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***Subaltern Sadhus? Political Ascetics in Indian Myth, Memory, and History*** **[1](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_01_)
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**1. Betrayal**
Early on the morning of February 3rd, 1954, while Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his guests watched from a boat on the Ganga near Allahabad, the Prayag ***maha-kumbh mela,***India's premier festival, descended into utter chaos. At the center of the commotion were armed naga ***sadhus***, who tore indiscriminately into the throng of jostling, hapless pilgrims. A stampede ensued, there was great loss of life. A Government Inquiry Commission was set up, which in the course of its investigations obtained the testimony of numerous witnesses to the carnage. Shanta Devi, who was present at the scene with her 5-year-old daughter, described the crush of the crowd and the onset of violence: "The Sadhus, instead of helping the distressed...by allowing them to pass through their own Shamiana, began to assault [them] indiscriminately...with their long Chimtas. My daughter first drew my attention and asked me...why the Sadhus were beating the people with their Chimtas. Scores of people who wanted to ascend the slope fell in the ditch on account of the terror of these Sadhus. Then followed a general stampede and utter confusion. The pressure was forcing the people to tread over the bodies of the injured and the dead."

Also included in the Government report, authored by Kamalakanta Verma, was an appeal to "anyone who purports to be a Sadhu," that "Sadhu means perfect, excellent, good, virtuous, pious, righteous." To punctuate this point, Verma quoted the sixteenth-century bhakti poet, Tulsidas, who likened the ideal sadhu to "the cotton-plant, whose produce is dry and white and thread-like. Though he suffers ill-usage [i.e., is spun and woven into cloth], he hides the faults of others [like clothing], and thus is worthy of reverence and wins honour in the world." In Verma's -- and Government's -- opinion, "those who want to be treated as Sadhus...should pause and ponder and should consider how far they come up to this standard. Is beating, with iron Chimtas, a poor exhausted pilgrim, who, pushed by relentless pressure from behind, is hurled across a roadway reserved for a procession of Sadhus, the act of a Sadhu? Is it right for a Sadhu only to insist on what he considers his rights, privileges and prerogatives, and to forget his duties? ...My earnest request to the present generation of Sadhus is that they should put their house in order and should go back to their original noble role. As matters tend at present, the word 'Sadhu' has ceased to have its real significance and has become synonymous with the word 'beggar'." [(2)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#N_02_)

The plaintive testimony of Shanta Devi, particularly as she relates her daughter's innocent question -- "Mommy, why are the sadhus beating the people?" -- together with the sharply honed editorializing by the chairman of the Government inquiry on the moral obligations inherent in being a sadhu, evoke a strong sense of religious and national betrayal. The kumbh tragedy of 1954 and these responses to it are a useful point of departure for an essay into the question of armed asceticism in Indian myth, memory, and history, because it juxtaposes an unruly armed asceticism predicated on bodily disciplines (***tapas***) to a more modern conception of domesticated asceticism

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predicated on religious devotion (***bhakti)***. [(3)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_03_)Superimposed on to and complicating this juxtaposition is the more recent history of Indian nationalist thought, which conceived of the armed ascetic as a sanyasi patriot whose civilizational purpose was to defend the motherland from foreign depredation. It is to this nationalist imagination that I now turn.

**2. Sadhu Patriots**
The history of Indian nationalism is rife with images of armed ascetics opposing British rule. Foremost among these is the soldier sadhu imagined by Bankimchandra Chatterji in 1882, a patriot sprung organically from the soil of Bengal for the express purpose of rescuing a golden age of Indian glory from the clutches of foreign invaders, whether Christian or Muslim. [(4)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_04_) A passage from a recent translation of Bankim's ***Anandamath***, in which Satya, the leader of the sanyasi patriots, returns to the remote jungle hideout, evokes the imagined world of ascetic patriotism:

"At a certain point a vast jungle touched the hill. The hill stood at the top; the highway at the bottom; and the jungle in between. A little noise mingled with the murmur of the trees. No one could know the nature of the noise. Satya walked in the direction of the murmur and entered the jungle. There he found rows of men seated amid the dark shadows of the trees. The men were tall, and armed. Here and there their polished equipment shone brightly in the moonlight that filtered through the openings between the branches. Two hundred men were sitting in perfect silence. Satya walked gently into their midst, and made a sign. No one rose and no one uttered a word. Past the files of men he walked, looking at each face. He seemed to be searching for some one. At last he found the man he sought and touched his body by way of command. The man at once stood up. Satya took him aside.

This man was young, his face covered with a black beard and moustache. He was strong and handsome, dressed in yellow, the holy colour, his body anointed with sacramental sandal paste."

Later in the story, this youth describes his asceticism to a potential recruit: "We are all ascetics, you see. But our renunciation is only for this practice. When we have mastered all techniques, and attained our goal, we shall return to our homes for our duties as householders. We, too, have wives and children at home." [(5)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_05_)

This proto-nationalist imagining of the sadhu patriot would counter a British colonial representation of the ascetic as little more than a criminal disguised in ochre robes, quite literally a variation on the thag typologies of the early nineteenth century. William Sleeman himself, creator of the Department of Thagi and Dakoiti, argued in the 1830s that "Three-fourths of these religious mendicants, whether Hindoos or Muhammadans, rob and steal, and a very great portion of them murder their victims before they rob them;... There is hardly any species of crime that is not throughout India perpetrated by men in the disguise of these religious mendicants; and almost all such mendicants are really men in disguise; for Hindoos of any caste can become Bairagis and Gosains: and Muhammadans of any grade can become Fakirs." [(6)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_06_) Sleeman also alleged that monks were guilty of spreading seditious rumours, and recommended the compulsory registration of all such individuals according to a strict Vagrant

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Act. [(7)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_07_) Colonial suspicions of sadhus and sects as founts of criminal mischief would continue unabated through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, no doubt spurred by the publication of ***Anandamath***, as demonstrated by the appearance in 1913 of an Urdu police handbook that described the various religious orders and, in detailed line-drawings, examples of representative figures -- down to the distinctive sandalwood-paste sect marks. [(8)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_08_) Indeed, to some extent this distrust of holy men as rogues in disguise was shared by the ever-growing Indian middle classes in such colonial centers as Calcutta -- how else to explain the sensational public reception of the Tarakeswar murder case in 1873, and the mini-industry that exploded among the painters of Kalighat depicting the seduction of Elokeshi by the Mahant of Tarakeswar. [(9)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_09_) This public criticism of the world of sadhus persisted as well into the twentieth century despite Bengali bhadralok affinities for Sri Ramakrishna and the nationalist popularity of ***Anandamath***, [(10)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_10_) and was expressed in a wide range of Hindi vernacular literature of the early twentieth century depicting sadhus as greedy scoundrels, bent on satisfying their own wants and desires. [(11)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_11_) As we shall see in the course of the paper, such critical attitudes were not simply a result of the negative colonial construction of the sadhu, but were grounded in longer Indic discourses regarding Vaishnava and Saiva ascetics and their relationship to political power.

Notwithstanding the public critique of sadhus, and probably because of the colonial critique, many nationalists in decades following the publication of ***Anandamath*** would look to the image of potent, political asceticism as refracted through Bankim's eyes. Examples include the revolutionary-terrorist cells of turn-of-the-century Bengal, which would style themselves "akharas" after the regimental units of Saiva and Vaishnava nagas, both real and imagined; Sarala Debi Ghoshal's call (as Debi Chaudhurani) to the young men of Bengal to build up their muscles so as to better defend their women would appeal to the sense of male patriotic duty evoked (and then challenged) in ***Anandamath***; and Bankim's sanyasi song "Bande Mataram" was put to music by Rabindranath Tagore and became the unofficial anthem of the Swadeshi movement and, later, of mature nationalism under a very different kind of nationalist ascetic, M. K. Gandhi. With Gandhi, however, armed asceticism as a model of and for nationalist action would be abandoned in favor of a globally potent unarmed asceticism. [(12)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_12_) And in 1920, just as Gandhi was

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grasping the reins of the nationalist movement, this new, nonviolent nationalist asceticism would come face to face with the real armed ascetic. In that year, a large number of naga sadhus attended the annual Congress meeting in Nagpur and seemed willing, for a time, to commit themselves to the anti-colonialist cause. This bit of information comes down to us not via nationalist memory, but courtesy of the colonial intelligence apparatus that tracked the rapidly transforming nationalist movement under the Mahatma. According to the Government informant's report, these " sadhus visited most of the villages and town and the masses had a high regard for them, and thought a great deal of their instructions and preachings. When these Nagas took up non-cooperation, the scheme would spread like wild fire among the masses of India and eventually Government would be unable to control 33 crores of people and would have to give Swaraj." He added, ominously, that Gandhi urged the nagas to "visit the vicinities of cantonments and military stations and explain to the native soldiers the advisability of giving up their employments."[(13)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_13_)

Of course, armed ascetics were not the only sadhus drawn to Gandhian nationalism. After the Nagpur Congress, the intelligence branch of government would become increasingly concerned with the activity of people they termed "political sadhus." [(14)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_14_) One such political sadhu was Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, a ***dandi*** or orthodox Dasnami sanyasi who would encounter Gandhi at the Ahmedabad Congress in 1921. His recollection of Gandhi's speech at that event evokes a mahatma unlike that to which we have become accustomed: "Gandhiji was seated on a table as he spoke. His whole body, especially his face, had a ruddy appearance. It seemed that some power in the garb of a demon was throwing a determined challenge to government and warning that it should be on its guard. He spoke for hours. There was pindrop silence. Never again did I see him speak with such emotion. Every word that came out of his mouth was like a thunderbolt against the government. It seemed that Shiva, the God of destruction, was raging and that soon the great deluge would follow." [(15)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_15_) For British officials observing the evolutionary course of Indian nationalism from 1919 onward, the agrarian potential of ascetic activism -- whether naga or dandi -- in the non-cooperation movement would seem a major issue, [(16)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_16_) perhaps causing some among them to question whether Bankim's organic sadhu patriotism was as much real as imagined. Such apprehensions would only be sharpened with the news that the "unGandhian" violence at Chauri Chaura in February 1922 had inspired a gang of twenty nationalist volunteers from Bihar, led by a sadhu with a banner. to proceed towards the scene of the carnage where. in their view. 'Gandhi raj had been established." [(17)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_17_)

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But most troubling for colonial officials (and perhaps for some nationalists) was the prospect of armed sadhus involved in the nationalist upsurge, embodied most succinctly in the 1920 intelligence report describing the Mahatma at Nagpur instructing nagas, ascetics with a history of soldiering all their own. to visit army cantonments and urge the imperial soldiery there to abandon its salt. This particular report would call to mind two moments of armed insurgency against the British. The first, spread over the last tour decades of the eighteenth century, featured "predatory'' bands of Hindu and Muslim ascetics ("sanyasis" and "fakirs'' in the colonial reportage) arrayed against Company troops, and formed the actual historical ground for Bankim's imaginative remembering a century later. [(18)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_18_) The prospect of naga sadhus visiting military cantonments in 1920 also invoked the breakdown of sepoy loyalty during the mutiny-rebellion of 1857. As was widely reported at the time, the onset of military mutiny in May of that year was preceded by such ominous acts as the circulation of a lotus flower from sepoy to sepoy through entire regimental units. [(19)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_19_) What is less well known, however, is that some of the rebels were naga sadhus, and that even though their participation was militarily limited. their symbolic significance to the rebellion was considerable. The testimony of a commissioner in the Meerut division, serves to underline this point:

"All the rumours by which the minds of the Native soldiers were prepared for revolt, were industriously disseminated at Meerut, especially those regarding the use of polluting grease in the preparation of the new cartridges, and the mixture of ground bones in flour, by which, it was said. Government desired to destroy the religion of the people. One of the many emissaries who were moving about the country appeared at Meerut in April, ostensibly as a fakeer, riding on an elephant with followers. and having with him horses and native carriages. The frequent visits of the men of the Native regiments to him attracted attention, and he was ordered, through the police, to leave the place; he apparently complied, but, it is said, he stayed some time in the Lines of the 20th Native Infantry." [(20)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_20_)

Such behavior on the part of sadhus of course only confirmed Sleeman's editorializing two decades earlier -- as would the record of events in Kanpur for 1857, which speaks of significant numbers of gosains, or Saiva soldier ascetics, taking part in the general insurgency. The leader of the Kanpur gosains was named Lalpuri Gosain, who, like the Meerut-based sadhu, appeared during the hostilities mounted on an elephant with a military banner on display.[(21)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_21_)

However, as with most rebels in 1857, the insurgency of armed sadhus had little to do with visions of national awakening and everything to do with resentment against British rule, a desire to establish a just political and economic order, and a longing to recapture a bygone military glory. [(22)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_22_) So with armed sadhus, particularly those around Kanpur, who were descended institutionally (and, in some cases, biologically) from Anupgiri Gosain, better known as Himmat Bahadur, an extremely successful military entrepreneur and warlord-king of northern India in the latter half of the eighteenth century. More importantly, these brief references to sadhu participation in 1857 move us from nationalist politics (and the imagined sanyasi patriot) to imperial politics (and the real soldiering sadhu). Unlike the politics of Gandhian nationalism, which was predicated on the hoped-for promised land of democratic representation, political power in the eighteenth century was established by military conquest and maintained by the

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judicious combination of military alliances, military force (real or threatened), military and administrative recruitment, and, importantly, the fictions of imperial sovereign legitimacy.

The different political context brings to the fore a second important distinction, particularly for the period before 1850 (to which we now turn): namely, that political ascetics were really of two kinds -- those sages who directed their benign gaze toward the ruler, thereby lending a distinct moral approval to the imperial project (contributing thus to the self-image of the imperial sovereign), and those soldier ascetics who organised themselves into armed groups and, after about 1700, sold their services to the highest bidder, often but not always the imperial state. While imperial regimes in northern India gradually rendered the considerable military power of soldier ascetics obsolete by 1850, they (and most notably the British imperial state) at the same time withdrew from an implicit moral engagement with ascetic sages in the same way that they withdrew from public arenas generally (cf. Freitag), thereby leaving ascetic moral power intact -- though atrophied from a want of sustenance. Despite the lack of interest in such political darshan evinced by the British, the ascetic and his morally approving gaze remained politically potent and would return to haunt the colonial state with the rise of, and under the guise of, Indian nationalism. And, to confuse matters, the naga akhara-based descendants of soldier ascetics, rendered militarily obsolete a century before, would begin to partake in the moral politics of the emergent Indian nation. In other words, the distinction between the military and the moral worlds of Indian asceticism become blurred by the colonial suppression of the former and disinterest in the latter, and are then conflated into one overarching, unified moral army, as it were. in Bankim's literary-nationalist imagination and Gandhi's political-nationalist mobilization. In this sense, the history of armed asceticism after about 1800 conforms to the subaltern trajectory of many other insurgent groups, as cannon-fodder for the centralizing nation-state.

**3.** **Gosains, Bairagis, and the Eighteenth Century**
If, however, we view the decade surrounding 1800 as an endpoint rather than a beginning, and conceptualize our inquiry in terms of mentality and practice rather than insurgency, we get a very different picture of armed asceticism in Indian history. By the mid-eighteenth century, with the decline of Mughal imperial authority at Delhi, a new phase of armed asceticism had crystallized. Substantial armies led by either gosains or bairagis and peopled by a rank-and-file "naga" soldiery would find lucrative service in the armies of the major north Indian states -- most notably, under the first three nawabs of Awadh, the Kachhwaha maharajas of Jaipur, and the Jat maharajas of Bharatpur. The most famous of these was Anupgiri Gosain, mentioned above; less well known but equally important was his "elder brother" Umraogiri. Both saw service with almost every major power in northern India, including the British. Only slightly less important were Balanand Swami of Jaipur and his disciple, Ramakrishna Mahant, who together served Madho Singh of Jaipur and Jawahir and Nawal Singh of Bharatpur. The tenacious naga soldiers these men were able to bring to bear on the battlefield would vary, but often reached 20,000 men, consisting of both horse and foot. Their weaponry was state-of-the-art and included musketry and artillery, materials for mounting sieges against well fortified locations, camel guns; their mounted soldiery was said to have the use of "excellent mares", and they also possessed elephants and other pack animals required to transport heavy equipment.

The large numbers suggest that naga commanders cast a wide net for military recruitment, and relied in particular upon the local north Indian peasant population. [(23)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_23_) Indeed, what is particularly significant about the armed akharas is that they appear to have been remarkably open socially, so tar as recruitment was concerned. This is certainly suggested by the low status to which Saiva nagas have been relegated in the Dasnami hierarchy since the nineteenth century. a low status that is uniformly based on the oft-repeated imputations of the shudra and untouchable origins of the akharas by the well-born Dasnami orthodoxy. [(24)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_24_) And the fact that the "low-born" (***antyaj***)

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were finding their way into the ranks of the Vaishnava bairagi akharas in the early eighteenth century is confirmed by the tact that no lesser light than Jai Singh II himself sought to prohibit their initiation as Ramanandis. [(25)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_25_) For the commanders, who seem to have been of higher status, the scanty biographical information that is available suggests that economic hardship played a role in turning to a life in the akhara: Anupgiri and Umraogiri, according to Bundelkhandi folklore, were the orphaned children of indigent Brahmans of Bundelkhand; [(26)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_26_) the Vaishnava commander Madhodas (who became famous as "Banda Bahadur," the leader of the Sikh resistance against the Mughals after the death of Gobind Singh) was the son of a poor Kashmiri Rajput ploughman. [(27)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_27_) That many nagas performed a dual role as cultivators or in supervising cultivation is also suggested by the variations in manpower in Anupgiri's army during the course of the year; in 1775-76, for example, while he was shifting allegiances from Asaf ud-daula to Najaf Khan, his estimated troop strength in the Doab varied from 6000 to 20,000 following the phases of cultivation in the region. The gosains would also benefit from the presence of well-placed pockets of grain, troops, and weapons held in reserve throughout the countryside; for example, while en route to Agra in 1787, William Hodges observed that the village of Firozabad was control by a gosain, who maintains an army of 2000 well-armed men in a camp nearby and had a small park of artillery, including "two fine pieces of battering cannon," and that the local agriculture was in an excellent state.[(28)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_28_)

The akhara provided the institutional context whereby peasants, shudras, the "low-born ', and perhaps even untouchables, could be hardened into effective, disciplined soldiers. Naga discipline enabled Anupgiri and Umraogiri to mount the daring operations during the 1750s to 1770 for which they became so well known --particularly the raids on urban fortifications or enemy encampments under the cover of darkness. [(29)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_29_) A guerilla style of rapid attack-and-retreat combat is seen as well in the four-decade long series of skirmishes that marked the sanyasi and fakir insurgency in Bengal. Francis Buchanan would describe the "nagas" of Bengal and Bihar as "rogues who from going quite naked[,] close shaved and well rubbed with oil are so slippery that no one can seize them while they force their way with a dagger pointed at both ends and held by the middle." [(30)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_30_) It is not difficult to imagine, then, how James Rennell, the pioneering Company mapmaker, received his wounds after surprising a large party of armed sanyasis just south of including a sabre gash that "cut through my right Shoulder Bone, and laid me open for nearly

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a toot down the Back, cutting through and wounding some of my Ribs....a cut on the left Elbow, which took off the muscular part of the breadth of a Hand, a Stab in the Arm, and a large cut on the head." [(31)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_31_)

Gosains and bairagis to the west likewise had a good reputation as fierce fighters and loyal soldiers. James Skinner thought well enough of the latter to include a portrait of a well-armed bairagi in early nineteenth-century caste compendium, ***Tasrih-i-Ahwam***; significantly, he includes them in the final section of his work, dealing with sects, sadhus, and fakirs. And Lieutenant-Colonel Valentine Blacker, reflecting on the rise of infantry forces in late eighteenth-century India, ranked gosains just below the elite Arabs and Sindhis: "The Gossyes have been always considered as good troops. They are a Hindoo cast of peculiar habits, scattered over different parts of India. Among other professions, they pursue that of arms, and may be ranked in the same degree with Rohillah [Afghans], Jats, and Seiks." [(32)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_32_) The comparison to Jats and Sikhs is quite appropriate, given McLeod's argument regarding the transformation of the Nanakpanth into the Khalsa. [(33)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_33_) But also appropriate, I would argue, is the equation of gosains with Afghans. As Jos Gommans has recently argued, the backbone of the Atghan armies in the eighteenth century was the elite corps of about 10,000 mounted ***ghulam-shahis***, or royal slaves, recruited from a panoply of non-Afghan central and west Asian groups, who could harass an enemy into a confused submission in a short time. [(34)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_34_) Likewise. gosains had earned a reputation at Allahabad in 1751, ironically, against besieging Afghans, for executing "lightning attacks upon the Afghan camp" and "doing daily killings there" on "excellent mares." According to Ghulam Husain's ***Siyar ul Mutaqherin***,

There happened to be then [1750-51] on the shores of the Ganga, and quite close to the castle of Ilah-abad. a certain Saniassi-fakir, very brave and well accompanied, who spent his time in his devotions to Mahadeoo. This man shocked to see the ravages committed by the Afghans, he had, without any invitation, resolved to join his cause to that of Baca-ollah-qhan [the Awadhi defender of the fortress], and of the others, that were shut up in the castle: but although he was requested to come within its walls, he constantly refused it, and contented himself with encamping his brave slave-boys and his people at a small distance from it. Every day he [Rajendragiri, Anupgiri's guru] used to set out with the bravest of his people, all mounted on excellent mares, and to gallop about the Afghan camp, from whence he never returned without

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having killed several of the bravest of the enemy, and brought away both their arms and horses with him; so long as the siege lasted he did not miss a single day, and always did some execution." [(35)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_35_)

Gommans' ghulam-shahis under Ahmad Shah Durrani, and Ghulam Husain's gosains under Rajindragiri, share tour key features: fearlessness, discipline, tactical innovation, and, most importantly, underpinning all three, an ethic of servitude to the commander. The fact that both used the term "chela" to express this last relationship only underlines the significance of the commonality. In any event, the ethic of servitude and the tactical advantages it would confer would render these soldiers, and others like them, highly sought after as allies in the unstable politics of the eighteenth century. In the late eighteenth century we witness the beginnings of a new phase of armed asceticism, namely. the transformation of ascetic military culture into agrarian territorial-based power and state-hood. This transformation is well known for the Punjab with the rise of Ranjit Singh, whose Amritsar-based empire depended on the military effectiveness of his mounted bands of khalsa soldiers. Further east, Anupgiri (one of Rajendragiri's "slave-boys") would establish himself as the paramount power in Bundelkhand, another buffer region -- but one of much greater strategic value to the expanding Company State vis-a-vis Maratha arms -- and would likewise style himself maharaja. From the perspective of established claimants to state power, such as Mahadji Shinde, the Durrani Afghans, and the expanding Company-state. Anupgiri had long developed a reputation as one who was not to be trusted, "like a man who in crossing a river kept a foot in two boats, ready to abandon the one that was sinking." [(36)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_36_) To his gosain adherents, however, he was the legitimate heir to a line of Dasnami ascetics that had taken to arms (according to sectarian tradition) in the early eighteenth century. [(37)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_37_) And to the bardic poets who flocked briefly to his darbar in the 1790s, he was a great and benevolent king, generous, brave, compassionate":

**Himmat Bahadur is a great king, incomparable in his excellent**

**benevolence.**

**He is generous, brave, and compassionate, [but] to his amassed enemies he**

**is death itself.**

 **. . . .**

**He darkens and disgraces his assembled enemies, he burns them in their**

**wild hide-outs.**

**During sacrifices he is compassionate to the poor, [to whom] he is**

**long-armed [generous].**

**He gives endowments to support dharma, he is the clothing that covers**

**Hindu shame.**

**He embodies radiant splendor, he is an insatiable demon when his emotions**

**are sparked.**

 **. . . .**

**He is as true to his word as Harishchandra, he is ever the source of**

**bliss.**

**He is the enemy of sadness, constantly engaged in sacrificial rites.**

**The lamp of his own sect blazes radiantly, [he is] the most valiant**

**protector of the earth.**

 **. . . .**

**To the class of poets he is like the sun to the lotus, he is full of**

**benign moral conduct.**

**He is extremely knowledgeable, he always puts forth a pleasant**

**countenance.**

 **. . . .**

**When he sees the needy he is compassionate, when slaughtering the evil he**

**is merciless.**

 **. . . .**

**He is a remarkable horseman and an unsurpassed archer.**

**He chants Siva bhajans with such excellence and equanimity --no one can**

**compare.**

**Himmat Bahadur is a powerful king, his army's presence immediately**

**destroys his foe.**

**His occupation is world conquest. he is notorious in the lands of his**

**enemies.**

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**Now I'll sing of an army that all the Thakurs [Rajput landlords]**

**have heard of.**

**Near the massive Ajaygarh fort, united they are fearsome.**

**Whence the conch shell is blown, [can be seen] his mighty sword.**

**The incessant beat of the kettledrum scatters his enemies like so many**

**snorting pigs.**[(38)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_38_)

**4. From Soldier to Subaltern in the Nineteenth Century**
In the decade following the composition of Padmakar's panegyric, Anupgiri consolidated his hold on the region, and drew local Rajputs and other "Hindustanis" into his service under the command of a Dutch adventurer by the name of John Mieselbach. Meanwhile, Bundelkhand was becoming increasingly valuable to the Marathas as a potential staging ground in the early 1800s, to counter Company expansion up the Gangetic Plain. As the great powers closed in on him, Anupgiri extended an invitation to the British in 1803 to enter the province, and offered his aid in 'subduing the recalcitrant Maratha warlords and Bundela chieftains there" in exchange for a massive jaidad of 22 lakh rupees, to be replaced eventually by a small jagir near Kanpur following the settlement of the province. Though some of his ascetic adherents would flirt with the prospect of continued military service in the territories beyond Company control in the decade following Anupgiri's untimely death in early June 1804, ultimately the bulk of the gosain's naga army would melt away, the fate of its rank-and-file soldiery uncertain. [(39)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_39_)

Anupgiri's capitulation, along with the suppression of itinerant ascetic gangs in Bengal by 1800, would render Saiva ascetic arms obsolete in the long Gangetic plain. The Ramanandi Vaishnava akharas would continue to serve, for a time, the maharajas of Jaipur, but would eventually be settled (and for the most part domesticated) in Awadh's Ayodhya. at the Hanumangarhi -- the interesting episodic history of which must remain the subject of another essay. The Sikh khalsa would continue to thrive in the nineteenth century, but after 1849 as a bulwark of Company arms. Thus the military function of the ascetic akharas in India would be rendered obsolete -- either suppressed or domesticated by the modern imperial state. Paradoxically, the military culture of the akharas would survive and, indeed, thrive during the nineteenth century -- suggesting that the akharas served an important social as well as military function. This is nowhere better illustrated than in the demographic success of the triennial kumbh mela -- which has long alternated between Haridwar, Nasik, Ujjain, and Allahabad -- since 1800.

Irrespective of the antiquity of this remarkable pilgrimage festival (and there is much to suggest that the individual locations were pilgrimage sites of great antiquity), it is clear that the kumbh in the eighteenth century had become the staging ground for the mobilization, recruitment, and mercenary employment of the armed akharas. Recall, for example, that Rajendragiri comes to the aid of Safdar Jang at Allahabad while visiting the Triveni at Prayag in 1750-51. An integral part of that staging process in each location was the procession of the armed akharas, in full armed regalia, to the sacred water for a ritual bath. The rights of akhara precedence in the procession, which reflected superior martial prowess, were, on repeated occasions, the basis for serious disagreement and conflict between the orders -- particularly between Saivas and Vaishnavas, often resulting in the spilling of blood by gosains and bairagis during the processions. Conflicts during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries seemed to be decided mostly in favor of the Saivas. Decisive victories occurred in particular at the Hardwar kumbh -- which had become by the mid eighteenth century a major commercial event in northwest India -- in 1640 and 1760, and at the Nasik kumbh in 1789. [(40)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_40_) Gosain dominance in this period, particularly in the northwestern Gangetic region around Hardwar, may have been sustained in part by the military and political successes of Rajendragiri and his chelas, Anupgiri and Umraongiri. Rajendragiri was appointed faujdar (commander) of Saharanpur in 1752 by the Mughal emperor Ahmad Shah, [(41)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_41_) an office that would have given allied Saiva akharas the upper hand in Hardwar at the peak of its commercial success.

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Gosains would retain control of the Hardwar festival, including the right to tax pilgrims, police the gathering, arid dispense justice, until 1796. However, in that year they would experience a humiliating defeat at the Hardwar kumbh; ironically, the instigators and victors in the 1796 conflict were not Vaishnavas but the Sikh khalsa, who were on the verge of statehood in the nearby Punjab under Ranjit Singh. [(42)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_42_) "Modern" state control would begin to be asserted after about 1800. This was most evident in. but necessarily restricted to, the efforts of the British. [(43)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_43_) The British would increasingly regulate the kumbh gatherings under their control, namely, Hardwar and Allahabad, so as to prevent bloodshed during the massive periodic gatherings. Conflicts would continue to break out, however, particularly in Ujjain. In what can be considered a low-point for Shaiva soldiering, a dispute said to have been instigated by gosains at the 1826 kumbh in Ujjain resulted in their utter defeat and the plunder of their monasteries and temples in the vicinity of that city at the hands of the Vaishnava bairagis, who were said to be assisted by local Marathas. [(44)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_44_) By 1850, Vaishnava bairagis would be the dominant sectarian presence at the Ujjain kumbh. but by then, the colonial state would intervene here as well. A description of "The Great Fair at Oojein [Ujjain]'' in 1850 published in the 12 and 15 June editions of that year's ***Delhi Gazette*** provides a telling glimpse of this new scenario. Responding to the threat of violence between gosains and the much more powerful bairagis during the main bathing day of the festival, local rulers solicited the armed assistance of two companies of the Gwalior infantry under the command of one Captain Macpherson. Prior to the onset of the monastic processions, Macpherson deployed his troops throughout the city, on the bathing "hats, and in temple balconies overlooking the river. He then endeavored to arbitrate the conflicting claims of the various orders for ceremonial precedence and eventually convinced the Saivas to conclude their military procession and ritual bathing in the morning well before the arrival of the much larger and more powerful Vaishnava armies. In case either party would later renege on the timing of the processions, heavy guns were "posted to command the whole breadth of the stream," and a fenced barrier was constructed in the middle of the shallow river "so as to form two separate pools" where the bairagis and gosains could bathe independent of each other. As a final precaution, one hundred brahmins were positioned between the two pools to assist the sadhus in their ablutions. thereby providing a buffer of sons between the two armies. Save for a potentially serious dispute over protocol between two Vaishnava battalions, which was quickly ironed over by Macpherson himself, the entire day passed without incident. Gone were the days of unbridled ascetic warfare at the kumbh: the contrast with the eighteenth century could not be more pronounced.

**5. Discipline, Devotion, and the Ascetic Armed**
One conclusion that can be drawn from the foregoing discussion, particularly as it relates to the history of the kumbh festival in the nineteenth century, is that the process of suppressing ascetic arms by the colonial state involved the reincorporation of the military akharas into the sectarian (i.e., Saiva or Vaishnava) orders with which they were loosely associated. Broadly speaking, what appears to be taking place during the nineteenth century is the rerouting (or perhaps devolution) of ascetic military culture into martial religious culture, increasingly dependent on regional and subcontinental pilgrimage, wherein the naga sadhus themselves became objects of worship at the periodic kumbh gatherings. [(45)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_45_) While the details of this process need to be more precisely delineated -- requiring an examination of

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the evolution of religious culture from the perspective of the colonial management of pilgrimage as well as sectarian organization [(46)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_46_) -- the general argument that the naga akharas were incorporated into the formal sectarian ascetic orders begs an important question: to what extent were pre-colonial military ascetics actually ascetics?

As it happens, we would not be the first to pose such a question. Kabir, the fifteenth-century poet, is himself said to have asked, in his inimitable manner, whether armed sadhus, "millionaires" mounted on stallions and mares, busily collecting the tribute of villages, were in fact "ascetics or archers." [(47)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_47_) As David Lorenzen has noted, the prominent mention of firearms in the verse in which this question is posed, suggests that the poem was composed after 1526 (and, hence, by someone other than Kabir) when such weapons saw widespread use in the subcontinent. Regardless of authorship, this vilification should be seen as part of a larger critique, emerging throughout north India, of armed asceticism generally -- despite, or perhaps because of, the expanding influence of gosains in particular in politics and commerce from about 1600 onward. It is worth recalling the verse of Tulsidas from the ***Ramcaritamanas***, cited at the beginning of the essay, likening the sadhu to the cotton plant -- an image that does not, at first glance, conform to the practice of ascetic arms. For Tulsi, any asceticism predicated solely on ***tapas***, or discipline for its own sake, was fundamentally flawed, and could only be rendered legitimate through ***bhakti***, or selfless devotion to Ram.

Tulsi's disdain for tapas stands in stark contrast to Valmiki's elevation of tapas in the ***Ramayana***, particularly in the extensive verses given over in the ***Balakanda*** (childhood section) to describing the troubled relationship between Vasistha and Viswamitra. [(48)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_48_) Long before the days of Rama, we are told, the great king Visvamitra wandered the earth looking for people to conquer, when he came upon the lovely ashram of the sage Vasistha. After receiving the hospitality of Vasistha, Visvamitra tried to steal the sage's magical, wish-fulling cow. The cow, not wishing to be abandoned by the sage, produced a host of magical armies. A battle ensued, resulting in the utter destruction of the monarch Visvamitra and his family. Dejected, Visvamitra made his way to the Himalayas where he performed great austerities (tapas) and was granted a boon by Siva. He chose weapons: the battle with Vasistha thus recommenced -- but still the sage, by virtue of his inner power as a brahman, was too powerful. In Visvamitra's own dejected phrasing, "The power of the kshatriyas is no power at all. Only the power of a brahman's energy is power indeed. All my weapons have been destroyed by a single brahman's staff." It is at this point that Viswamitra chooses to undertake even greater austerities, so as to become a truly powerful brahman -- and at this he succeeds. to the astonishment of many. [(49)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_49_) And it is as a brahman ascetic sage that Visvamitra much later presented Rama with his own great arsenal of weapons, after the God-prince had slain the demon-goddess Taraka who tormented the people of the region. Hence, while the superficial point of the episode is to underline the true source of Vasistha's power, his brahmanness, the final irony (and the true import of the tale) is that brahmanness is not

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ultimately beyond the reach of a non-brahman: Visvamitra, after amazing austerities (again, tapas), literally transforms himself into a brahman, and is confirmed as such by none other than Vasistha.

Tulsidas, by contrast, not only ridicules the practitioner of tapas but identifies tapas itself to be the source of great civilizational evil if left unconstrained by bhakti. Thus in the Ramcaritamanas there is no description at all of Viswamitra's tapas-induced metamorphosis in the distant past, and only passing reference to his expertise in weaponry. Vasistha, likewise. is given short shrift. The main political ascetic we read about, aside from Ravana himself, is a vengeful, deceitful prince in the guise of a hermit, who is generically identified by Tulsi as "tapas'' end who appears in the Ramcaritamanas in a lengthy story detailing the travails of one Pratapabhanu. a king who lived many generations before the birth of Ram. [(50)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_50_) Significantly, this story occurs in the portion of the ***Balakanda*** text where, roughly speaking, we might have expected to learn about the travails of Valmiki and Viswamitra, given our earlier reading of Valmiki's Ramayana: likewise, there is no reference to Pratapabhanu in the Balakanda of the Valmiki Ramayana. In the Ramcaritamanas, by contrast, Tulsi's "tapascetic" manages, through a spiraling series of duplicitous acts, to not only bring about the ruin of Pratapabhanu and his kingdom, but is indirectly responsible for Pratapabhanu's rebirth as the evil king and arch enemy of Ram, namely, Ravana -- the ill results of whose own tapas-induced powers are too well-known to recount here, save to make the obvious point that it is bhakti and not tapas that constitutes the transformative praxis that affords the defeat of Ravana and the redemption of the kingdom of Ayodhya. Throughout this portion of the text, tapascetic is referred to as 'master of deceipt" (ch. 160), as "scheming and guileful" (d. 160), and as "hypocritical" (ch. 162). Meanwhile, the king, completely taken in by tapascetic's professions of humility, praises him in the following, unwittingly ironic terms: "Wise mystics like yourself, free from all self-conceit, habitually conceal their personality. Their highest good they find in the adoption of lowly guise. That is why saints and scripture proclaim that the perfectly destitute are dear to Hari. Mendicants like yourself, without money or home raise clouts in the minds of Brahma and Siva. But whatever you may be, I reverence your feet; now, master, be gracious to me" (ch. 161). Tulsi's commentary is most revealing: "The more the ascetic spoke of his detachment, the greater grew the king's belief in him. When the hypocritical ascetic saw that the king had submitted thought, word and deed to his influence. he said, 'Brother, my name is Ekatanu [One-body]' At the word the king bowed his head and said again, 'Explain to me, as to your own dear servant, the meaning of that name' (ch. 162). 'In the beginning [answered the tapascetic], when the world was created. I was born. and since that time I have worn no other body; that is why I am called One-body (d. 162). My son, marvel not in your heart; tap [short for tapas] renders all easy of attainment. By the power of tap Brahma creates the world; by the power of tap Visnu preserves it; by the power of tap Sambhu destroys it; there is nothing in the world that cannot be accomplished by tap."'

Hence, while Valmiki elevates tapas in its own right as a transformative praxis, Tulsi disdains it as not only the basis of hypocritical. duplicitous behavior, but as politically and civilizationally dangerous. A commitment to the transformative power of tapas and with it the integrity and political value of the armed ascetic persists in north Indian mentalities well into the medieval period. as is ably demonstrated by David White in his recent study of yoga-tantra and the ideology of bodily discipline. [(51)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_51_) And, as we know from Joseph Alter's work on the wrestler's body, tapas as the basis of a transformative praxis continues to be a powerful, and popular, dynamic in the late twentieth century -- producing, as we shall see, political ascetics of a very different stripe, notwithstanding the emergence of a bhakti critique around 1600.

Situated historically between the Tulsidas ***Manas*** and the Valmiki ***Ramayana*** is a third portrayal of the political ascetic that both speaks to the remembered ideal of the armed ascetic evoked in Valmiki's verse and is linked to the full-blown martial asceticism of the later medieval period. This portrayal occurs in the seventh-century ***Harsacarita***, a "historical romance" authored by Banabhatta. [(52)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_52_) Bana describes here the enlistment of two ***yogis***,

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adherents of one Bhairavacharya, in the personal guard of King Pushpabhuti of ***Sthanisvara*** (or Thaneshwar, in what is now Haryana), the earliest ancestor (whose dates are uncertain) of the great seventh-century monarch Harshavardhana. Bhairavacharya is celebrated in the text as a great Saiva ascetic of the Deccan, practically a second Siva, "whose powers, made famous by his excellence in multifarious sciences were, like his many thousands of disciples, spread all over the sphere of humanity." [(53)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_53_) According to Banal Pushpabhuti was himself a fervent devotee of Siva and, "immediately on hearing of this saint Bhairavacarya,...conceived towards him, though far away, a deep affection as towards a second Civa, and desired even with longing by all means to see his face." One day Bhairavacharya was encamped in Sthanisvara and despatched a "recluse" to present the monarch with gifts (five silver lotuses) and request a meeting. On the following day Pushpabhuti would meet and declare himself the disciple of Bhairavacharya who, in turn, would present the monarch with an additional collection of silver lotuses and. most importantly, a great and powerful sword. Some days later Bhairavacharya would request the monarch to accompany three of his armed disciples to a funeral ground where he had made ready the performance of a dark ritual. the successful completion of which required "a victory over a goblin" -- which supposedly only the king could perform. Pushpabhuti would willingly comply with this request, defeat the demon goblin in hand-to-hand combat, receive assurances from a goddess of the future glory of his descendants (Harsha most prominent among them), and retain two of Bhairavacharya's disciples in his personal guard. These two, one Patalaswamin and a "Dravidian" named Karnatala, would be "elevated to a fortune beyond their wildest dreams, drawing their swords in the midst of the royal guard, Land] occupying the front rank in the battle." eventually to "[arrive] at old age by the king's side."

Despite the many differences between the Valmiki Ramayana and the Bana Harsacarita, what unites them -and what sets them apart from the later, "bhakti-kal" compositions of Tulsidas and Kabir -- is their presentation of remembered ascetic sages possessed of great military power. Valmiki describes the long-past battles of Visvamitra and Vasistha, and later Visvamitra's gift of weapons to Rama, and Bana describes armed ascetics in the context of the founding myth of the dynasty into which Harsha is born. Both also depict armed ascetics as powerful and independent, and monarchs as either once proud but repentant (Visvamitra), or as suppliant devotees (Rama and his father Dasrath to Visvamitra, Pushpabhuti to Bhairavacharya). Most importantly, the ascetic is depicted as the keeper of advanced military technology, namely, weapons endowed with magical power and legendary weight. Hence, when Visvamitra presents weapons to Rama, the sage announces: "Bless you, prince of great renown. I am fully satisfied with you. Since I feel such great affection for you, I shall give you the divine weapons." Those weapons include several discuses. a lance, maces, nooses, spears, a club, and "a jewel of a sword, the favorite weapon of the ***gandharvas***, which is called Manava." [(54)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_54_) Likewise, when Bhairavacharya's bestowal of a sword upon Pushpabhuti is accompanied by the following speech: "'Most fortunate king, his reverence informs your majesty that he has a Brahman disciple named Patalasvamin, who from the hand of a Brahmaraksasa took a great sword called Attahasa. Pray accept of this, a weapon befitting your majesty's arm.' With these words he removed the covering of rags, and drew forth from the sheath a sword, like the autumn sky converted to a scimitar...." [(55)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_55_) And, finally, in both cases, the ascetic and the sovereign need each other; while each is independently powerful, together they form an alliance whose political and civilizational result is greater than the sum of its parts.

By contrast, Tulsidas obscures the whole question of military asceticism, preferring to focus instead on the politically duplicitous nature of tapas, the implications of which are civilizational chaos. Kabir is less subtle: the

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armed ascetic is a vain hypocrite, a false siddha, a lover of maya. More to the point, while the ascetic engaged in political pursuits is a perfectly acceptable ideal in the historical imaginations of Valmiki and Banal the same political ascetic is an abomination in the imaginations of Tulsidas and Kabir. So, whether an ascetic could also be an archer depended (and depends) on one's vision of asceticism, as predicated on either bhakti or of tapas. As we shall see, the answer is complicated by the fact that most brands of north Indian asceticism encompassed both postures.

**6. Ascetics, Archers, and Institutionalization**
Having juxtaposed idealizations of the military ascetic in north Indian historical consciousness to caricatures of the political ascetic in late medieval poetry, it is appropriate to measure both against the actual, historical military ascetic from 1500 onward. As noted earlier. Pushpabhuti's realm was that of ***Sthanisvara*** or Thaneshwar, situated in what is now the popular pilgrimage locale of Kurukshetra in Haryana, north of Delhi; many centuries after the decline of Pushpabhuti's lineage, Thaneshwar would form the setting for another major encounter between an Indian monarch and armed Saiva ascetics. The outcome. however, would be radically different. In 1567, the Mughal emperor Akbar would witness at Thaneshwar a skirmish between two large groups of armed ascetics. [(56)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_56_) Though the three contemporary chroniclers -- Abu'l Fazl, al-Badauni, and Nizamuddin Ahmad -- differ on the exact sub-sectarian identity of the combatants, they agree that the ascetic warriors were all Saivas of one stamp or another -- and it is clear from the portraits that accompany two of the chronicles that many of the combatants were Gorakhnathi yogis. [(57)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_57_) They also agree that Akbar ordered some of his troops to assist the outnumbered faction, and that that faction consequently emerged victorious. According to Abu'l Fazl, whose account is the lengthiest. the ascetics were in disagreement over which party possessed the right to occupy a particular location adjoining the sacred tank at Thaneshwar which would afford the maximum receipt of alms during the annual bathing festival there. (Nizamuddin Ahmad made no mention of the reasons for the conflict, while al-Badauni noted that the two sides were "in the habit of fighting there [at Thaneshwar] in their bigotry.")

There are several point of interest in the 1567 Thaneshwar episode in the context of the Bana narrative, despite the interval of nearly a full millennium. First, Abul Fazl's observation that the conflict was over the right to collect alms suggests that notwithstanding their military service with such monarchs as Pushpabhuti prior to the seventh century, armed Saivas by the Mughal period relied on the control of pilgrimage centers as a major source of income. More importantly, the weaponry employed by the ascetics was far interior to the state-of-the-art Mughal technology, which included firelocks and artillery. Abul Fazl describes the skirmish in the following terms: "The two sides drew up in line, and first one man on each side advanced in a braggart fashion, and engaged with swords. Afterwards bows and arrows were used. After that the Puris attacked the Kurs with stones. As the Puris were few in number, H.M. signified to some men who understood fighting with stones...to assist the Puris. They joined the Puris in their attack on the Kurs and so exerted themselves that the Kurs could not withstand them and fled." [(58)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_58_) The rudimentary weaponry used by the armed ascetics is confirmed by the two Mughal paintings that depict this event -- one in the ***Akbar nama*** (at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London), the other in the ***Tarikh-i-khandan-i-Timuriya*** (at the Khuda Baksh Oriental Public Library, Patna).

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The most significant feature of the 1567 episode, however, is that the emperor demonstrates (at least. to his own satisfaction and the satisfaction of his courtiers) Mughal authority over the armed ascetics at Thaneshwar. Not only are they represented as suppliant -- requesting Akbar to intervene in their ongoing dispute -- but one party eventually benefits from the aid proffered by the emperor in the form of footsoldiers. Why should Akbar wish to gain favor with a certain faction of Saiva ascetics? One answer is that the decision was made purely out of pity for the outnumbered faction. or out of a capricious desire to view an evenly matched contest. The latter motive is suggested by the concluding remarks by both Abu'l Fazl and Nizamuddin Ahmad that the emperor enjoyed the spectacle immensely. [(59)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_59_) It is possible, therefore, that Akbar's aid to the Dasnamis was entirely fortuitous and should not be taken to hint at a conscious strategy on the part of the emperor. However, I would argue that Akbar perceived Saiva ascetics to be politically useful, and consequently wished to ally himself with them, should not be discounted. By the latter half of the sixteenth century, when Akbar was seeking to consolidate his control over the Gangetic east and Bengal. and extend Mughal power southward, it is plausible that his natural inclination would have been not to offend influential Dasnamis with ties to the central and eastern Gangetic region. The fact that Akbar would in the 1570s commence the construction of a massive fortress at the confluence of the Ganga and Jamuna, and that the site, the triveni, had long been held sacred as a place of efficacious bathing by pilgrims and ascetics alike, must also be seen to be of relevance. A further and. I suspect, crucial hint of Akbar's motives is provided in the artistic representation associated with a ***Hamzanama*** portrait painted at his court between 1567 and 1582, which depicts a banquet for two spies at Akiknigar." [(60)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_60_) The significance of this painting for us is that the spies of the Hamzanama are being entertained by, according to Stuart Cary Welch, "strange men probably based upon people Akbar encountered on some expedition. These men, adds Welch, "resemble exponents of tantric religion, perhaps from Nepal or Tibet. One, sporting a white plume, has slanted eyes and a flattened Mongol nose.'' The main figure is seated upon a tiger skin, another is wearing a leopard skin around his waist, and a third has a tiger skin draped around his shoulders. Most are armed to the teeth with daggers, and there is an array of weaponry hanging from a rope in the background, along with an additional tiger skin and some musical instruments. Upon closer inspection. the ascetic attire and. in particular, the circular earrings of the hosts bear a remarkable resemblance to that of the yogis and sanyasis depicted in the ***Akbar nama*** and the ***Tarikh-i-khandan-i-Timuriya*** portraits. as locked in mortal combat at Thaneshwar in 1567. This suggests quite strongly that Akbar, who according to Abu'l Fazl met with his artists once each week and was actively engaged in the production of imperial art, [(61)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_61_) associated in his mind Saiva ascetics with the underworld of spies and Indian espionage, and that this fact, in turn, may provide an inkling of why he interested himself in the outcome of the skirmish at Thaneshwar between the yogis and sanyasis. This should not surprise us, given the well-known advice of Kautilya in his treatise on statecraft, that the king should concern himself first and foremost with the acquisition of intelligence, and avail himself of spies from a wide array of occupational walks of life, including especially, ascetics, [(62)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_62_) and given what we know about Akbar's penchant for imperial innovation.[(63)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_63_)

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Whatever the answers to the above speculations, what is historically significant for us is that Akbar was interesting himself in the world of Saiva armed asceticism at the very moment that Tulsidas was composing the Ramcaritamanas, in which an ascetic is identified as "tapas" and depicted as a duplicitous rogue. Meanwhile, armed ascetics are also being vilified as "archers" in disguise, "false siddhas," and "lovers of maya." in poetry attributed to Kabir -- though, it must be recalled, this verse is harder to date. Further west at Galta, Nabhadas is beginning to compose his inventory of devotees, known as the ***Bhaktamala*** which, as I have argued elsewhere, sought to counter ascetic exclusivism with a celebration of the bhakti accomplishments of "ordinary" lay Vaishnavas framed within a discourse of Vaishnava ecumenicism. [(64)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_64_) Ironically, we do not see the subsequent decline of armed asceticism, but quite the reverse: By the seventeenth century the practice of arms would begin to spread beyond the confines of Saiva asceticism, into Vaishnava and Nanakpanthi communities -- and. what is more, the institutionalization of arms among sent and bhakti-oriented religious communities. The most significant examples are the Sikh khalsa in the Punjab, and the Satnami, Ramanandi, Dadupanthi, and Nimbarki bairagi armies in what is now Rajasthan. [(65)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_65_) As military cultures emerged in the bhakti and sent communities, some of which combined armed asceticism with demands of religio-political legitimacy, the imperial need to control by way of regulating those arms also grew. The history of Mughal conflict with the Sikh gurus is well known and need not concern us here. Less well known is the fact that during the thirty-fifth year of Aurangzeb's reign (i.e., 1692-93) an imperial decree was issued authorizing five Ramanandi commanders "to move freely about the whole Empire with standards and kettledrums, at the head of companies both of horse and foot," and instructing subadars and zamindars "that no obstacle or hindrance be put in their way, so that they may travel without molestation from one province to another." [(66)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_66_) Similarly. the early eighteenth century would witness attempts by the maharaja of Jaipur, Jai Singh II, to domesticate and disarm the soldiering Ramanandis in his realm. [(67)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_67_) Given the subsequent success of Swami Balanand and his chela Ramakrishna Mahant and their thousands of bairagi soldiers in the armies of Jaipur and Bharatpur, it is clear that the attempt failed. If we compare these efforts by sovereigns to control armed ascetics between about 1790 and 1830 to the sixteenth-century evidence offered by Thaneshwar, it becomes clear that by the later date armed ascetics were no longer seen as the object of imperial sport, but were increasingly viewed as a real military and social threat to imperial authority and the regional polities that sustained it. This point is made abundantly clear by the outbreak of rebellion among the khalsa followers of Guru Gobind Singh; and the shared culture of north Indian ascetic arms which the khalsa imbibed together with Saiva gosains and Vaishnava bairagis is underlined by the fact that the leader of the Sikh rebellion after Gobind Singh's death in 1708 is none other than Banda Bahadur, an erstwhile Vaishnava bairagi whose sectarian name, prior to his joining the khalsa cause, had been Madhodas. [(68)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_68_) Hence, the emergence of

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a bhakti-driven criticism of ascetic arms should be seen as a reflection of the ***growing*** institutionalization of ascetic arms in Mughal India, particularly from Saiva to Vaishnava bhakti and sent communities. This process of institutionalization only accelerates in the eighteenth century, with the decentralization of Mughal power and the increasing market for military labor.[(69)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_69_)

The success of Saiva ascetic arms depended on an effectiveness as mercenaries -- naga sadhus and the gosains that led them in the eighteenth century had to be willing to serve with one another regardless of caste and status, and to serve states regardless of the religious foibles of the monarch and his allies. I have already alluded to the ambiguous origins of the naga soldiery, so we need not belabor the point here. As for a lack of religious fastidiousness, one cannot escape the conclusion that Anupgiri and Umraogiri's success in the latter half of the eighteenth century was predicated on a distinct disregard for an overriding religious identity in the pursuit of politics and war. The most obvious reflection of this is the fact that the gosains were allied with the major powers of north India, including the Mughal emperor, the Nawabs of Awadh, and the British, and turned their backs on the one military force that these days is often hauled up as the main 18th-century representative of resurgent Hinduism, the Marathas. Two early episodes in their career are particularly instructive. The first occurs while in the service of the Nawabs of Awadh, alongside the Mughals and the Durrani Afghans in the battle of Panipat of 1761, when Maratha fortunes in northern India were dealt a heavy blow. Neither gosain would take offense when Ahmad Shah Durrani would complain to Shuja ud-Daula, just before the battle of Panipat in 1761, that he could not countenance the presence in camp of naked infidels, parading around with their genitalia in full view for all to see. Significantly, the gosains respected the religious sensibilities of the Afghan, removed their battalions to a respectable distance, and then proceeded to contribute in a major way to the slaughter of the Marathas. [(70)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_70_) For Anupgiri and Umraogiri, rituals and religious symbols were a means to an end, not the end itself -- a way of expressing power perhaps, but not necessarily the embodiment of power. Indeed. Umraogiri, speaking for both of them, publicly asserted that he was "obliged to his sword for everything he held." [(71)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_71_) The significance of religious symbols was. quite simply, symbolic. a way of announcing one's political arrival. To take a second amusing example, the gosain brothers had been the victims of a treacherous assassination attempt at the hands of the Jat maharaja Jawahir Singh in 1766. The deed would not, apparently, go unpunished, inasmuch as Anupgiri would dismantle part of a pavilion honoring the Jat king on the outskirts of the Vaishnava pilgrimage center of Mathura and use the materials for the construction of a ghat at Vrindaban to commemorate his own name. [(72)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_72_)

The institutionalization of an ethic of austere discipline enabled the individual to sheaf off the constraining elements of culture, such as caste and religion, and imagine new, creative possibilities. The discipline of tapas was nowhere more effectively institutionalized than in the military akharas, embedded in the very language and corporeality of the soldiering existence. The Saiva term "gosain," usually translated as "in control of the senses," and the Vaishnava &'bairagi," usually defined as "bereft of emotion." thus refer in a martial sense to a comprehensive

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physical and mental discipline required for an officer to make command decisions under the extreme duress of battle. Likewise 'naga," which is generally understood to mean "naked," is understood here to connote the culture and process of self-abnegation required to transform an individual recruit into an effective and unselfconscious member of a military regiment -- whether infantry or cavalry. [(73)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_73_) (The same idea could be applied to the term generally employed. as noted above. to designate armed soldier ascetics in Bengal, "sanyasi," or "one who renounces.) Asceticism also provided the organizational structures in which abject servitude to a guru-commander not only had meaning but was a desirable goal, not to mention being crucial for decisive and coordinated military action.

**7. Subalternity and Discipline**
It is not enough to understand the armed ascetic simply as a subaltern figure, caught between two worlds and doomed to historical voicelessness and irrelevance -- though subalternity does capture his resistance to the Company juggernaut and totalizing nationalist ideologies, a resistance that entailed a self-deprecating strategy of survival, an ironic reconfiguration of the ascetic self as primarily religious, as opposed to military, during the long imperial nineteenth century. Indeed, for the naga akharas at the kumbh after 1850, the military seemed to devolve (again?) into the martial, and the culture of arms evolved a religiously symbolic exterior wholly absorbed within the ambit of modern Hinduism and devoid of military-political significance (only to become the hunting ground of imaginative proto-nationalists by the 1880s). And certainly the four decades of sanyasi and fakir skirmishes with Company troops in Bengal possesses many of the elementary features of subaltern insurgency -- the agrarian strife that seems to have acted as the spark. the sporadic and inchoate nature of the sanyasi and fakir resistance to Company domination and demilitarization, the increasing willingness of the insurgents to put aside their cultural differences and act as one by the 1790s, and the tact that the insurgency possessed its own temporal logic. [(74)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_74_)

Understanding the armed sadhu as subaltern renders him a mere negative imprint of the expanding state, particularly the British colonial state, and obscures the long pre-history of armed asceticism: the conceptualization of the hermit sage as the ancient keeper of magical weaponry and storehouse of military science; the seventh-century image of the armed yogi as remembered ally and bulwark of the fledgeling state; the reality of the armed ascetic at Thaneshwar as bickering alms-seeker and. perhaps, potential spy in the 1560s and 1570s; the emergence of a pointed ***bhakti-kal*** criticism of the armed sadhu around 1600; and his evolution in the following two centuries into a formidable naga soldier, mercenary, military entrepreneur, warlord, and, indeed, by the 1790s. king. Conceptualizing the sadhu as subaltern also obscures the extensive monastic and pilgrimage networks throughout the northern and central Indian countryside in place by the eighteenth century, which -- though not discussed here -- have been hauled up for inspection in recent decades from the perspective of economic change and the commercialization of politics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and which certainly must have played a role in the apotheosis of ascetic arms in the 1790s. [(75)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_75_) A glance at Francis Buchanan's surveys of Bihar and Bengal offer a sample of the depth

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of those networks in one important agricultural area. It is likely that these networks must have played an important role in the recruitment of naga soldiers, not to mention the gathering of local intelligence (which, it might be noted, Anupgiri deployed with abandon in the 1770s and '80s around the hornet's nest of Delhi). [(76)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_76_)

We have been encouraged recently to look beyond the negative and beyond simple armed insurgency in our search for subaltern ideologies, so as to begin to perceive alternative histories-in-the-making beneath the rubric of the colonial telos. [(77)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_77_) Caste and religion, recommended by Partha Chatterjee and fruitful as they are for ethnohistorical meaning, have a tendency (if not handled carefully) to reify the very nineteenth-century categories upon which colonial control (and historiography) depended. Beneath and within, or perhaps ontogenetically prior to, the rubrics of religion and caste, however. is the praxis that allowed some subalterns freedom from their epistemological prisons. As I have sought to emphasize in this essay, at the core of armed asceticism was a practice of discipline as a means to power, or tapas. In some sectarian contexts, this praxis acquired an ideological veneer that -- as in the case of the Satnamis and the Sikh khalsa -- exploded into a commitment to political forms that reflect the totality of religious truth and authority. But among Saiva armed ascetics -- at least, prior to the 1790s -- such a commitment did not seem to evolve. [(78)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_78_) Hence the armed insurgency of gosains in the 18th and 19th centuries was ideologically inchoate and generally reactionary -- and, hence, doomed to classification as subaltern failure.

But the Marxian-Gramscian telos, at least as it is has been theorized as "subaltern" for Indian history, does not allow for ideological or praxiological migration, a fact that emerges with clarity in the transition from colonial to nationalist political culture. After 1858 armed insurgency was no longer a legitimate mode of political expression. And as a result of their demobilization, soldier ascetics could no longer take part in the military life of the nation -- at least, not on their own terms. Hence their reinvention by Bankim in 1882, and their incorporation, for a brief time, as Gandhian activists in 1920. Meanwhile, naga sadhus themselves would be fully engaged in the nineteenth century in an effort to redefine themselves as a secret society of spiritual guardians of Indianness, situated at the inner sanctum of the nation: the ***Triveni*** at Prayag. In this way Bankim's imaginings would feed off of akhara posturing. One continues to see the institutionalization of an ascetic ethic in political life after 1882, most obviously with the Rudolphs' Gandhi of course, but beneath and beyond the rubric of Gandhi, to a local arena where the akhara had become institutionalized in political culture almost completely independent of sectarian or caste identity: the wrestling pit. It is in this context that the violence at Chauri Chaura, despite Shahid Amin's pessimistic account, is revealing: nationalist volunteers -- ***otiyars***, in the Bhojpuri rendering -- whether Muslim or Hindu. high caste or low. made nationalism all their own via the wrestling pit akhara, on the one hand, and via the nationalist-mendicant existence afforded them by chutki, the gift of grain, on the other. [(79)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_79_) And just as the pahelwan in his akhara in the 1920s would provide the basis for a subaltern nationalist critique of British colonialism and Gandhian nationalism, the post-colonial pahelwan today mounts a neo-nationalist critique of modern Indian culture.[(80)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_80_)

The long history of the armed ascetic reveals, then. an important phase in the institutionalization of a transformative ethic, perhaps a kind of home-grown secularism, based on tapas, grounded in the akhara -- wherein people of widely differing origins could come together and produce a new kind of corporate identity. It is here that the Ramayana evidence is programmatically instructive -- not because Visvamitra gains power as a result of his austerities and then offers up some of that power to Ram, but because he actually achieves what all the sages thought to be the impossible: he changes his corporeal being from kshatriya to brahman. The lesson here is that tapas as praxis affords change, renders the individual indeterminate, ambiguous, and, as a political ascetic, powerful; in the

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process, the transformative implications of asceticism cause ascriptive confusion, which neither the modern state nor modern religion can tolerate. A universalising faith predicated on the total commitment to devotion. or bhakti, cannot countenance exclusivist ascetic privilege based on claims of inner, yogic power -- hence the complaints of Kabir and Tulsidas (and, I would add. the discursive strategizing of Nabhadas). The totalizing state, likewise, cannot countenance unruly sadhus, armed, dangerous, and often naked, wandering, about the countryside, levying contributions from villages, and representing an alternate, itinerant, locus of authority. The modern state requires a modern monk -- a sadhu given over entirely to prayer, unconcerned with worldly acquisition and advancement. Hence Warren Hastings' proclamation of 21 January 1773 banishing "all Biraugies and Sunnasses [bairagis and sanyasis] who are travellers strangers and passengers in this country" from the provinces of Bengal and Bihar, save "such of the cast of Rammanundar and Goraak [Ramanandis and Gorakhnathis] who have for a long time been settled and receive a maintenance in land money...from the Government or the Zemindars of the province, [and] likewise such Sunasses as are allowed charity ground for executing religious offices." In other words, those sadhus who were "neither vagrants nor plunderers but fixed inhabitants," who "quietly employ themselves in their religious function. ' could, in Hastings' view, be tolerated. [(81)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_81_) The combined effect of the modern statist and modern religious critique of armed asceticism would produce the political, cultural, and military decline of armed asceticism after 1800. And it would produce the critique of the naga sadhu articulated by Kamalakant Verma in 1954, with which this essay began.

It is in the context of tapas, discipline, that we begin to see continuities between the political asceticism of the 1700s and its counterpart two centuries later, continuities that punctuate the migratory qualities of tapas in Indian politics and culture. Anupgiri's elasticity of identity is a good case in point. None of his eighteenth-century contemporaries could quite pin him down: was he an ascetic or a mercenary adventurer'? His ambiguous asceticism was a tool he deployed to full advantage; whenever he was between a rock and a hard place, he would offer to abandon all his wealth and weapons and retire to his "home" near Kanpur on the Ganges and engage in prayer and meditation. And his Indian adversaries would always relent. [(82)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_82_) Gandhi of course was well known for infuriating his adversaries and allies alike in this way. As for nationalist volunteers (Amin's ***otiyars*** in Gorakhpur, for example), though they were not sanyasis in the sectarian sense of the word, they certainly imbibed a nationalist asceticism that was explicitly predicated on tapascetic discipline, if not Gandhian nonviolence -- a point that is underlined by their concomitant immersion in the local wrestling akharas, and their own connection of the two arenas (of nationalism and wrestling) in their own remembrances of the 1920s. [(83)](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22N_83_) Likewise, Joseph Alter's post-colonial ***pahelwans*** make sharp distinctions between their akharas and the akhara of the naga sadhu; but those sharp boundaries mask a long process of institutionalisation and the historical connections between the wrestling akharas and asceticism -- a point that is underlined by the fact that one of the major pahelwan akharas in India today is run by a naga ***mahant*** (abbot) of the Hanumangarhi in Ayodhya, Baba Gyan Das.

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**Footnotes**

1. Research for this essay was supported with funds from the Social Science Research Council and the Fulbright-Hays program of the U. S. Department of Education, for which I am grateful. I would also like to thank Walter Hauser, who cared not for the use of the term "monk" to signify the ascetics of British India, because "it conjured up the image of St. Francis of Assisi." This offhand remark has bounced around in my head for a decade now, one result of which is this paper. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf01)]

2. ***Report of the Committee appointed by the Uttar Pradesh Government to enquire into the mishap which occurred in the Kumbha Mela at Prayaga on the 3rd February 1954*** (Allahabad, 1955), 67 (for Shanta Devi's testimony), 106-107. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf02)]

3. My understanding of these terms is informed by a variety of works, including, most importantly, R. S. Khare, ***The Untouchable as Himself: Ideology, Identity, and Pragmatism among the Lucknow Chamars*** (Cambridge, 1984); J. C. Heesterman, ***The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kinship and Society*** (Chicago, 1985); P. van der Veer, ***Gods on Earth: The Management of Religious Experience and Identity in a North Indian Pilgrimage Center*** (London, 1988); L. Dumont, ***Homo Hierarchicus***, rev. English ed. (Chicago, 1980); and in conversations and study with R. S. Khare during the 1980s. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf03)]

4. On the historical and biographical circumstances of Bankim's authorship, see T. Raychaudhuri, ***Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth-century Bengal*** (Delhi, 1988), chapter 3. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf04)]

5. Bankim Chandra Chatterji, ***Anandamath***, trans. and adapted by B. K. Roy (New Delhi, 1992), 33, 41. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf05)]

6. Sleeman, ***A Report on the System of Megpunnaism or, The Murder of Indigent Parents for their Young Children (who are sold as Slaves) as it prevails in the Delhi Territories, and the Native States of Rajpootana, Ulwar, and Bhurtpore*** (Calcutta: Serampore, 1839), 11. I am grateful to Sandria Freitag for suggesting this source. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf06)]

7. This recommendation was not acted upon by the government. Sleeman's opinions were part and parcel of the ever-widening scope of colonial police power in the early nineteenth century, and the bandits and thugs that he sought to supress were hold-overs of institutionalized violence from an era when the reach of the state was not nearly so total. See S. Gordon, "Scarf and Sword: Thugs, Marauders, and State-Formation in Eighteenth-Century Malwa," ***Indian Economic and Social History Review*** 6, 4 (1969): 403-429. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf07)]

8. Saiyyid Muhammad Tassaduq Hussain, ***Kitab-i Sadhu*** [The Book of Sadhus] (Sadhaura, Umballa District: n.p., 1913). The author is described as "Head Constable, Saharanpur Police Lines;" the book is dedicated to Bromley. Esq., Deputy Inspector General of Police, and on page five it is noted that the work was sanctioned by Government Order No. 3232 of 1913. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#r08)]

0. For examples, see Pratapaditya Pal and Vidya Dehejia, ***From Merchants to Emperors: British Artists and India. 1757-1930*** (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 171-176. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf09)]

10. On Ramakrishna and Calcutta youth of the late nineteenth century, see Partha Chatterjee. ***The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*** (Princeton, 1993), chapter 3. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf10)]

11. Such views can be found in a range of vernacular literature, including "peasant-kshatriya" caste history booklets of the early twentieth century in the Gangetic north, authored by lay Hindus and articulating what may be termed neo-Vaishnava religious reform; see my ***Peasants and Monks in British India*** (Berkeley, 1996). Of particular interest, however, are the accusations against sadhus outlined in Govindacharya Mishra, ***Sadhu Jivan*** (Calcutta, 1922-23) and ***Sadhu Samsar*** (Calcutta, 1923), and his efforts to organize reform among them. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf11)]

12. Though, to be sure, Gandhi as mahatma was not always perceived by Indians to be non-violent. See S. Amin, "Gandhi as Mahatma," in R. Guha (ed.), ***Subaltern Studies I: Writings on Indian History and Society*** (Delhi, 1982). On the civilizational import of Gandhi's asceticism, see L. and S. Rudolph, ***The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India*** (Chicago, 1967), part two; and Ashis Nandy, ***The Intimate Enemy: Loss and the Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*** (Delhi, 1983). [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf12)]

13. Government of Bihar and Orissa, Political Department, Special Section, file no. 80 of 1921, "Report of Sadhus taking part in non-cooperation," part 2, p. 3 (Bihar State Archives, Patna). [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf13)]

14. The ***Index to the Proceedings of the Political Department, Special Section***, Government of Bihar and Orissa, housed in the Bihar State Archives, indicates numerous reports compiled on the subject of "political sadhus," especially between the years 1920-1935, when Gandhi dictated the terms of Indian politics. The term is employed in history sheets sent from R. S. F. Macrae, of the Bihar police, to E. L. L. Howard. chief secretary to the Government of Bihar and Orissa, 3 November 1921. and included as appendices in GOBO, Political Special file no. 80 of 1921. part II. 8-20. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf14)]

15. Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, ***Mera Jivan Sangharsh*** [My Life Struggle] (Bihta. Patna: Shri Sitaram Ashram. 1952), 212-213, quoted in Walter Hauser, "Swami Sahajanand and the Politics of Social Reform, 19071950," ***Indian Historical Review*** 18, 1-2 (July 1991 and January 1992): 72. Gandhi was being perceived here in ways that went well beyond his protestations of nonviolence. For more on this point, see Shahid Amin. "Gandhi as Mahatma." For another image of Gandhi as Siva, see the nationalist poster from Lahore entitled "Bharatuddhar" (Gandhi, the protector of India, cat 1930), no. 553, in C. A. Bayly (ed.), ***An Illustrated History of Modern India, 1606-1947*** (Delhi: Oxford, 1990). 392-393. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf15)]

16. Mention should be made as well of Baba Ramchandra's agrarian activism in Awadh from 1919 onward. - See Gyanendra Pandey, ""Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism: The Peasant Movement in Awadh, 1919-22," in Guha (ed.), ***Subaltern Studies I***, 143-197. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf16)]

17. Shahid Amin, ***Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992*** (Delhi, Berkeley, 1995), 44. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf17)]

18. The publication date of the first major study of that insurgency, J. M. Ghosh, ***Sanyasi and Fakir Raiders in Bengal*** (Calcutta. 1930), is significant in this context. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf18)]

19. See, for example. Disraeli's speech to Parliament, 27 July 1857, partially reproduced Ainslee T. Embree (ed.), ***1857 in India: Mutiny or War of Independence'?*** (Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1963), 11- 12. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf19)]

20. Testimony of Mr. Williams. cited in J. W. Kaye, **A History of the Sepoy War in India. 1857- 1858,** second ed. (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1865), 566n .[[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22rf20)]

21. **Translation of a Narrative of Events at Cawnpore** (Home Misc no. 727. Oriental and India Office Collection, London), 845-881 (Nanukchund's account); see 856 for Lalpuri Gosain's appearance on an elephant with banner. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf21)]

22. See Gautam Bhadra, "Four Rebels of 1857," in **Selected Subaltern Studies** (Delhi, 1988). [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf22)]

23. Not unlike the situation described by Dirk Kolff in **Naukar, Raiput and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan. 1450-1850** (Cambridge, 1992). [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#r23f)]

24 .J. N. Farquhar "The Fighting Ascetics of India," **The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library** 9 (1925): 444; and "Organization of the Sannyasis of the Vedanta," **Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society** (July 1925): 483, footnote 1. Ghurye (**Indian Sadhus,** 92, 101) agrees that shudras provided the main breeding ground for the naga akharas. This continues to be the general perception among sanyasis, as indicated in a conversation with Ramchandra Giri, mahant of Damami math near Sitamarhi in north Bihar, 25 November 1994. And even though Swami Sadananda Giri, **Society and Sannyasin (A History of the Dasnami Sannyasins)** (Rishikesh: Swami Sadananda Giri, 1976), 26, disputes the assertion that shudras were recruited into the order as warriors, he admits nonetheless (p. 37) a distinct scorn on the part of orthodox Dasnamis for the extant akharas of soldier sadhus. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf24)]

25. Monika Thiel-Horstmann, "Warrior Ascetics in 18th-Century Rajasthan and the religious policy of Jai Singh II" (unpublished ms.. nd. ). I am grateful to the author for providing me with a copy of this essay and for allowing me to cite it. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf25)]

26. Padmakar, **Himmatbahadur Birdavali** (2nd ea., Banaras: Kashi-Nagaripracharani Sabha. n.d.). ed. and comp. Bhagvandin, xix-xx; see also vv. 44-45, p. 7. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf26)]

27. On Banda's early career W. Irvine (**Later Mughals,** i, 93) cites Major James Browne. **India Tracts** (London, 1788; 4 vols., a translation of a Persian ms. written by two Hindus at Browne's request), 9; E. Thornton, **Gazetteer of the Territories under the East India Company,** 788; and Gyan Singh (Gyani) and Babu Rai Indar Singh, **Shamsher-i-Khalsa** (Urdu, Sialkot. 1891 Lithograph, 4 vols.), 183. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf27)]

28. William Hodges, **Travels in India, during the years 1780, 1781, 1782, and 1783** (London: J. Edwards. 1793), 112. I am grateful to Katherine Prior for bringing this reference to my attention. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf28)]

29. See Jadunath Sarkar and Nirod Bhushan Roy, **History of the Dasnami Naga Sanyasis**, 127-128, 156-157, 171-172. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf29)]

30. This is taken from Buchanan's Dinajpur account, cited in R. Montgomery Martin. **The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India,** vol. 2 (London, 1838),517, itself cited in Jamini Mohan Ghosh. **Sanyasi and Fakir Raiders in Bengal** (Calcutta, 1930), 137. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf30)]

31. Ms. Letter from then Captain James Rennell, dated 30 August 1766. in possession of his grandson Major Rodd, cited in Col. Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell, **Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms. Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive** (London, 1903), s.v. Sunyasee (p. 872). [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf31)]

32. **Memoir of the Operations of the British Army in India, During the Mahratta War of 1817, 1818, & 1819** (London: Black. Kingsbury, Parbury, and Allen, 1821). [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf32)]

33 .W. H. McLeod. **The Evolution of the Sikh Community: Five Essays** (Delhi: Oxford University Press), 119. McLeod argues that the arming of Sikhs was a consequence not of unilateral directives by the high-caste Khatri leadership (particularly the tenth guru, Govind Singh) in response to Mughal persecutions in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, but occurred over a much longer period and was the result of social and not political change. By de-emphasizing the political context, however, McLeod fails to explain why Jat peasants were armed in the first place: instead he relies on the a priori existence of a proud martial tradition and vigorous physical culture among early medieval Jats prior to their attraction to Sikhism. (Here McLeod relies on Irfan Habib, **Proceedings of the Punjab History Conference 1971** [Patiala. 1972], 49-54 passim.) McLeod thus asserts that "we may be sure that the Jats did not enter the Panth empty-handed. They would have been bearing arms many years before Guru Arjan died in Lahore [in Mughal captivity under mysterious circumstances. in 1606~." (McLeod, **Evolution of the Sikh Community,** 12.) This argument has received as well some criticism from within the Sikh community, since it runs counter to the accepted hagiography of the gurus, particularly that of the tenth guru, Govind Singh. On his critics, see McLeod, **The Sikhs: History, Religion, and Society** (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 40, 126. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf33)]

34. Gommans, "Indian Warfare and Afghan Innovation during the Eighteenth Century," **Studies in History** n.s. 11.2 (1995): 270-274. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf34)]

35. Gholam Hossein Khan, **Seir Mutaqherin,** vol. 3 (Delhi reprint, 1990), 298-299. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf35)]

36. **Correspondence of Thomas Brooke at Benares with Major M. Shawe, Secretary to Lord Wellesley, 1803-1805** (British Library, Department of Manuscripts, Add.Ms.37,281), ff. 228b-229f. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf36)]

37. See Lala Bahadur Bhatt. "Anupa Prakash" (1894), (Mss.Hin.D.9[b], Oriental and India Office Collection, London), If (this ms. is a rough prose version of Man Kavi, "Anupa Prakasa" (1791-1792), Mss.Hin.D.9[a]). [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf37)]

38. **Himmatbahadur Virdavali,** 2-8 (selections from vv. 3-50) [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf38)]

39. For a detailed consideration of the Bundelkhand episode of Anupgiri's career, see my "Who Was Himmat Bahadur'? Gosains, Rajputs, and the British in Bundelkhand, cat 1800," ms. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf39)]

40. J. G. Lochtefeld, "The Vishva Hindu Parishad and the Roots of Hindu Militancy," **Journal of the American Academy of Religion** 62, 2 (Summer 1994): 594-595. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf40)]

41. A. L. Srivastava, **The First Two Nawabs of Oudh** (Lucknow. 1933), 204-205. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf41)]

42. Thomas Hardwicke, "Narrative of a Journey to Sirinagur," **Asiatick Researches** VI (1801): 312-319. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf42)]

43. As an example of non-British state control, as a result of the Vaishnava bairagi blood spilt by Saiva gosain swords in 1789 at Nasik, a complaint would be registered on behalf of the bairagis in the court of the Peshwa in Pune, which would decide in 1813 to assign separate bathing areas to each order. The evidence usually cited for this is a copper plate inscription, a copy of which was shown to one of Ghurye's associates by one Mahant Radhamohandas of Nasik. For reasons that are unclear, Ghurye (1964: 177-178) reports the date of the Nasik battle as 1690, and the Peshwa court decision as 1702, which is clearly impossible. Burghart (1978: 137. fn. 4) cites a reproduction of this inscription published in the Indian periodical Jagriti 10,4 (1945): 896-897, which gives the 1789 and 1813 dates, respectively. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf43)]

44. "Great Fair at Oojein" 1850. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf44)]

45. This general argument represents the sectarian side of a process described for urban Calcutta by Chatterjee. **Nation and Its Fragments,** chapter 3, that mid-nineteenth-century bhadralok youth turned to religion in general and the spiritual sadhu in particular, especially in the form of Sri Ramakrishna, as a way of assuaging its subaltern wounds. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf45)]

46. Here K. Prior, "The British Administration of Hinduism in North India, 1780-1900" (Cambridge University Ph.D. thesis, 1990), is particularly pertinent. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf46)]

47. "Never have I seen such yogis, brother. They wander mindless and negligent, proclaiming the way of Mahadeva. For this they are called great mahants. To markets and bazaars they peddle their meditation -- false siddhas, lovers of maya. When did Dattatreya attack a fort? When did Sukadeva join with gunners'? When did Narada fire a musket? When did Vyasadeva sound a battle cry? These numbskulls make war. Are they ascetics or archers'? They profess detachment, but greed is their mind's resolve. They shame their profession by wearing gold. They collect stallions and mares, acquire villages, and go about as millionaires." This verse is cited in Farquhar, "The Fighting Ascetics of India," 439; Ghosh, **Sanyasi and Fakir Raiders in Bengal,** 13; and David Lorenzen, "Warrior Ascetics in Indian History," **Journal of the American Oriental Society** 98 (January 1978): 61, who begins his essay with it. I have altered slightly the English rendering of the verse by Lorenzen. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf47)]

48. **The Ramayana of Valmiki,** vol. 1, Balakanda, trans. R. P. Goldman (Princeton, 1984), 220-232 (sargas 50-56), 246-247 (sarga 64), and 175-177 (sarga 26). [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf48)]

49. **The Ramayana of Valmiki**, Balakanda, 229-231 (sarga 55.23 for the quote). [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf49)]

50. For the verse translations, see W. Douglas P. Hill, **The Holy Lake of the Acts of Rama: An English Translation of Tulsi Das's Ramacaritamanasa** (Oxford, 1952), 72-81, which I have relied on for the prose in this paragraph; also useful, for comparing Hill to the Hindi original, is **Sri Ramacharitamanasa** (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 1968), 135- 150. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf50)]

51. **The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India** (Chicago, 1996). [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf51)]

52. Banabhatta, **Harsa-carita,** trans. E. B. Cowell and F. W. Thomas (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1897), 83-99. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf52)]

53. **Harsa-carita,** 85. The name Bhairavacharya indicates a sectarian affiliation with **Bhairav** -- or malevolent Siva, depicted as naked, intoxicated, and bearing arms, with a garland of skulls draped about his neck. Given the association with Bhairav, it is likely these were **kapalika** yogis (the term "kapalika" is derived from **kapalin,** a representation of Siva holding a skull), whose loose sectarian identity would be associated with and overtaken by the followers of the sage Gorakhnath in the twelfth century. The followers of Gorakhnath would come to be known generically as **kanphat** (or split-eared) yogis, denoting the initiatory practice of piercing the earlobe and inserting a large circular disc On Kapalikas and Gorakhnathis, see G. S. Ghurye, **Indian Sadhus,** second ed. (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1963), ch. 7. The term "kapalika" is derived from **kapalin,** a representation of Siva holding a skull. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf53)]

54. **Ramayana,** Balakanda, 176 (sarga 26.14). [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf54)]

55. **Harsacarita,** 89. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf55)]

56. The event is described in Abu'l Fazl, **Akbar Nama,** trans. H. Beveridge (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1902-1939), vol. ii. 423-424: al-Badauni, **Muntakhabu't Tawarikh,** trans. W. H. Lowe (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1898), vol. ii, 94; and Nizamuddin Ahmad, **Tabakat-i Akbari**, trans. H. M. Elliot and J. Dowson in **The History of India as Told by its Own Historians,** vol. v (London: Trubner and co., 1873), 318. Summarized in Vincent Smith. **Akbar the Great Mogul** (Oxford: Clarendon, 1917), 78-79. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf56)]

57. Cf. Geeti Sen, **Paintings from the Akbar Nama: A Visual Chronicle of Mughal India** (Calcutta: Rupa, 1984), 109, who argues that the combatants are Vaishnava and Saiva ascetics. In the context of the identity of the combatants, it is worth mentioning is that Akbar aided one faction of yogis at a time when strands of Gorakhnathi asceticism were being absorbed into the Dasnami order, particularly as nagas. That such absorption was occurring is supported by the fact that the oldest of the Dasnami akharas is the Juna akhara, which was originally known as the Bhairav akhara. See Sarkar, **History of the Dasnami Naga Sanyasis,** 89; Ghurye, **Indian Sadhus,** 103-104. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf57)]

58. **Akbar Nama,** 423-424. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf58)]

59. Akbar's delight at the spectacle was the source of remarkable comment in early twentieth-century British scholarship. Vincent Smith (**Akbar the Great Mogul,** 79) averred that the pleasure derived by Akbar here reveals a barbaric side to his character which emanated from his Turkic and Mongol roots. In a weak attempt to support the twentieth-century oral tradition that posits Muslim attacks on unarmed sanyasis as the impetus behind the arming of Dasnamis. Farquhar ("Fighting Ascetics," 443) suggested that "Since [Akbar] had agreed to their organisation, in order that they may fight Muslim toes, he must have chuckled inwardly to see them turn their swords against each other." [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf59)]

60. The **Hamzanama** was a collection of tales about the life of Hamza, "an uncle of the Prophet [Muhammad], whose deeds became confused with those of a namesake from Sistan during the reign of Harun al-Rashid. His picaresque exploits in China. Central Asia, Rum (Turkey), and Ceylon were grist for the storyteller's mill, whose embroideries upon them were interpreted with imaginative flair by Akbar's artists." Stuart Cary Welch. **Imperial Mughal Painting** (New York: George Braziller, 1978), 40, 44-45 (for the portrait and quotes to follow). [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf60)]

61. Welch, **Imperial Mughal Painting,** 43. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf61)]

62. Kautilya, **Arthasastra** (Mysore: Wesleyan Mission Press, 1929). [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf62)]

63. See. for example, Douglas Streusand, **The Formation of the Mughal Empire** (Delhi: Oxford, 1989). [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf63)]

64. "Nabhadas and the Bhaktamala, cat 1600-1910," The Place of the Past: Uses of History in South Asia Workshop, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 16- 18 April 1997. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf64)]

65. See McLeod, **Evolution of the Sikh Community,** chapter 1: on Vaishnava bairagis, Horstmann, "Warrior Ascetics in 18th-Century Rajasthan:" Lorenzen, "Warrior Ascetics": and, on Satnami arms, see Muhammad Saki Mustatidd Khan. "Ma-asir-i 'Alamgiri," in H. M. Elliot and J. Dowson (trans.), **The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians,** vol. 7 (1866-67; reprint Delhi. 1990), 185: and Muhammad Hashim Khafi Khan, "Muntakhabu-l Lubab," in Elliot and Dowson (trans.), 294. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf65)]

66. This farman is in the possession of the Balanand math and mandir in Jaipur W. G. Orr. "Armed Religious Ascetics in Northern India," **The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library** 25 (1940): 87. On the previous page, the author suggests the early sixteenth century for the arming of Ramanandis, citing the rise to dominance of Vaishnavas at Galta in the early 1500s and the decline of Nath yogis there. However, there is no evidence that arms were involved in that particular transformation. Likewise, Farquhar ("Fighting Ascetics," 444-445) proposes 1600, but offers little in the way of supporting documentation. Ghurye (**Indian Sadhus,** 178) was told by Ramanandis in the early 1950s that naga organization among them was two hundred and fifty to three hundred years old, suggesting a date between 1650 and 1700. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf66)]

67. Horstmann, "Warrior Ascetics in 18th-Century Rajasthan." [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf67)]

68. On Banda's early career W. Irvine (**Later Mughals,** i, 93) cites Major James Browne, **India Tracts** (London. 1788: 4 vol., a translation of a Persian ms. written by two Hindus at Browne's request), 9; E. Thornton, **Gazetteer of the Territories under the East India Company**, 788; and Gyan Singh (Gyani) and Babu Rai Indar Singh, **Shamsher-i-Khalsa** (Urdu, Sialkot, 1891 Lithograph, 4 vols.), 183. See also Ganda Singh, **The Life of Banda Singh Bahadur** [on my shelf, in sadhu section]. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf68)]

69. Seema Alavi, **The Sepoy and the Company: Tradition and Transition in Northern India. 1770-1830** (Delhi, 1995): cf. Kolff, **Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy.** [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf69)]

70. Ghulam 'Ali Khan Naqawi, **'Imad us-Sa'adat** [Aid to bliss] (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore, 1864), 84, translated in Barnett, **North India Between Empires,** 56-57. Barnett notes that the directness of the original Persian does not allow a printable translation; Roy's rendering in Sarkar, **A History of the Dasnami Naga Sanyasis**, 158, is a tad closer to the original: "how could the Kaffirs have so much liberty as to walk with their things and buttocks exposed (peshopas barhana Kardah) before the Moslems." In any case, the gosains did in tact comply with Abdali's request, moved their tents to a polite distance, and, notwithstanding the Durrani affront, acquitted themselves on the battlefield. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf70)]

71. See John Bristowe to the Board, letter received 8 Nov 1775 (dated 11 Oct 1775), Bengal Secret and Military Consultations (Oriental and India Office Collections, London). [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf71)]

72 .See F. S. Growse, **Mathura: A District Memoir** (1882; reprint New Delhi, 1993), 307-308. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf72)]

73. On the different levels of discipline and self-negation necessary to wage war effectively through the ages, see John Keegan, **The Face of Battle** (London, 1976). Also useful, on global historical dimensions of pre- and proto-modern infantry training, is the introduction to David B. Ralston, **Importing the European Army: The Introduction of European Military Techniques and Institutions into the Extra-European World, 1600- 1914** (Chicago, 1990). .") This should not obscure the fact, of course, that nakedness or near-nakedness could have easily facilitated a system of hand-to-hand combat at which, as I have noted above, nagas excelled. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf73)]

74. R. Guha, **Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency,** for the various structural features that characterized subaltern insurgency in the colonial era. See also Suranjan Chatterjee, "New Reflections on the Sannyasi, Fakir and Peasants' War," **Economic and Political Weekly** 19, 4 (28 Jan 1984): 10; and Atis K. Dasgupta, **The Fakir and Sannyasi Uprisings** (Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi, 1992), 34-40. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf74)]

75. I am referring to Bernard Cohn's gosain merchants ("The Role of the Gosains in the Economy of Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Upper India," **Indian Economic and Social History Review** 1 [1964]: 175-182), Dirk Kolff s sanyasi trader-soldiers ("Sanyasi Trader-Soldiers," **Indian Economic and Social History Review** 8 [1971]: 213-220), and Chris Bayly's gosain landlord-financiers (**Rulers. Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion. 1770-1870** [Cambridge, 1983], 125-144, 242) of the late eighteenth, early nineteenth centuries. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf75)]

76. See my "Who Was Himmat Bahadur?" [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf76)]

77. See in particular, Chatterjee, **Nation and Its Fragments,** chapters 8 and 9. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf77)]

78. More research is required, particularly in the political culture embedded in the bardic poetry celebrating Anupgiri Gosain as Himmat Bahadur. before discerning whether such a commitment was in the process of coalescing in the 1790s in Bundelkhand. This is one of the pivotal questions of my current inquiry into armed asceticism in the eighteenth century. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf78)]

79. See Amin, **Event, Metaphor Memory**. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf79)]

80. As described by Alter. **The Wrestler's Body,** chapter 10. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf80)]

81. Government of India, Foreign Department, Secret Branch proceedings (National Archives of India, New Delhi), Nos. 5 and 6 of 21 January 1773. [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf81)]

82. For example, in 1785, when Anupgiri was at odds with Mahadji Shinde, Anderson (the British agent at Shinde s camp) reported: "Mahajee Sindia's suspicions of Himmut Behadre having been raised to a great height, He was yesterday induced to station parties of horse over his tents as a guard upon him. Himmet Behadre went immediately to the Durbar with a very small retinue, instead of the numerous armed attendants, with which he used of late to be accompanied, and after declaring to Sindia that he was determined to relinquish all worldly pursuits, and attach himself in future to the observances of religious duties he presented him with all the sunnuds he holds for his several possessions. Sindia after pausing a while returned the sunnuds and declared he had no other view in stationing of the horsemen round his tent, than to try his fidelity which he had now afforded him so ample a proof." J. W. Anderson to Hastings, Sindia's camp at Muttrah, dated 10 May (recorded in progs. 26 May 1785), Bengal Secret and Military Consultations (Oriental and India Office Collection, London). [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf82)]

83. Amin, **Event, Metaphor, Memory.** [[BACK](http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html#rf83)]

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Panel Discussion

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