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Śivayoga Dīpikā And The Doctrine Of Pañcadhāraṇā: A Psychospiritual And Elemental Meditation Framework In Medieval Haṭha-Śaiva Yoga

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Abstract

The *Śivayoga Dīpikā* is a significant yet insufficiently studied medieval yogic treatise embedded in the Haṭha-Śaiva tradition. Among its doctrines, the exposition of **Pañcadhāraṇā** (*Five Elemental Concentrations*) in offers a structured internal practice based on the five *mahābhūtas*—Pṛthvī (Earth), Aap (Water), Agni (Fire), Vāyu (Air), and Ākāśa (Ether). This article critically examines these elemental dhāraṇās from textual, philosophical, and psycho-energetic perspectives, situating them within broader Indian yoga systems including the *Yoga Sūtra*, *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā*, and Tantric subtle-body doctrine. Through increased citation density, Sanskrit technical vocabulary in original Devanāgarī, and modern academic references, the study argues that Pañcadhāraṇā functions as a transformative internal process culminating in higher states of Samādhi and *Amanaska* (no-mind state). By integrating cosmology, subtle anatomy, and meditative discipline, this technique contributes significantly to the evolution of medieval yoga praxis.

Keywords: *Śivayoga Dīpikā*, Pañcadhāraṇā, Haṭha Yoga, Mahābhūta, Chakra, Samādhi, Śaiva Yoga, Elemental Meditation

Introduction

Historical developments in Indian yoga demonstrate a layered synthesis of metaphysics, embodied praxis, and soteriology. Classical yoga, as codified in the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali, defines yoga as चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः and culminates in कैवल्य.¹ Edwin Bryant's translation emphasizes the ontological isolation of पुरुष from प्रकृति as the ultimate goal.² Haṭha traditions such as the *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā* and *Gheraṇḍa Saṁhitā* shift emphasis toward prāṇic control, subtle physiology, and bodily discipline as preparatory instruments for absorption.³ James Mallinson has demonstrated that medieval Haṭha literature integrates physical and energetic technologies with older meditative paradigms.⁴ Within this broader trajectory, the *Śivayoga Dīpikā* presents a distinctive Śaiva reinterpretation of yogic ascent.⁵ Chapter III introduces the doctrine of पञ्चधारणा as a progressive elemental interiorization leading toward liberation.⁶

Dhāraṇā in Yogic Context

Dhāraṇā in Patañjali's Framework

In the *Yoga Sūtra*, Patañjali defines dhāraṇā as:

देशबन्धश्चित्तस्य धारणा । (*Yoga Sūtra* 3.1)⁷

This definition is intentionally broad, focusing on mental fixation without specifying loci. Patañjali's emphasis is on the cultivation of one-pointed attention (एकाग्रता) as the first stage of the triadic practice of संयम (धारणा → ध्यान → समाधि)

Dhāraṇā in Haṭha Traditions

he *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā* associates concentration with prāṇa stabilization and nāḍī purification.⁸ The *Gheraṇḍa Saṁhitā* elaborates bhūta-dhāraṇā in a structured sequence.⁹

Dhāraṇā in *Śivayoga Dīpikā*

The *Śivayoga Dīpikā* expands the concept into a cosmological-meditative schema ध्यानैकगोचरमतिस्थिरता भवेद्या... ॥ ३५ ॥¹⁰ Here dhāraṇā is a stabilized extension of medita

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tion integrated within Śaiva क्रम.¹¹ Here dhāraṇā involves specific elemental loci, mantra integration, and deity meditations that correspond to the five great elements (*pañca-mahābhūtas*). This system moves beyond abstract focus to embodied, subtler concentration.

Conceptual Definition of धारणा in Śivayoga Dīpikā

Before elaborating the elemental modalities of practice, *Śivayoga Dīpikā* establishes a philosophically nuanced definition of धारणा. The text defines the term in the following verse:

ध्यानैकगोचरमतिस्थिरता भवेद्या
सा धारणेति शिवयोगविदो वदन्ति ।
शैवक्रमेण रचितेह पुनः प्रकाराद्
भूम्यादिभूतवरणेन पृथक्पृथक्च ॥ ३५ ॥

According to this formulation, धारणा is that condition in which the mind (मति), having entered meditation (ध्यान), becomes firmly stabilized upon a single object (एकगोचर). The knowers of शिवयोग describe this intensified steadiness of awareness as धारणा. Importantly, the text situates this definition within the शैव क्रम, indicating that in the Śaiva tradition धारणा assumes a structured elemental form through the distinct contemplation of the five great elements (पञ्चमहाभूत), beginning with पृथ्वी. Thus, धारणा here is not merely preparatory concentration but a matured meditative stabilization emerging organically from sustained ध्यान.

This conception subtly diverges from the classical formulation of Patanjali, who defines धारणा as:

देशबन्धश्चित्तस्य धारणा । (योगसूत्र ३.१)

While the *Yoga Sūtra* emphasizes fixation of the mind upon a chosen locus (देशबन्ध), *Śivayoga Dīpikā* presents धारणा as a deepened continuity of meditative absorption. In this Śaiva-Haṭha synthesis, धारणा represents an intensified stabilization of consciousness that directly prepares the aspirant for समाधि.

Enumeration of the Five Elemental धारणा (पञ्चधारणा)

Having defined the concept, the text explicitly enumerates five elemental forms:

धारिणी वारुणी चैव आग्नेया मारुती तथा ।
नभोमयीति कथ्यन्ते सूरिभिः पञ्च धारणा ॥ ३६ ॥¹²

The sages declare five धारणा: धारिणी, वारुणी, आग्नेयी, मारुती, and नभोमयी. These correspond to the five महाभूत and represent a reverse cosmogenesis.¹³ The sequence reflects the cosmological progression from gross to subtle, implying a gradual refinement of embodiment and awareness. Through this elemental ascent, the practitioner symbolically retraces the process of cosmic manifestation in reverse order.

The text emphasizes their siddhi-granting capacity सर्वसिद्धिप्रदास्ताश्च...॥३७॥¹⁴ The accomplished योगविद् prescribe these practices because they bestow all siddhis

upon those devoted to constant discipline (सदाभ्यास). The stress on sustained repetition reveals that mastery arises through energetic refinement of प्राण and elemental equilibrium rather than sporadic effort.

धारिणी धारणा (पृथ्वी तत्त्व)

Verse III.38 describes fixation with “लं” and meditation upon ब्रह्म.¹⁵ Mastery yields भूमिजय.¹⁶ धारिणी धारणा pertains to पृथ्वी तत्त्व and is practiced in the region extending from the feet to the knees. The practitioner fixes प्राण with the बीज मन्त्र “लं” while meditating upon ब्रह्म, the four-faced deity. Through steady concentration, the yogin attains भूमिजय—mastery over the earth element. Philosophically, पृथ्वी symbolizes stability and structural support. Psychologically, it represents groundedness and resilience. Mastery over this element neutralizes inertia (तमस्) and establishes foundational equilibrium for higher ascent.

वारुणी धारणा (आप तत्त्व)

The second elemental practice is described thus:

वकारेणोपेतं सलिलनिलये जानुनाभ्यन्तदेशे
स्थिरं कृत्वा वायूं मधुरिपुममुं संस्मरेत्पतिचेलम् ।
प्रसन्नास्यं शुद्धस्फटिकमणिनिभं शङ्खचक्राङ्कबाहुं
जलादुत्पन्नोद्ययजयमिदं त्वं भजे वारुणीयम् ॥ ३९ ॥

Verse III.39 prescribes “वं” and visualization of विष्णु.¹⁷

This purifies affective instability.¹⁸ आपः symbolizes fluidity, cohesion, and emotional adaptability. Mastery of this element dissolves rigidity and purifies internal disturbances, cultivating serenity and psychological flexibility.

आग्नेयी धारणा (अग्नि तत्त्व)

The third concentration is articulated in the following verse:

नाभेः कण्ठान्तदेशे वरशिखिनिलये वायुमारोप्य रेफा-
त्र्यक्षं रुद्रस्वरूपं तरुणरविनिभं भस्मनोद्धूलिताङ्गम् ।
शान्तं शीघ्रप्रसन्नं वरदमभयदं संस्मरन्भावयेत्
यस्यस्याभ्यासिनोऽग्नेर्भयहरणमिह सम्भवेद्धारणायाः ॥ ४० ॥

Verse III.40 invokes रुद्र with “रं.”¹⁹ This represents tapas and psycho-energetic transformation.²⁰ अग्नि represents transformation, illumination, and tapas. Mastery over this element enhances digestive fire, inner radiance, and the alchemical conversion of gross tendencies into spiritual energy.

मारुती धारणा (वायु तत्त्व)

The fourth elemental concentration is described as:

गलादिमुबोर्मध्यदेशे समीरस्थले मान्तवर्णेन दीदिप्यमानम् ।
प्रकाशस्वरूपं स्मरेदीश्वरं यः सखे वायुवत्क्रीडतिशप्रभावात् ॥ ४१ ॥

Verse III.41 employs “यं.”²¹ Lightness and prāṇic expansion arise.²² Mastery grants lightness of body and refined prāṇic control, symbolizing freedom from gross limitation.

नभोमयी धारणा (आकाश तत्त्व)

The highest elemental meditation is described in the following verse:

अभूमध्यादिकान्ते पवनमतिदृढं व्योमदेशे प्रकुर्वन्
सोमं सोमाधमौलिं दशककरकमलं पञ्चवक्त्रं त्रिनेत्रम् ।
श्रीकण्ठं सायुधं तं समधिकवरदं सर्वतत्त्वादितत्त्वं
बिन्दुं व्योमस्वरूपं शिवमभययुतं चिन्तयेद्यः स मुक्तः ॥ ४२ ॥

Verse III.42 culminates in meditation upon सदाशिव.²³ Liberation is explicitly declared.²⁴ The practitioner meditates upon सदाशिव, the supreme principle beyond all तत्त्व. आकाश symbolizes boundless space and pure consciousness. The text explicitly declares that one who practices this becomes liberated (स मुक्तः).

Duration, Discipline, and Therapeutic Dimension

The prescribed duration of practice is stated as इत्येवं धारणाः पञ्च... ॥ ४३ ॥²⁵ Each धारणा is to be practiced for one घटिका. Practice yields देहसिद्धि.²⁶

The therapeutic implications are further emphasized एतासु भूम्यादिकधारणासु... ॥ ४४ ॥²⁷ Through regulation of प्राण within these elemental concentrations, chronic diseases arising from दोष imbalance are destroyed. This reveals an implicit dialogue between yogic prāṇic theory and Ayurvedic elemental physiology.

Concluding Reflection on पञ्चधारणा

The doctrine of पञ्चधारणा in *Śivayoga Dīpikā* integrates cosmology, subtle anatomy, and soteriology into a unified meditative system. By sequentially mastering पृथ्वी through आकाश, the practitioner transcends elemental conditioning and reorients consciousness toward non-dual realization. Thus, elemental concentration becomes not merely a technical discipline but a transformative ascent from embodied multiplicity to Śaiva unity.

Subtle Psychospiritual Centers and the Ascent to Samādhi in Śivayoga Dīpikā

In the contemplative framework of *Śivayoga Dīpikā*, attributed to Sadāśiva Brahmendra, meditation is grounded in a highly structured map of the subtle body. The text presents a systematic enumeration of psycho-spiritual loci that serve as internal supports (आधार) for धारणा and prāṇic ascent. These centers are not merely symbolic constructs but functional meditative stations through which the practitioner interiorizes consciousness and progressively transcends sensory limitation. The treatise principally classifies these loci into nine चक्र (नव चक्राणि) Chapter III enumerates नव चक्र (III.35–41).²⁹ these include मूलाधार, स्वाधिष्ठान, नाभि, हृद, कण्ठ, भ्रूमध्य, and ब्रह्मरन्ध्र. The षोडश आधार (III.43–45) function as prāṇic stabilizers.³¹ The त्रिकूट junction symbolizes integration of इडा, पिङ्गला, and सुषुम्ना.³²

The nine चक्र are described as ascending centers of subtle activation situated along the central channel. Beginning with the ब्रह्मचक्र (मूलाधार) at the base of the spine (III.35), the text identifies it as the foundational seat of कुण्डलिनी शक्ति and the stabilizing ground of प्राण. From this root center, the meditative ascent proceeds to the स्वाधिष्ठान चक्र (III.36), depicted as a four-petalled lotus governing संस्कार and affective tendencies. The नाभि चक्र (III.37), serpentine in form and associated with the digestive fire, functions as a vital hub of dynamic energy and willpower. The हृच्चक्र (III.38), an eight-petalled downward-facing lotus in the cardiac region, becomes the locus of subtle worship and luminous awareness, integrating devotion with contemplative absorption.

Further upward, the कण्ठ चक्र (III.39) refines speech and resonates with नाद, the subtle sound principle, while the भ्रू चक्र (III.40), located between the eyebrows, serves as the command center of cognition and intuitive insight. The ascent culminates at the ब्रह्मरन्ध्र (III.41), termed the निर्वाण चक्र, which is described as exceedingly subtle and represents the gateway to liberation. Through sustained concentration upon these centers, प्राण is gradually withdrawn from peripheral sensory functions and directed into the सुषुम्ना, facilitating higher states of meditative absorption.

Complementing the chakra system, the sixteen आधार function as specific supports where the mind may be stabilized to regulate प्राण and perception. These include focal points such as पदाङ्गुष्ठ, ललाट, and नेत्र, among others (III.43–45). Meditation upon the पदाङ्गुष्ठ steadies vision and cultivates concentration, indicating the integration of sensory discipline with internal awareness. Raising प्राण toward the ललाट confers expanded perception and yogic attainments, while upward fixation of the gaze at the नेत्र आधार leads to inner luminosity (ज्योतिर्दर्शन). These आधार collectively function as internal pilgrimage sites (अन्तरतीर्थ), marking progressive stations in the interiorization of consciousness.

A pivotal concept in this psychospiritual ascent is the त्रिकूट, the subtle confluence of इडा, पिङ्गला, and सुषुम्ना नाडियाँ. This junction represents the inner equivalent of the sacred confluence at Triveni Sangam and symbolizes the harmonization of dual energies within the non-dual channel. When प्राण enters सुषुम्ना at this subtle intersection, the practitioner moves beyond oscillations of duality and approaches the threshold of समाधि.

Within this framework, समाधि is defined as सामरस्य—complete homogeneity or indistinguishable unity between मनस् and आत्मन् (III.47). The text employs the analogy of salt dissolved in water to illustrate the disappearance of

separateness. In a ritual-metaphorical context (III.46), समाधि is described as the supreme internal offering in which the योगिन् presents the individual self (स्वात्मन्) to the Supreme (परमात्मन्) within the temple of the heart. This interiorization of worship transforms external ritual into contemplative absorption. The culmination of practice occurs when the distinction between Union of जीवात्मन् and परमात्मन्: यदा भवति चैकत्वं... ॥ ४८ ॥³⁴ ushering the योगिन् into the state of समाधि characterized by cessation of sensory perception, dissolution of अहंकार and mental modifications (वृत्ति), and Dissolution of dualities श्रोत्रादीने न चेन्द्रियाणां... ॥ ४९ ॥³⁵

The text further distinguishes between सविकल्प समाधि and निर्विकल्प समाधि, निर्विकल्प समाधि is defined in IV.11.³⁶ as an effortless and natural state of uninterrupted non-dual awareness. In this condition, meditation is no longer an act of volitional concentration but the spontaneous abiding of consciousness in itself. Thus, the subtle body schema of nine चक्र and sixteen आधार functions not merely as an anatomical model but as a progressive contemplative methodology culminating in अद्वैत realization.

Within the broader doctrine of पञ्चधारणा, these psychospiritual centers may be understood as mediating points through which elemental concentration (भूतधारणा) is interiorized and transcended. The system presented in *Śivayoga Dīpikā* therefore integrates हठयोग techniques of प्राण control with शैव metaphysics and non-dual realization, offering a coherent elemental and psychospiritual meditation framework characteristic of medieval हठ-शैव योग

Conclusion

The contemplative schema presented in *Śivayoga Dīpikā* reveals a sophisticated synthesis of subtle physiology, prāṇic discipline, and Advaitic metaphysics. Through the systematic exposition of नव चक्र and षोडश आधार, the text constructs a layered psychospiritual cartography that guides the practitioner from embodied awareness to transcendental realization. These internal loci function not merely as symbolic representations but as operative centers for धारणा, enabling the regulation of प्राण, stabilization of मनस्, and gradual interiorization of consciousness.

Within the doctrinal framework of पञ्चधारणा, the subtle centers assume deeper philosophical significance. Elemental concentration (भूतधारणा) is not treated as an isolated technique but as a progressive means of transcending the gross elements (महाभूत) and their corresponding sensory fields. As प्राण ascends through the structured hierarchy of चक्र and आधार, the practitioner symbolically and experientially withdraws from the domain of material differentiation into the unified current

of सुषुम्ना. This ascent culminates at ब्रह्मन्ध्र, where the oscillation between subject and object dissolves into सामस्व्य. The text's definition of समाधि as the indistinguishable unity of जीवात्मन् and परमात्मन् situates its yogic praxis firmly within a non-dual Śaiva horizon. Unlike purely technical manuals of Haṭha practice, *Śivayoga Dīpikā*, attributed to Sadāśiva Brahmendra, integrates energetic discipline with interiorized ritual and metaphysical realization. The movement from सविकल्प समाधि to निर्विकल्प समाधि represents not merely gradations of meditative absorption but the ontological resolution of duality itself.

Thus, the doctrine articulated in this text exemplifies a mature medieval Haṭha-Śaiva synthesis in which subtle anatomy, elemental concentration, and Advaitic insight converge. The nine चक्र and sixteen आधार function as methodological instruments within a broader soteriological vision—one that transforms the body into a sacred field of ascent and culminates in effortless, natural abidance in non-dual awareness. In this manner, *Śivayoga Dīpikā* stands as a crucial bridge between Haṭha technique and Śaiva metaphysics, articulating a psychospiritual meditation framework that is at once elemental, internal, and ultimately transcendent.

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33. *Ibid.*, III.47, p.118.
34. *Ibid.*, III.48, p.118.
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