaiSha sanAtanaH ||
sarvabhUtabhavaM j~nAtvA li~Nge.archayati yaH prabhum |

Krishna being called “rudrasambhava” is significant indeed! The *children* of Shiva are hailed as such, elsewhere in the Mahabharata. (As an aside, the appellation also appears in the Subrahmanya Sahasranama from the Skanda Purana.) This is sufficient reason to assert that ***Krishna has his genesis in Shiva!***

Besides, Krishna was born of Devaki, and Rama was born of Kausalya. When Vishnu being “born” is not taken as literal birth, why make an exception for Shiva?

There are Vaishnavite texts that eulogize Vishnu as the Supreme Deity, while the Shaivite texts do the same with Shiva. However, the Mahabharata acknowledges *both* Deities as the Supreme!

What can be the intent of Veda Vyasa in the Mahabharata when freely extolling *either* of these two Divinities as the Supreme Being?

The answer is given in the next Section:

V. Conclusive view of Vishnu and Shiva in the Scriptures

This self-explanatory piece is from the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata:

“Lord Krishna said, ‘Rudra is otherwise called Kapardin. He has Matted Locks on His Head, and sometimes displays a Head that is bald. He loves to dwell in the midst of crematoriums which constitute His home. He is an Observer of the austere vows. He is a Yogin of Mighty Puissance and Energy. He is the Destroyer of Daksha's sacrifice and the Tearer of Bhaga's eyes. O son of Pandu, Rudra should be known to have always Narayana for His Soul. If That Deity of Deities, viz., Maheswara, be worshipped, then O Partha, is the Puissant Narayana also worshipped. I am the Soul, O son of Pandu, of All the Worlds, of All the Universe. Rudra, again, is My Soul. It is for this that I always adore Him. If I do not adore the Auspicious and Boon-giving Isana, nobody would then adore My Own Self. The ordinances I set are followed by all the worlds. Those ordinances should always be adored, and it is, therefore, that I adore them. He who knows Rudra knows Myself, and he who knows Myself knows Rudra. He who follows Rudra follows Me. **Rudra is Narayana – both are One; and One is displayed in two different forms. Rudra and Narayana, forming One Person, Pervade All displayed things and cause them to act.** No one else than Rudra is competent to grant Me a boon, O son of Pandu.”

shrIbhagavAnuvAcha ||
kapardi jaTilo muNDaH shmashAnagRRihasevakaH |
ugravratadharo rudro yogI tripuradAruNaH ||
dakShakratuharashchaiva bhaganetraharastathA |
nArAyaNAtmako j~neyaH pANDaveya yuge yuge ||
tasminhi pUjyamAne vai devadeve maheshvare |
sampUjito bhavetpArtha devo nArAyaNaH prabhuH ||
ahamAtmA hi lokAnAM vishvAnAM pANDunandana |
tasmAdAtmAnamevAgre rudraM sampUjayAmyaham ||
yadyahaM nArchayeyaM vai IshAnaM varadaM shivam |
AtmAnaM nArchayetkashchiditi me bhAvitaM manaH ||
mayA pramANaM hi kRRitaM lokaH samanuvartate ||
pramANAni hi pUjyAni tatastaM pUjayAmyaham |
yastaM veti sa mAM veti yo.anu taM sa hi mAmanu ||
rudro nArAyaNashchaiva sattvamekaM dvidhAkRRitam |
loke charati kaunteya vyaktisthaM sarvakarmasu ||
na hi me kenachiddeyo varaH pANDavanandana |

|| श्री कृष्णार्पणमस्तु ||

|| हरिः ॐ ||