Pashupata Saivism
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The Pashupatas (from Pashupati, a name of Siva meaning "Lord of souls") are the oldest known sect of Saivite ascetic monks. They wandered, pounding the dust with iron tridents and stout staffs, their oily hair snarled in unkempt coils or tied in a knot, faces wrinkled with intense devotion, piercing eyes seeing more Siva than world, loins wrapped in deer skin or bark. The Pashupatas were bhaktas and benign sorcerers of Siva, estranged from the priest-dominated Vedic society. Religious turbulence in India intensified as the dual waves of Saivite Agamic theism and Buddhism washed over the Gangetic plain. The ways of the Pashupatas were chronicled by several sometimes hostile contemporary commentators of that distant period, leaving us with a mixed impression of their life and philosophy. They originally allowed anyone to follow their path, which was not caste-discriminative. As the popularity of the Pashupata lineage rose, high numbers of brahmins defected to it to worship Siva in unhindered abandon. Eventually it was preferred for a Pashupata to come from the brahmin caste. The relationship between these Pashupata monks and the ash-smeared sadhus of Buddha's time, or the makers of the Indus Valley seal depicting Siva as Pashupata, is not known. They are perhaps the same, perhaps different. The Pashupata sadhus evoked sheer religious awe. Theirs was a brave, ego-stripping path meant to infuse the seeker with Lord Siva's karunya, "compassionate grace." Their austerity was leavened with puja rites to Siva, with a profound awareness of the cosmos as Siva's constant becoming and

with an almost frolicsome spirit of love toward Him. Sadhana began with a strict code of ethics, called yamas and niyamas, stressing brahmacharya, "continence," ahimsa, "noninjury," and tapas, "asceticism." As detailed in their scriptures, their discipline was practiced in stages. First they assumed vows and practiced special disciplines among themselves which included Siva-intoxicated laughing, singing and dancing. Next they disappeared into mainstream society, living incognito. Here they performed outrageous acts to purposely invite public censure, such as babbling, making snorting sounds, walking as if crippled, talking nonsense, and wild gesturing. This sadhana was a means of self-purification, of rooting out egoism, of getting over the need to be accepted by the public, by friends or by neighbors, and to fully establish in the subconscious the knowledge that like and dislike, good and bad and all these human ways of thinking and feeling are equal if one's love of Lord Siva is sufficiently strong. This was designed to break their links with human society and with their own humanness that came with them when they were born. Returning to overt sadhana, they performed austerities, then abandoned all action to perform kundalini yoga and so achieve perpetual nearness with God Siva. When union matured, they acquired supernatural powers such as omniscience. The Pashupatas believed that when a person is firm in virtue and able to accept with equanimity all abuse and insult, he is well established in the path of asceticism. Shri Kaundinya wrote in his sixth-century commentary, Panchartha Bhashya, on the Pashupata Sutra that the Pashupata yogi "should appear as though mad, like a pauper, his body covered with filth, letting his beard, nails and hair grow long, without any bodily care. Hereby he cuts himself off from the estates (varna) and stages of life (ashramas), and the power of dispassion is produced." Pashupatism is primarily an ascetic's path that rejects dialectical logic and prizes sadhana as a means to actuate Lord

Siva's karunya. Seekers embrace strict yama-niyama vows, their sadhanas graduating from "action" to "nonaction." Worshipful action includes puja, penance, Namah Sivaya japa, wearing sacred ash and showing abandoned love of God Siva. The sect was said to have been founded by Lord Siva Himself, who imparted the doctrines to certain maharishis. Around 200 ce, Pashupata's most historically prominent satguru, Lakulisha, appeared in what is today India's state of Gujarat. According to the Karavana Mahatmya, he was born to a brahmin family, but died in his seventh month, after displaying remarkable spiritual powers. His mother cast his body into a river (a traditional form of infant burial), and a group of tortoises carried it to a powerful Siva shrine. There the boy returned to life and was raised as an ascetic. By another account, Lakulisha ("lord of the staff") was an anchorite who died and was revived by Lord Siva, who entered his body to preach the Pashupata Dharma to the world. The site of his appearance is a town known today as Kayavarohana ("to incarnate in another's body"). The miracle is still festively celebrated. Two stone inscriptions in the village honor the names of this satguru's four main shishyas: Kushika, Gargya, Maitreya and Kaurusha. Satguru Lakulisha was a dynamic Pashupata reformist. In his sutras, outlining the bold codes of conduct and yoga precepts, he restricted admittance to the three higher castes (vaishya, kshatriya and brahmin) in an attempt to link this school with Vedic orthodoxy. A popular householder path arose out of this exclusively ascetic order. Today numerous Pashupata centers of worship are scattered across India, where Satguru Lakulisha as Siva is often enshrined, his image on the face of a Sivalinga, seated in lotus posture, virilely naked, holding a danda in his left hand and a citron fruit in his right. Their most revered temple, Somanatha, is in Gujarat a powerful, active temple which has endured several cycles of destruction and rebuilding. A

seventh-century Chinese traveler, Hiuen Tsiang, wrote that 10,000 Pashupatas then occupied Varanasi. The Pashupata tradition spread to Nepal in the eighth century, where the now famous Pashupatinath Temple became a prime pilgrimage center and remains so to this day. At its medieval zenith, Pashupatism blanketed Western, Northwestern and Southeastern India, where it received royal patronage. In the fifteenth century, it retreated to its strongholds of Gujarat, Nepal and the Himalayan hills. Traditionally, the deepest Pashupata teachings have been kept secret, reserved for initiates who were tried, tested and found most worthy. Central scriptures are the Pashupata Sutras (ascribed to the venerable Lakulisha), Kaundinya's commentary on them, Panchartha Bhashya (ca 500) and the Mrigendra Agama. The Pashupata philosophy prior to Lakulisha was dualistic. Little is known of it, as no writings remain. But scholars have discerned from references to Pashupata by other ancient writers that it regarded Siva as only the efficient cause of the universe, not the material. It posited five primary categories-cause, effect, union, ritual and liberation. The later category was somewhat unusual, as the Pashupatas believed the soul never merged in Siva and that liberation was simply a state with no further pain. They taught that God can create changes in the world and in the destinies of men according to His own pleasure. God does not necessarily depend upon the person or his karma (actions). Lakulisha's Pashupata system retained the idea of five categories, but regarded the goal of the soul as attainment of divine perfection. Further, he put God as the material cause of the universe, effectively moving the philosophy from dualism to dual-nondual. The soul, pashu, is prevented from closeness to Siva by pasha, "fetters." The soul retains its individuality in its liberated state, termed sayujya, defined as closeness to but not complete union with God. Lord Siva has no power over liberated souls. The

Kapalika, "skull-bearers," sect developed out of the Pashupatas and were likewise-but perhaps justifiably-vilified by their opponents. At worst, they are portrayed as drunken and licentious, engaged in human sacrifice and practicing the blackest of magic. Other portrayals are more benign. For example, in the early Sanskrit drama Malati-Madhava, a Kapalika says with great insight, "Being exclusively devoted to alms alone, penance alone and rites alone-all this is easy to obtain. Being intent upon the Self alone, however, is a state difficult to obtain." Even today, followers of this sect are found begging food which they accept in a skull, preferably that of a brahmin. Some scholars see a connection between the Kapalikas and the later Gorakshanatha yogis. In the seventh century, another sect developed out of the Pashupata tradition, the Kalamukhas, "black-faced," who established a well-organized social structure with many temples and monasteries in what is now Karnataka and elsewhere. Like the earlier Pashupatas, they suffered vilification at the hands of hostile commentators. Nothing is left of their scriptures, hence details of their philosophy and life is obscure. However, the esteem in which they were once held is reflected in an 1162 inscription on one of their temples stating, in part, that it was "a place devoted to the observances of Saiva saints leading perpetually the life of celibate religious students, a place for the quiet study of four Vedas,... the Yoga Shastras and the other kinds of learning, a place where food is always given to the poor, the helpless,...the musicians and bards whose duty it is to awaken their masters with music and songs,...and to the mendicants and all beggars,...a place where many helpless sick people are harbored and treated, a place of assurance of safety for all living creatures." The Vira Saiva school is thought by scholars to have developed out of and eventually replaced the Kalamukhas, apparently taking over their temples and ashramas. Today's reclusive Pashupata monks live in Northern

India and Nepal and influence followers worldwide.