

Exploring The Role of Shiva-Shakti in Mental Health and Well-Being: A Review Study

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review explores the conceptual understanding of Shiva-Shakti in Eastern philosophy and evaluates its potential to facilitate mental health and well-being. Following the PRISMA approach, 56 studies were considered from the available literature to address two objectives mainly- first, to understand the conceptualization of Shiva-Shakti in Eastern philosophy, and second, to examine how the Shiva-Shakti orientation supports mental health and well-being. The reviewed literature emphasizes their non-dual union — Shiva representing pure consciousness and the masculine principle whereas Shakti symbolizing dynamic creative energy and the feminine principle. Together, they are seen as complementary forces within the individual rather than as rigid opposites, whose integration is linked to emotional balance, trauma recovery, and deeper self-awareness. These principles appear across therapeutic practices, spiritual disciplines, and cultural narratives, especially within Indian psychology. While the symbolic and experiential significance of this framework is widely acknowledged, the review identifies key gaps in empirical validation, standardized tools, and clinical application. Future research should aim to explore how Shiva-Shakti integration can be systematically applied in contemporary mental health care through culturally informed and evidence-based approaches.

Keywords: *Shiva-Shakti, Mental Health, Mental Well-Being, Indian Psychology*

The concept of Shiva-Shakti, deeply rooted in Indian philosophy, represents a profound vision of balance and unity. Shiva is often understood as pure consciousness, the masculine principle, while Shakti embodies dynamic creative energy—the movement, transformation, and expression of life as well as the feminine principle. Their union symbolizes an essential integration of awareness and action, stillness and motion, mind and body. This dynamic interplay has been recognized as foundational to holistic well-being, not just in spiritual traditions, but increasingly in psychological discourse as well (Adinarayanan & Rekha, 2017).

Mental Health refers to a state of well-being in which an individual realizes their own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to their community (WHO, 2022). Therefore, mental health, as understood today, is not solely about the absence of illness, but about emotional balance, psychological

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resilience, and the capacity to thrive. Cultural and philosophical worldviews play a significant role in shaping how individuals understand and experience mental well-being. The Shiva–Shakti orientation offers a culturally rich and symbolically significant framework for exploring the mind, emotional regulation, and personal healing (Gopalkrishnan, 2018). It provides a way of understanding the self not as fragmented, but as an evolving synthesis of energies seeking balance. Therefore, the Shiva-Shakti framework, with its emphasis on balance and unity, may offer novel insights for therapeutic interventions. This systematic review has the following objectives:

1. Elucidate the conceptualization of Shiva-Shakti in Eastern philosophy.
2. Investigate how Shiva-Shakti orientation facilitates mental health and well-being, as evidenced in the literature.

Philosophical Exploration and Mental Health Relevance of Shiva-Shakti

The Shiva–Shakti philosophy, presents a holistic vision of reality where consciousness (Shiva) and creative energy (Shakti) are seen as interdependent and non-dual. Shiva is not merely a male deity but represents pure, unmanifest awareness—the silent witness—while Shakti is the dynamic, animating force of creation. Together, they symbolize the indivisible nature of stillness and motion, form and formlessness, the eternal and the temporal (Adinarayanan & Rekha, 2017; Feuerstein, 1998).

This union of energies is not an abstract ideal but is embodied in powerful mythological and symbolic figures, most notably Nataraja, the cosmic dancer, whose movements depict the cyclical nature of existence—creation, preservation, and dissolution (Srinivasan & Aithal, 2024). Similarly, Ardhanarishvara, the composite form of Shiva and Parvati, challenges binary thinking and expresses the integrated wholeness of masculine and feminine energies, inviting a deeper understanding of the psyche that transcends and challenges rigid gender constructs (Mahantesh, 2018; Sharma, 2023).

More than philosophical symbolism, Shiva–Shakti is experienced through spiritual practices such as Tantric meditation, breathwork, and ritual. These methods aim to align individual consciousness with the universal, encouraging practitioners to move beyond egoic fragmentation and reconnect with their essential nature. In this light, the philosophy supports a lived experience of balance, unity, and self-awareness—qualities that are foundational to mental and emotional well-being (Judith, 2004; Srivastava, 2020).

Central to Shiva-Shakti lies the practice of Kundalini Yoga. Kundalini Yoga is a central yogic and spiritual practice in Tantric traditions that symbolically and experientially captures the union of Shiva and Shakti within the human body. It is grounded in the belief that each individual carries within them the potential for spiritual awakening and inner wholeness. In this framework, Shakti—the divine, feminine energy—is said to lie dormant at the base of the spine, coiled like a serpent in the Muladhara (root) chakra. Shiva, on the other hand, resides at the Sahasrara (crown) chakra, representing pure consciousness (Jung, 1958). C.G. Jung interpreted this process psychologically, seeing the ascent of Kundalini as a metaphor for individuation—the integration of conscious and unconscious elements of the psyche, including the balance of masculine and feminine archetypes. For Jung, the union of Shiva and Shakti in Kundalini Yoga is symbolic of psychological wholeness, where “Shiva is the eternally unextended point... encircled by the female principle, Shakti” (Jung, 1958).

The practice of Kundalini Yoga aims to awaken this dormant Shakti energy, allowing it to rise through the central energy channel (Sushumna Nadi), passing through each chakra,

purifying and energizing the practitioner on physical, emotional, and spiritual levels. As Shakti ascends, she progressively unites with Shiva at the crown chakra, symbolizing the non-dual integration of energy and awareness, body and spirit, feminine and masculine principles. This inner union is said to result in self-realization, emotional balance, creativity, and liberation (Kakkattil, 2022). From a psychospiritual standpoint, each chakra represents a developmental stage of consciousness. As Kundalini Shakti rises and activates these centers, practitioners may experience enhanced self-awareness, release of trauma, intuitive insight, and emotional transformation (Kakkattil, 2022).

This has been elaborated in existing literature in real-life settings as well. In a case study, a middle-aged Indian woman engaged in intense Vipassana and Kundalini Yoga began to experience episodes of hallucinations, dissociation, and sensory overload—symptoms that led to a diagnosis of "kundalini psychosis". Neurocognitive testing revealed deficits in memory and planning, and imaging showed signs of cerebral demyelination. Clinically, she was treated with psychiatric intervention, but the cultural framing of her experience as a "spiritual emergency" complicated the path to healing (Paradkar & Chaturvedi, 2010). This case starkly illustrates the risks of unregulated Shakti awakening without the stabilizing presence of Shiva's awareness. Without preparation, containment, or guidance, the rise of powerful psychic energy can disorient the practitioner. However, with proper cultural understanding and support, even such intense experiences may become opportunities for deep inner transformation rather than clinical breakdown.

By contrast, another research on 80 long-term practitioners of Tantric Yoga tells a very different story. These individuals reported profound yet positive kundalini-related experiences—such as rising sensations, spontaneous kriyas (involuntary movements), and light or sound perceptions. Crucially, these were not associated with psychosis or distress. Instead, participants described a sense of coherence, inner peace, and heightened self-awareness, suggesting that when Shakti is awakened within a structured, meditative practice, and balanced with the consciousness (Shiva) of the practitioner, it leads to emotional integration and mental clarity (Maxwell & Katyal, 2022). This case supports the ideal outcome of Kundalini Yoga: the inner union of Shiva and Shakti, not as symbols but as living, psychological forces that shape emotional regulation, resilience, and transformation. Another compelling narrative is the story of "Rosita", a Mexican-American woman who spontaneously awakened Kundalini energy following a Shaktipat (spiritual transmission). She experienced ecstatic states, involuntary movement, and deep spiritual insight. Initially misdiagnosed with psychosis, her episode subsided without medication. After the experience, she reported greater emotional stability, purpose, and clarity.

Rosita's case emphasizes the importance of culturally informed interpretation of spiritual phenomena (Ossoff, 1993). Rather than viewing such episodes purely through a clinical lens, recognizing them as Shiva-Shakti processes may allow practitioners and therapists to support integration instead of suppression.

These case studies bring to life the deeper truths embedded in the Shiva-Shakti orientation. Shakti's awakening, when guided, contained, and balanced by Shiva's witnessing awareness, becomes a pathway to healing, emotional depth, and expanded consciousness. When misaligned or misunderstood, it can mimic pathology. Hence, Kundalini Yoga—and the symbolic journey of inner union between Shiva and Shakti—demands careful cultivation, community support, and culturally sensitive frameworks.

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Another key concept in Tantric Shaivism is *samāveśa*, or the experience of merging one's consciousness with divine energy, often facilitated through mantra, deity visualization, or transmission from a teacher. This direct, embodied union distinguishes Tantra from devotional or dualistic religious practices, emphasizing the accessibility of divinity within the human psyche (Wallis, 2007).

Contemporary psychological interpretations of Shiva-Shakti underscore their therapeutic relevance. The conscious integration of these forces—awareness and action, reflection and vitality—can foster psychological resilience, emotional regulation, and creative flow. Studies have suggested that engaging with this symbolic framework helps individuals navigate personal transformation, trauma recovery, and the cultivation of inner peace (Kakkattil, 2022; Raveesh, 2013; Rewers, 2019).

As modern mental health begins to recognize the value of embodied and symbolic approaches, the integration of ancient models like Shiva-Shakti into therapeutic practice and trauma-informed care offers new and deeply meaningful directions for mental and psychological well-being. Therefore, promoting a holistic framework that incorporates the understanding of Shiva-Shakti can prove significant.

METHODOLOGY

Search Strategies

To explore how the Shiva-Shakti framework is understood and applied in relation to mental health and well-being, a systematic search was carried out using both digital and manual methods. The Lens.org database served as the primary platform for identifying academic literature, supported by manual searches through platforms like ResearchGate, SciHub and Google Scholar. The keywords used include “Shiva-Shakti and mental well-being” and “Shiva-Shakti mental health.” The search included works published between 1952 and 2025, to focus on both foundational texts and more recent contributions to the field.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Articles were included if they explored the psychological, therapeutic, or symbolic dimensions of Shiva-Shakti, especially in connection with mental health, emotional regulation, trauma healing, or self-integration. Both theoretical and empirical works were considered, including case studies, qualitative research, conceptual essays, and literature reviews. Only English-language sources were included. Works that discussed Shiva-Shakti in the form of personal opinion blogs without any psychological interpretation were excluded.

Study Selection Process

The selection process followed the general structure of a PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Item for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis) review. After removing duplicate entries, each article's title and abstract were screened using the inclusion criteria. During the manual search, backward citation tracking (reviewing reference lists of included papers) helped identify additional sources. Any uncertainties were revisited to ensure that the selected studies aligned with the review's focus on mental health applications of the Shiva-Shakti framework.

Analysis and Synthesis

The studies were analyzed using thematic synthesis, which allowed for the identification of patterns and recurring ideas across the literature. Some of the key themes that emerged

included: the symbolic integration of consciousness (Shiva) and energy (Shakti), non-dual approaches to healing, the role of spiritual practices in emotional well-being, and the therapeutic potential of Kundalini awakenings. Attention was given to how these themes were framed in both Eastern philosophical contexts and contemporary psychological discourse. Gaps in research—especially the lack of empirical validation and standardized clinical applications—were also noted. Overall, the synthesis provided a culturally grounded perspective on how ancient frameworks like Shiva-Shakti can meaningfully contribute to modern mental health practice.

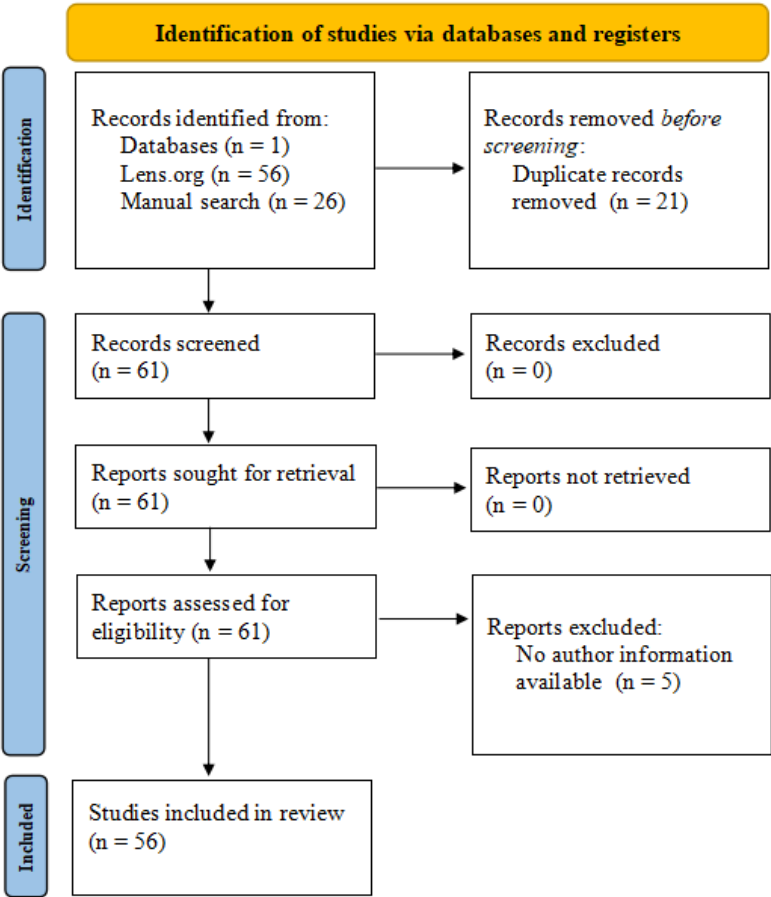


Figure No. 1 Documents' search and inclusion for the review using PRISMA.

RESULTS

The thematic analysis revealed rich insights into how this ancient framework speaks to the human experience, bridging cultural wisdom with psychological practice. The results are organized around the two research objectives, offering a deeper understanding of Shiva-Shakti's relevance in today's mental health landscape.

Conceptualization of Shiva-Shakti in Eastern Philosophy

The studies portray Shiva-Shakti as a vibrant, non-dual model that captures the dance of consciousness (Shiva) and creative energy (Shakti). This framework resonates deeply with India's cultural and spiritual heritage, offering a lens to understand the self and the cosmos. Key themes emerged include the following:

Non-Dual Unity: Shiva-Shakti embodies a seamless integration of opposites, transcending binaries such as male-female and stillness-motion. Ardhanarishvara—the half-male, half-

female deity—serves as a powerful symbol of wholeness, reflecting the human quest for inner balance (Bhartiya & Bhatnagar, 2024). This archetype has been linked to Indian psychiatric thought, where it informs therapeutic practices aimed at harmonizing emotional conflicts (Raveesh, 2013). Additionally, Shiva's role as the “destroyer of duality” encourages individuals to embrace paradox and cultivate resilience in the face of life's complexities (Sharma, 2023).

Psychological and Cosmic Polarity: The Shiva–Shakti dyad mirrors universal polarities, from cosmic creation to psychological dynamics. It has been compared to Jung's anima/animus, suggesting that Shiva–Shakti offers a culturally rooted framework for integrating the psyche's masculine and feminine aspects (Wilberg, 2009). Its intersection with physics has also been explored, with Spanda (vibrational energy) described as a bridge between mind and matter (Benedict, 2021). This connection extends to the chakra system, where Shiva–Shakti energies flow through energy centers, guiding individuals toward psychospiritual harmony (Srivastava, 2022).

Cultural and Mythological Resonance: In Hindu narratives, Shiva–Shakti manifests as Kali's fierce transformation or Parvati's nurturing strength, offering metaphors for emotional journeys. Kali–Shakti's role in psychotherapy is highlighted, where her chaotic energy symbolizes the courage to confront pain (Mahantesh, 2018). These myths resonate with Indian communities, providing culturally familiar stories that therapists can draw upon to make healing relatable (Kakkattil, 2022). Shiva–Shakti's archetypes also challenge Western gender norms, inviting a more fluid understanding of identity (Albu, 2014).

These findings highlight that Shiva–Shakti is much more than a symbolic or abstract concept—it emerges as a dynamic and deeply relevant framework within Eastern philosophy that speaks directly to psychological growth and healing. Far from being confined to metaphysical theory, Shiva–Shakti offers a powerful lens for understanding the inner dynamics of the human mind. Across the studies reviewed, it becomes clear that this framework supports the integration of key dualities—such as consciousness and energy, stability and change, or the traditionally understood masculine and feminine—into a more balanced, whole sense of self.

Shiva-Shakti Orientation and Mental Health

The literature underscores how Shiva-Shakti's principles are woven into therapeutic practices, spiritual traditions, and cultural narratives, fostering mental health and well-being in ways that feel deeply human and culturally grounded. The following themes highlight its impact:

Trauma Processing and Transformation: The Kali–Shakti archetype, with its cycle of destruction and rebirth, offers a powerful lens for trauma recovery. Kali's energy helps clients dismantle rigid ego defenses, allowing them to rebuild with greater self-awareness (Mahantesh, 2018). This process connects to Jungian individuation, where confronting the “dark feminine” fosters psychic integration (Curran, 2005). Case studies also show individuals using Kundalini practices to rise from depression, with energy movement through breathwork and meditation restoring their sense of liveliness (Hamming, 2025). These practices resonate with those seeking to heal from deep wounds, offering a culturally rooted path to transformation.

Culturally Sensitive Interventions: Misdiagnosing spiritual experiences as mental illness is a real risk in India, where practices like Kundalini awakening are common. Kundalini symptoms—such as intense energy surges—can mimic psychosis, prompting the need for culturally informed diagnoses (Paradkar & Chaturvedi, 2010). Shaktipat, a transfer of spiritual energy, is highlighted as a transpersonal practice that enhances emotional resilience, particularly in Indian therapeutic settings (Ossoff, 1993). Tantra's role in mental health is also emphasized, with a call for therapies that honor India's spiritual heritage while addressing modern psychological needs (Rewers, 2019).

Emotional Balance and Gender Integration: The Ardhanarishvara archetype promotes emotional harmony by embracing gender fluidity and inner balance. Stories of clients who, through Ardhanarishvara-inspired counseling, found peace with their gender identities—reducing anxiety and self-conflict—highlight its therapeutic impact (Das et al., 2022). Cultural practices like Bharatanatyam, which embody Shiva–Shakti energies, also support the expression of complex emotions and foster self-acceptance (Nisha & Anand, 2020). These findings speak to the universal human need to feel whole, especially in a world struggling with rigid identity norms.

Spiritual Practices for Well-Being: Shiva–Shakti-inspired practices, such as Kundalini meditation, mantra chanting, and yagna (fire rituals), offer tangible benefits for mental health. Participants in Kundalini meditation reported sharper mental clarity and reduced stress, describing a sense of “coming home” to themselves (Vashisht, 2023). Mantra chanting has also been shown to calm the nervous system, with participants feeling more grounded in daily life (Maxwell & Katyal, 2022). Śakta–Tantric healing is described as an empathic, spiritually rich approach that empowers individuals to reclaim agency over their well-being (Chakraborty & Mukhopadhyay, 2023). These practices also align with Taoist principles of energy flow, suggesting a universal appeal that transcends cultural boundaries (Winn, 2004).

These findings highlight the deep relevance of the Shiva–Shakti framework as a culturally rooted yet widely applicable model for supporting mental health and emotional well-being, especially within the Indian psychological context. Rather than existing only as a spiritual or philosophical idea, Shiva–Shakti emerges as a living framework—one that brings together indigenous knowledge systems and modern therapeutic approaches in meaningful ways.

Gaps and Limitations in the Existing Literature

While the studies reviewed offer meaningful insights into the Shiva–Shakti framework and its potential role in mental health, there are several limitations that stand out. These gaps suggest areas where further research is needed to help bring this indigenous psychological model into more structured and evidence-based practice.

Many of the existing works are philosophical or interpretive in nature, offering rich discussions on the symbolic and spiritual significance of Shiva–Shakti (Wilberg, 2009; Sharma, 2023). However, their ideas are not backed by empirical data. Without quantitative or experimental evidence, it's difficult to measure how effective Shiva–Shakti-based interventions might be in clinical practice. There's a clear need for rigorous research studies that test these concepts in therapeutic or community settings.

Much of the literature is grounded in Indian cultural and spiritual contexts, often drawing from Hindu mythology and Tantric traditions. While this gives depth and authenticity to the

framework, it also limits its cross-cultural applicability (Mahantesh, 2018; Kakkattil, 2022). For example, these works may resonate deeply within the Indian psyche but might not connect as easily with individuals from different cultural or religious backgrounds. There's potential for future studies to explore how Shiva–Shakti compares with other global systems, like indigenous healing traditions, to understand its broader relevance.

Many studies use qualitative, interpretive, or autoethnographic approaches, which, while insightful, are often highly subjective (Winn, 2004; Hamming, 2025). These authors reflect on their own spiritual experiences—particularly around Kundalini awakenings—but these accounts are deeply personal and hard to generalize. The absence of standardized research tools makes it difficult to compare findings or replicate results in other studies.

Another challenge is the lack of validated instruments to assess Shiva–Shakti-based psychological traits or changes (Srivastava, 2022). While Srivastava discusses chakra models and energy flow, there's no established scale or psychometric tool to evaluate constructs like non-dual awareness or energy-based resilience. Without such tools, it becomes difficult to measure outcomes or demonstrate the benefits of this framework alongside conventional mental health criteria.

Although studies argue for the therapeutic value of Śakta-Tantric methods (Chakraborty & Mukhopadhyay, 2023; Rewers, 2019), there's still little research on how to practically combine these traditional systems with evidence-based psychological treatments. Questions remain about how clinicians can responsibly and effectively introduce Shiva–Shakti concepts in therapy, and what hybrid or integrative models might look like in real-world mental health care.

DISCUSSION

This systematic review highlights the significance of the Shiva–Shakti framework as a culturally grounded paradigm for advancing psychological thought in India. Synthesizing 56 studies, the review illustrates how Shiva–Shakti, as the non-dual interplay of consciousness and energy, offers a meaningful lens for understanding the psyche and promoting mental health. Its applications in trauma processing, emotional integration, and spiritual growth have been noted (Mahantesh, 2018; Vashisht, 2023). However, the current literature is limited by its reliance on theoretical interpretations and lacks empirical evidence (Wilberg, 2009; Sharma, 2023). Additionally, the framework's cultural specificity may limit its global applicability (Kakkattil, 2022). Future research should prioritize clinical trials, psychometric tool development, and cross-cultural exploration to further validate Shiva–Shakti's therapeutic potential and strengthen its relevance within contemporary mental health discourse (Rewers, 2019; Chakraborty & Mukhopadhyay, 2023).

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Conflict of Interest

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