

Ten Names of the Naga Sannyasi Tradition

Padmaja Singh^{1*}

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Ancient History, Archaeology and Culture,
Deen Dayal Upadhyay University, Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Email id: padmaja_singh@rediffmail.com

Abstract

The "Ten Names of the Naga Sannyasi Tradition" delves into the historical and organizational life of the Naga Sannyasis, a venerated spiritual fraternity in India. Based on old traditions, the Dashnam Sannyasis were restructured by Acharya Shankar to boost their strategic and spiritual value. The narrative unfolds the complex evolution of the Naga Sannyasis, from their early formation as Paramahansa Sannyasis found in Upanishads to playing a pivotal role in protecting society at the time of foreign invasions. Acharya Shankar's systematic reorganization of these ascetics into a well-structured framework, similar to a contemporary military organization, ensured both the sustenance of spiritual beliefs and the safeguarding of Hindu society. The article explores the origin and functions of the different Akharas—like the Ahwan, Atal, and Mahanirvani Akharas—founded by prominent leaders. These Akharas were not only centers of spirituality but also centers of military training during pivotal moments in Indian history. Gradually, the number of Akharas increased to fourteen, each having its own traditions and worship gods. The Naga Sannyasis, with their rigorous organization and structural abilities, managed to maintain their traditions and even remain an indispensable part of Hindu society, mainly in the Kumbh Mela. Through this article, one can deeply understand the sacred, organizational, and protective services of the Naga Sannyasis throughout centuries.

Keywords: Naga Sannyasis, Dashnam Sannyasis, Acharya Shankar, Akharas, Spiritual Defense

Introduction

A detailed and authentic mention regarding the Dashnam Sannyasis is found in the book 'Shri Vidhyaranya Tantra' edited by Shri Vidhyaranya Panchdashikar. In this tradition, seventy-one principal Acharyas are mentioned, which later included fourteen disciples of Acharya Shankar.

Prominent Acharyas and scholars have attested that the Paramahansa Sannyasis, who are prominently described in the Shrutis and Smritis, are the same as the Naga Sannyasis in today's common parlance. Detailed descriptions of the characteristics of Paramahansas are found in the Upanishads. An excellent example of this is Shri Shukdevji. Adi Shankar's guru, Govind Padacharya, also belongs to this Digambara tradition. This is proven by Acharya Shankar's commentaries and written books, which mention that when Acharya Shankar had his first meeting and darshan of his guru Govind Padacharya, a young man, on the banks of the Narmada River in Omkareshwar on Om Parvat, he was Digambara (naked). The details of Naga Sannyasis have been mentioned by Greek writers in Alexander's court, as well as by G.S. Ghurye in his books. The deity of the Naga Sannyasis, Lord Shankar, is himself Digambara. Scholars have concluded that the Digambara and Naga Sannyasis, as well as the Paramahansas, were given the option of whether or not to renounce clothing. Later, it is mentioned in the Dashnam texts that Maharaj Prithviraj Chauhan and Maharaj Jai Chand both organized the organizations of Naga Sannyasis. Shri Prithvi Giri and Shri Hari Giri also conclude about the Naga Sannyasis that during times of crisis in India, the

Naga Sannyasis have continuously cooperated with society and rulers in conflicts and wars against foreign invaders since ancient times, and we also find examples of this when Alexander invaded India.

Organization of the Ten Name Sannyasis

Acharya Shankar reorganized and organized the entire India in every direction. In this, he organized the groups of Sannyasis and Naga Sannyasis, providing them with an organized structural form and organizing the important dimension of their spiritual as well as strategic significance. Just like today's modern army, Acharya Shankar created these organizations, which we call static composition and strategic composition in the language of the modern army. In the static composition of the modern army, commands, areas, sub-areas and stations come, and in the strategic composition, corps, divisions, brigades and battalions are included. Similarly, to maintain the unity of the organization of the ten name Sannyasis, Acharya Shankar created static and strategic small and large units and put them into practice on the ground, the same structure is still prevalent and accepted in most systems.

In the static composition of Dashnam Naga Sannyasis are Amanaya, Pad, Madhi and Math. In the strategic composition, it is called Akhara, Daava, Madhi and Dhuni.

In peacetime, the static structure effectively organized the society and made the structure beautiful and orderly, in which the work of selection and training of Sannyasis and Naga Sannyasis was also important; but when there was an invasion by heretics, especially

during the Muslim invasion, the strategic structure became active to strongly resist the strong invasion.

The currently popular word Akhara is a transformation of 'Akhand'. The word 'Akhand' came to be called Akhara in common parlance. Malla Vidya and weapon operation and training centers are still called Akhara, but earlier, Sannyasis, especially Naga Sannyasis, used to give regular training to Hindu youths at the village, town and regional level from such training centers, so that at the time of invasion by heretics, these trained youths could effectively fight to protect the monasteries, temples, educational institutions, daughters-in-law and women of the Hindu society.

If we consider the establishment of Akharas and their chronology, we get authentic and factual information from written records and folklore. In the book 'Das Naam Naga Sannyasi and Shri Panchayati Akhara Mahanirvani', the establishment and history of the Akharas has been mentioned on the basis of evidence. It is written in the above book that after about a hundred years of the establishment of the first Akhara, the number of Dasnam Sannyasis had increased a lot, and they were facing many difficulties in managing and controlling them from a single center. Therefore, another Akhara was established and the same system was ensured independently for the second Akhara 'Atal'. In the course of time, as the number of Naga Sannyasis and Vaishnav Sadhus increased, the number of Akharas also increased, which has now become fourteen.

After Atal Akhara, Mahanirvani Akhara was formed. After Mahanirvani, three more Akharas of Naga Sannyasis, Anand, Niranjani and Juna, were established.

There are a total of seven Akharas of Naga Shaiva Sannyasis, three of Vaishnavas, two of Udaseen and one of Nirmal Sikhs, making a total of fourteen Akharas currently in existence.

If we look at the history of the Akharas of Naga Sannyasis, we find that the basic element is the same, but some traditions and deities etc. are different, which are briefly mentioned below-

Shri Ahwan Akhara: Shri Ahwan Akhara was established on Sunday, Margashirsha, Samvat 703 Vikram Samvat in Gondwana. Its presiding deity is Bhairav i.e. Siddha Ganapati. Among its founders, Shri Marichi Giri, Deenanath Giri, Ratna Giri, Dalpat Giri, Bhav Haran Giri, Uday Puri, Ganesh Puri, Chandan Van, Onkar Van, Ratna Van, Heera Bharti, Ganapati Bharti, Haridwar Bharti etc. played a major role.

Shri Atal Akhara: Shri Atal Akhara was established on Sunday, Margashirsha, Vikram Samvat 703 in Gondwana. It is noteworthy here that Shri Ahwan and Shri Atal, both Akharas were established on the same day. The presiding deity of Shri Atal Akhara is Shri Gajanan Ganeshji, the presiding officer of intelligence. It can be said that both of them had determined their respective areas and functions, so that organized and effective struggle could be done. Shri Vankhandi Bharti, Sagar Bharti, Shivcharan Bharti, Ayodhya Puri, Tribhuvan Puri, Chhote Ranjit Puri, Shravan Giri, Dayal Giri, Mahesh Giri, Himachal Van and Prati Van etc. had an important role in the

establishment of Shri Atal Akhara.... Shri Mahanirvani Akhara: Shri Mahanirvani Akhara was established on Thursday, Margashirsha Sudi 10, Vikram Samvat 805 in the courtyard of Shri Siddheshwar temple in Garh Kunda, Chhattisgarh. Shri Roop Giri Siddha, Uttam Giri Siddha, Ram Swaroop Siddha, Shankar Puri Mauni, Digambar Bhavani Puri Urdhvabahu, Dev Van Mauni, Onkar Bharti and Purnanand Bharti etc. are the main founders of Shri Mahanirvani. All these Mahatmas, with the power of their penance, worshiped Lord Pashupati, Goddess Durga, Bhairav, Siddha Ganapati and determined its traditions with due process on the orders of Shri Kapil Muni, which are still being conducted continuously.

A brief but authentic mention about the establishment of Mahanirvani Akhara is found in a book received from a place in Kashi. It is mentioned in this book that Shri Shambhu Giri along with seven other saints did intense worship of Shri Pashupati Nathji in Nepal located in the Himalayas, due to which they received an order in a dream from Pashupatinathji to take a bangle kept at the head and go to Gangasagar and do penance of Kapil Mahamuni. After reaching Gangasagar and doing severe penance for three years, Lord Kapil Muni gave them darshan and instructed them to establish an Akhara.

On the instructions of Shri Guru Kapil Muni, the above eight Siddhas and other Mahatmas started regularly worshiping the bangle, which was endowed with supernatural purity, with due process. Which is still going on smoothly till date. At the Prayagraj Kumbh, along with the Ahwan and Atal Akharas, the pilgrims of Prayagwal and the Kumbh pilgrims welcomed the saints and urged them to establish the Mahanirvani Akhara and for the first time the Dharmadhwaja of Mahanirvani was established in the Mahakumbh. The residents of Ahwan and Atal and Prayagraj requested Mahanirvani Akhara to take the lead in protecting Sanatan Dharma. Along with this, it was decided that the spears named Surya Prakash and Bhairav Prakash, the symbols of Adyashakti Bhagwati Durga, which were established to protect Sanatan Dharma, which were so far with Ahwan and Atal, would be taken care of by Mahanirvaniji. Even today, these two spears are with Mahanirvani Akhara, which are installed after worshiping them with due process in the Kumbh and on the day when Amrit Snan takes place, these spears are carried by the Nagas in the front during the bath. There are eight Shri Mahants of Mahanirvani Akhara. There are eight sub-Mahants, thirty-two Madhi Presidents. Eight executive members are also appointed to assist in the work of Shri Mahants. Eight Sthanapati/Thanapati were appointed for management and operation. All these traditions are still going on smoothly.

Shri Anand Akhara: Shri Anand Akhara was established on Jyeshtha Sudi Chaturthi, Vikram Samvat 912 in Barar Desh. Shri Katha Giri, Harihar Giri, Rameshwar Giri, Devdutt Bharti, Shiv Shyam Puri, Shravan Puri and Hem Van Ji are important among the founders of Shri Anand Akhara. The deity of worship of Shri Anand Akhara is Shri Suryanarayan.

Shri Niranjani Akhara: Shri Niranjani Akhara was established on Monday, Vikram Samvat 970 Miti Vadi 7 in Mandvi, Kutch Desh by Sarvashri Atri Giri Mauni, Saryu Nath Giri, Purushottam Giri, Harishankar Puri, Ranchod Bharti, Jagjivan Bharti, Arjun Bharti, Jagannath Puri, Swabhav Puri, Kailash Puri, Khadga Nath Puri, Kshem Van Agnihotri, Uday Van and Bhim Van etc. The deity of worship of Shri Niranjani Akhara is Shri Kartikeya Ji, the commander of the gods and the son of Sati.

Agni Akhara: The deity of worship of Shri Agni Akhara is Sarva Sanharak Agni and Gayatri. Brahmacharis live in Agni Akhara.

Juna Akhara: Juna Akhara was established on Tuesday, Vikram Samvat 1202 Miti Kartik Sudi 10 in Karnaprayag, Uttarakhand by Shri Sundar Giri, Dalpat Giri, Lakshman Giri, Raghunath Giri, Vaikunth Giri, Shankar Puri Avdhoot, Veni Puri Avdhoot, Daya Van, Raghunath Van, Prayag Bharti and Neelkanth Bharti etc. The deity of Juna Akhara is Dattatreya.

All these Akharas have their own traditions. Bhasmi has an important place among Naga Sadhus, hence all Sadhus keep a Bhasmi Gola. A definite shape has been fixed for the Bhasmi Gola of all the Akharas. The Ahwan's Gola is square, with some roundness at the

corners and somewhat elevated. The shape of Mahanirvani's Bhasmi Gola is quadrilateral, Atal's has eight facets, Niranjani's is round, Anand's is Shiva Linga shaped, Juna's is round, but Niranjani's Gola is slightly smaller and Juna's Gola is slightly larger. The Sadhus of the Akharas call this Bhasmi Gola 'Shambhu'.

All these Akharas have their own meaning and purpose, organizational structure, rules and management of property and wealth accumulation, and prohibitions and constitution.... Maha Kumbh.

Conclusion

The Naga Sannyasi tradition, as reformed by Acharya Shankar, has been the cornerstone of both the spiritual and strategic life of Hindu society. With their precise division into Akharas, these ascetics not only helped carry on their spiritual traditions but also protected the social fabric of India during the chaotic times of invasion. The Akharas, each with its distinctive tradition and godhead, are still active focal points of spiritual life and cultural continuity. The Naga Sannyasis, with their orderly and tough form, are a continuing symbol of Hindu resilience and toughness, asserting the linkage of spirituality and social responsibility.
