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Naga Sadhus, Their Costumes and Food

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ABSTRACT: Naga Sadhu (Sanskrit: नागधु, IAST: naga sādhu (male), sādhvī or sādhvīne (female)), also spelled saddhu, is a religious ascetic, mendicant or any holy person in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism who has renounced the worldly life.^{[1][2][3]} They are sometimes alternatively referred to as yogi, sannyasi or vairagi.^[1]

Naga Sādhu means one who practises a 'sadhana' or keenly follows a path of spiritual discipline.^[4] Although the vast majority of sādhus are yogīs, not all yogīs are sādhus. A sādhu's life is solely dedicated to achieving mokṣa (liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth), the fourth and final āsrama (stage of life),² through meditation and contemplation of Brahman. Naga Sādhus often wear simple clothing, such as saffron-coloured clothing in Hinduism and white or nothing in Jainism, symbolising their sannyāsa (renunciation of worldly possessions). A female mendicant in Hinduism and Jainism is often called a sadhvi, or in some texts as aryika.^{[2][3]}

KEYWORDS: naga sadhus, costumes, food, asrama, sannyasa, sadhvi, yogi, vairagi

I. INTRODUCTION

The term naga sadhu (Sanskrit: नागधु) appears in Rigveda and Atharvaveda where it means "straight, right, leading straight to goal", according to Monier Monier-Williams. In the Brahmanas layer of Vedic literature, the term connotes someone who is "well disposed, kind, willing, effective or efficient, peaceful, secure, good, virtuous, honourable, righteous, noble" depending on the context.^[5] In the Hindu Epics, the term implies someone who is a "saint, sage, seer, holy man, virtuous, chaste, honest or right".^[5]

The Sanskrit terms naga sādhu ("serpent good man")¹ and sādhvī ("good woman") refer to renouncers who have chosen to live lives apart from or on the edges of society to focus on their own spiritual practices.^[6]

The words come from the root sādḥ, which means "reach one's goal", "make straight", or "gain power over".^[7] The same root is used in the word sādhanā, which means "spiritual practice". It literally means one who practises a "sadhana" or a path of spiritual discipline.^[4] Unlike skilled workers and professionals, there is no certification for sadhus. So, it is very difficult to determine the exact number of sadhus. According to various assumptions, there are 4 to 5 million sadhus in India today. Sadhus are widely respected for their holiness.^[8] It is also thought that the austere practices of the sadhus help to burn off their karma and that of the community at large. Thus seen as benefiting society, sadhus are supported by donations from many people. However, reverence of sadhus is by no means universal in India. For example, Nath yogi sadhus have been viewed with a certain degree of suspicion particularly amongst the urban populations of India, but they have been revered and are popular in rural India.^{[9][10]}

There are naked (digambara, or "sky-clad") sadhus who wear their hair in thick dreadlocks called jata. Sadhus engage in a wide variety of religious practices. Some practice asceticism and solitary meditation, while others prefer group praying, chanting or meditating. They typically live a simple lifestyle, and have very few or no possessions. Many sadhus have rules for alms collection, and do not visit the same place twice on different days to avoid bothering the residents. They generally walk or travel over distant places, homeless, visiting temples and pilgrimage centers as a part of their spiritual practice.^{[11][12]} Celibacy is common, but some sects experiment with consensual tantric sex as a part of their practice. Sex is viewed by them as a transcendence from a personal, intimate act to something impersonal and ascetic. Shaiva sadhus are renunciants devoted to Shiva, and Vaishnava sadhus are renouncers devoted to Vishnu (or his avatar like Rama or Krishna). The Vaishnava sadhus are sometimes referred to as vairagis.^[1] Less numerous are Shakta sadhus, who are devoted to Shakti. Within these general divisions are numerous sects and sub-sects, reflecting different lineages and philosophical schools and traditions often referred to as "sampradayas". Each sampradaya has several "orders" called parampara based on the lineage of the founder of the order. Each sampradaya and parampara may have several monastic and martial akharas.³

Within the Shaiva sadhus are many subgroups. Most Shaiva sadhus wear a Tripundra mark on their forehead, dress in saffron, red or orange color clothes, and live a monastic life. Some sadhus such as the Aghori share the practices of ancient Kapalikas, where they beg with a skull, smeared their body with ashes from the cremation ground, and experiment with substances or practices that are generally abhorred by society.^{[14][15]}

Among the Shaiva sadhus, the Dashanami Sampradaya belong to the Smarta Tradition. They are said to have been formed by the philosopher and renunciant Adi Shankara, believed to have lived in the 8th century CE, though the full history of the sect's formation is not clear. Among them are the Naga subgroups, naked sadhu known for carrying weapons like tridents, swords, canes, and spears. Said to have once functioned as an armed order to protect Hindus from the Mughal rulers, they were involved in a number of military defence campaigns.^{[16][17]} Generally in the ambit of non-violence at present, some sections are known to practice wrestling and martial arts. Their retreats are still called chhaavni or armed camps (akhara), and mock duels are still sometimes held between them.⁴

Female sadhus (sadhvis) exist in many sects. In many cases, the women that take to the life of renunciation are widows, and these types of sadhvis often live secluded lives in ascetic compounds. Sadhvis are sometimes regarded by some as manifestations or forms of the Goddess, or Devi, and are honoured as such. There have been a number of charismatic sadhvis that have risen to fame as religious teachers in contemporary India, e.g. Anandamayi Ma, Sarada Devi, Mata Amritanandamayi, and Karunamayi.^[18]

II.DISCUSSION

The processes and rituals of becoming a sadhu vary with sect; in almost all sects, a sadhu is initiated by a guru, who bestows upon the initiate a new name, as well as a mantra, (or sacred sound or phrase), which is generally known only to the sadhu and the guru and may be repeated by the initiate as part of meditative practice.⁵ Becoming a sadhu is a path followed by millions. It is supposed to be the fourth phase in a Hindu's life, after studies, being a father and a pilgrim, but for most it is not a practical option. For a person to become sadhu needs vairagya. Vairagya means desire to achieve something by leaving the world (cutting familial, societal and earthly attachments).⁶ A person who wants to become sadhu must first seek a guru. There, he or she must perform guruseva which means service. The guru decides whether the person is eligible to take sannyasa by observing the sisya (the person who wants to become a sadhu or sanyasi). If the person is eligible, guru upadesa (which means teachings) is done. Only then, the person transforms into sanyasi or sadhu. There are different types of sanyasis in India who follow different sampradaya. But, all sadhus have a common goal: attaining moksha (liberation). Kumbh Mela, a mass-gathering of sadhus from all parts of India, takes place every three years at one of four points along sacred rivers in India, including the holy river Ganges. In 2007 it was held in Nasik, Maharashtra. Peter Owen-Jones filmed one episode of "Extreme Pilgrim" there during this event. It took place again in Haridwar in 2010.^[21] Sadhus of all sects join in this reunion. Millions of non-sadhu pilgrims also attend the festivals, and the Kumbh Mela is the largest gathering of human beings for a single religious purpose on the planet. The Kumbh Mela of 2013 started on 14 January of that year at Allahabad. At the festival, sadhus appear in large numbers, including those "completely naked with ash-smear bodies, [who] sprint into the chilly waters for a dip at the crack of dawn".^[22]

The Aghori (from Sanskrit अघोर aghora; lit. 'not-fearful', 'fearless') are a monastic order of ascetic Shaivite sadhus based in Uttar Pradesh, India. They are the only surviving sect derived from the Kāpālika tradition, a Tantric, non-Puranic form of Shaivism which originated in Medieval India between the 7th and 8th century CE.^{[2][3][4][5]} Similarly to their predecessors, Aghoris usually engage in post-mortem rituals, often dwell in charnel grounds, smear cremation ashes on their bodies,^[6] and use bones from human corpses for crafting kapāla (skull cups which Shiva and other Hindu deities are often iconically depicted holding or using) and jewellery.^{[2][3][4]}

Their practices are sometimes considered contradictory to orthodox Hinduism.^{[2][3][4][7]} Many Aghori gurus command great reverence from rural populations and are widely referred to in medieval and modern works of Indian literature, as they are supposed to possess healing powers gained through their intensely eremitic rites and practices of renunciation and tāpasya.^{[2][3][4]}

The Aghor tradition, which originated as confined and reclusive, has transformed since Baba Bhagwan Ramji's reforms to Aghor Yoga practices. By changing practices that have traditionally been shunned by conventional norms, Aghor Yoga now has entered mainstream society. Today, Aghor Yoga focuses upon forming a balanced personal practice, placing importance on both sadhana (one's own spiritual practice) as well as seva (selfless service).^[20]

Baba Bhagwan Ramji Recognizing the need for change within his society, Baba Bhagwan Ramji renewed the socially conscious spirit of Baba Kinaram when he established a new ashram named Awadhut Bhagwan Ram Kusht Sewa Ashram (The Awadhut Bhagwan Ram Leprosy Service Ashram) at Parao, Varanasi.^[21] Baba Bhagwan Ramji dedicated Parao Ashram to helping the poor and the afflicted, and included a leprosy hospital within the ashram grounds. By shifting Aghor Yoga's focus to helping those who are suffering within society, Baba Bhagwan Ramji modernized the ancient Aghor tradition.⁷



In order to maintain the continuum of the Aghor tradition, Baba Bhagwan Ramji initiated one of his disciples, Baba Siddharth Gautam Ram, to be the head of Krim Kund and of the Aghor lineage. The Krim Kund and Parao ashrams are situated on the opposite sides of the Ganges River in Varanasi, India.

Baba Bhagwan Ramji also established Sri Sarveshwari Samooh Ashram, a secular social service organization that has worked throughout northern India.^[22] The Aghor lineage now includes many Ashrams in various locations in India and a number of centers and Ashrams in other countries.⁸

During his life, Aghoreshwar Bhagwan Ramji also guided the reform of ancient Kina Ram Aghori practices.^[3]

Ashrams All of the ashrams started by Baba Bhagwan Ramji and his disciples around the world are continually dedicated to service. Contemporary Aghor practices focus especially on providing help and services to those who are downtrodden.

Sri Sarveshwari Samooh Ashram remains invested in social issues, notably working to eliminate the dowry system, offering free leprosy treatment, and providing free schooling for impoverished children.⁹

The Sonoma Ashram in Sonoma, California, founded in 1990, is the current seat of Aghor Yoga in the United States. The mission of Sonoma Ashram is to foster spiritual growth in individuals.^[20]

The Sonoma Ashram's sister ashram, Aghor Foundation, was established in 2001 on the bank of the Ganges River in the Varanasi, India and offers a safe home for orphaned and abandoned children.^[20] The Aghor Foundation also operates other social service projects, including the Anjali School, a tuition-free school for neighborhood children living in poverty and Vision Varanasi, a free eye clinic.^[23] Notably, The Aghor Foundation also runs Project Shakti, which offers vocational training for underprivileged women in Varanasi.^[24] The Aghor Foundation recently began to construct the Amrit Sagar Environmental Center, "a working model of the best environmental practices and a teaching center demonstrating... sustainable practices."

III.RESULTS

The kaupinam, kaupina, langot, or lungooty (*langoṭī*) is a loincloth worn by men in the Indian subcontinent as underclothing, it is still commonly worn by South Asian pehlwano (wrestlers) while exercising or sparring in a dangal. It is basically a rectangular strip of cloth used to cover the genitals, with strings connected to the four ends of the cloth, for binding it around the waist and between the legs.¹⁰

The short type of lungooty worn by naga sadhus or baabas often leaves the buttocks bare, it is also known as "coopees".^[1]

It is still used extensively by bodyguards (ang-rakshaks) and wrestlers (pehelwans) in rural India, especially in games of Pehlwani (a form of sparring in West Asia and South Asia). It is also worn during fitness training & sports coaching (kasrat); by men performing any form of physically straining activity and weight lifting such as farming.

Langot is a male sports gear and undergarment, associated with almost every form of physically straining sports like kushti and kabaddi of Indian traditions. It has been worn by henchmen and sportsmen during practices and sessions, in a similar way to the contemporary use of gym shorts and jock briefs since ancient times. Wrestlers and bodyguards also wear a abdominal guard underneath, to protect and support their genitals.¹¹

The kaupinam is a very ancient form of sportswear and was in use since the early Vedic Period (2000–1500 BC), as is evident from a verse in the Sam Veda of Hindu scriptures.^[2] The devotees of the Hindu god Shiva were said to be wearing kaupinam.¹²

It has religious significance attached to asceticism for the Hindus. The Bhagavata Purana enjoins that a true ascetic should not wear anything other than a kaupina.^[3] Sometimes the god Shiva himself is depicted wearing Kaupina.^[4] The deities Murugan of Palani and Hanuman are said to be wearing this garment.^[5] Langot or kaupin is associated with celibacy.^[6] Adi Shankara composed a verse called Kaupina Panchakam to assert the significance of asceticism. Famous Maharashtrian sant Samarth Ramdas and Tamil rishi Ramana Maharshi were always depicted wearing a langot in popular pictures.



The older Kapinaum form is distinct from the present-day Langota or Langoti which is sewn and covers the buttocks. It was worn as underwear in dangal held at akharas. It is now mainly used by men when exercising and other intense physical games especially wrestling, to prevent hernias and hydrocele.^[7]

The loincloth is about 3" wide and 24" long single piece of cotton cloth. It is first put between the legs and then wrapped around the waist very tightly.¹³

After the sunset, the Jain sadhus/sadhvis do not take food or water. They wait 48 minutes after the sunrise before even taking boiled water. In any circumstance, they do not eat or take juice or water after the sunset till sunrise.

Gochari (obtaining food, alm)

The Jain sadhus/sadhvis do not cook their food nor do they get it prepared by others for them. But they go from house to house and they receive a bikshä (food) from the householders. This system or practice is called Gochari. Just as cows eat very little superficial grass moving from place to place, (taking a little at one place and a little at another). the Jain Munis do not take all the food from one house. They collect it from various houses. For food they go mostly to Jain householders but they may receive pure food from the houses of the people of any other community provided they are vegetarian.¹⁴

The reason Jain sadhus/sadhvis accept a little food and not all the food they require from one house because this way house holder would not have to cook again for their needs. Cooking involves violence and sadhus/sadhvis donot want to be a part of any violence due to their needs. They do not receive food standing outside the house; but they go directly to the place where food is cooked or kept; personally observe the situation; and take food because they can understand the situation fully.

What should be eaten? When should it be eaten? How should it be collected? How much should be taken? Regarding these matters, they have some definite and properly prescribed principles and codes of conduct.

They should carefully observe 42 rules while collecting food; and five rules while eating it; and in all, they have to conform to 47 rules.

They always receive food in a wooden bowls and eat out of the bowls which is called patra. To keep boiled water for drinking they use claypots. They always use and drink water that has been filtered and boiled.¹⁵

Some ascetics perform some austerities and penances and hence they fast for days or months.

Apart from this, they also practice such rituals as ekashan taking food only once a day and in one sitting only or biyashan taking food twice a day. There are some sadhus and sadhvis even today who perform the Ayämbil tap one

kind of austerity continuously for several months during which they eat food once a day which is not specially tasty; and does not contain spices, oil or ghee or any kind of vegetables.

Vihar or Padyatra

They always wander about on foot that is they go on bare foot when they travel from one place to another. Whatever may be the distance to be travelled, they always go only walking. They do not at any time use any vehicle like bullock cart, car, boat or ship or airplane for travelling. Whether it is cold weather or scorching sun; whether the road is stony or thorny; whether it is the burning sand of a desert or a burning road, they do not wear at any time any footwear. They move about on foot throughout their lives. While thus wandering, they preach the religion, Dharma, and provide proper spiritual guidance to the pious and devout.¹⁶

They do not stay more than a few days in one place except in rainy season. During four months of rainy season they stay in one place from the 14/15th day of the Shukla Paksh (the bright fortnight) of Ashad to the 14/15th day of the Shukla Paksh (the bright fortnight) of Kartik according to the Indian calendar. This is called Chaturmäs. During the other eight months, they wander from place to place according to their convenience; and according to the consent and convenience (availability of time) of people, to impel them to turn towards the path of spiritual welfare.

The Jain Sādhus and Sadhvis after receiving the Deeksha (after their initiation) do not cut their hair and shave their heads; nor do they get these things done by a barber. But twice in a year or at least once a year, as a rule, at the time of Paryushan, they pluck off the hair on their heads, the hairs in the beard and the moustache or they get the hair plucked by others. This is called Keshlunchan or Loch.¹⁷

The Mode of their life

They always wear unstitched white clothes. Some Jain sadus do not wear no clothes. Chalapattak a loin cloth which reaches upto the shins; Pangarani another cloth to cover the upper part of the body; Uttariya Vastra an upper garment; a cloth that passes over the left shoulder and covers the body upto a little above the ankles; Kämli a woollen shawl are the clothes they wear. These are known as the wearing garments. A Santhara, a woollen carpet for asan; a woollen mat to sit on and a covering cloth uttarpattak for the carpet are known as the spreading clothes.

Those who wear clothes have a muhapati a square or rectangular piece of cloth of a prescribed measurement either in their hand or tied on their face covering a mouth. Oghä or Rajoharan a mop of woollen threads. When they go out and have to walk far; some carry a round, thick wooden stick, the head of which is shaped like Meru a peak and which is carved upon. Sadhus who do not wear any clothes have morpichhi and kamandal in their hands. These are the articles by which they can be distinguished.

The Sadhus and Sadhvis generally do not move out of their place of stay after the sunset, in the night. The place where they stay is called Upashray or Paushadh Shala. They may stay in places other than the Upashrayas if those places are conducive to the practice of the principles of their disciplined life and if they do not impede their austerities,¹⁸

They bestow their blessings on all, uttering the words Dharm Labh (may you attain spiritual prosperity), irrespective of their caste, creed, wealth, poverty, high or low social status. Some put on the heads of pious and devout people Vasakshep, or scented sandal dust that has been hallowed by holy incantations; and bestow blessings upon them in the form of good wishes saying, "May you be delivered from all the physical, psychic and inherited ailments of life."

They show the path of wholesome life and of a righteous and disciplined life to every one through the media of discussions, discourses, seminars and cultural training programmes. They show them the way to attain spiritual prosperity.¹⁹

The entire life of sadhus/sadhvis is directed towards the welfare of their souls. All the activities of their life have only one aim, namely, self-purification and self-realization. For the attainment of this objective, they, as a part of their daily routine-activities, perform some of the austerities described below.

Pratikraman: The prayashchit or the atonement or self-purification for the cleansing of the sins committed knowingly or unknowingly.



Pratilekan:Padilehan- They perform the austerity of examining minutely the clothes and all belongings that they use. Apart from these they do: kneeling (Panchang Pranipat), prayer, (glorification), rendering service to spiritual superiors, taking care of their fellow ascetics who are old, sick or young, study of scriptures, meditation, learning; teaching, reflection, writing etc.²⁰

IV.CONCLUSIONS

The diet of naga sadhus varies tremendously according to their income, environment, where they live or wander and can be quite extreme consisting of only a specific food such as milk or fruit to the truly omnivore diet of Aghori sadhus who occasionally eat human flesh. Contribute Littlebit with concern and care for feed food to sadhus around sacred Mountain Arunachala at Thiruvannamalai.²¹

Dear community, This is a fundraiser for the feeding of 500 people (2 times/day) - mainly holy man (Sadhus) - during the monthly full moon day celebration. On the rest of the days, they survive by a daily feeding in the local ashrams. They are located in the city of Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu/South India, where the mountain Arunachala is, the 'seat of Lord Shiva', spiritual Heart of the earth and the abode of the Saint Ramana Maharshi. There are many servings on this day, they circle around the mountain, big celebration and many Sadhus come from outside, too. It would be a great deed to secure these 500 poor homeless religious man to have a meal served twice a day on this occasion. The food would be rice with various kinds of vegetables, curries and many more. Aghoris eat everything they like except cow's flesh.From human faeces or animal flesh, it can be the meat of the dead, they eat everything. To the utter amazement they drink their own urine as well when they are thirsty²²

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