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Indian Naga Sadhus, Tradition, Food Habits, Dress and Ornaments

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ABSTRACT

In the 16th century, Madhusudana Saraswati of Bengal organised a section of the Naga (naked) tradition of armed sannyasis in order to protect Hindus from the tyranny of the Mughal rulers. Warrior-ascetics could be found in Hinduism from at least the 1500s and as late as the 1700s, although tradition attributes their creation to Sankaracharya. Some examples of Akhara currently are the Juna Akhara of the Dashanami Naga, Niranjani Akhara, Anand Akhara, Atal Akhara, Awahan Akhara, Agni Akhara and Nirmal Panchayati Akhara at Prayagraj. Each akhara is divided into sub-branches and traditions. An example is the Dattatreya Akhara (Ujjain) of the naked sadhus of Juna Naga establishment. The naga sadhus generally remain in the ambit of non-violence presently, though some sections are also known to practice the sport of Indian wrestling. The Dasanāmi sannyāsins practice the Vedic and yogic Yama principles of ahimsā (non-violence), satya (truth), asteya (non-stealing), aparigraha (non-covetousness) and brahmacārya (celibacy / moderation). The naga sadhus are prominent at Kumbh mela, where the order in which they enter the water is fixed by tradition. After the Juna akhara, the Niranjani and Mahanirvani Akhara proceed to their bath. Ramakrishna Math Sevashram are almost the last in the procession.

KEYWORDS: *naga sadhus, tradition, dress, ornaments, food habits, non-violence, sankaracharya*

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INTRODUCTION

In the Indian religious and philosophical traditions, all knowledge is traced back to the gods and to the Rishis who primarily heard the Vedas by mediation.[1]

The current Acaryas, the heads of the maṭhas, trace their authority back to the four main disciples of Shankara, and each of the heads of these four maṭhas takes the title of Shankaracharya ("the learned Shankara") after Adi Shankara.[2]

The Advaita guru-paramparā (Lineage of Gurus in Non-dualism) begins with the mythological time of the Daiva-paramparā, followed by the vedic seers of the Ṛṣi-paramparā, and the Mānava-paramparā of historical times and personalities:

Daiva-paramparā[3]

- Nārāyaṇa
- Sada Shiva
- Padmabhuva (Brahmā)

Ṛṣi-paramparā

- Vaśiṣṭha
- Śakti
- Parāśara
- Vyāsa
- Śuka

Mānava-paramparā[4]

- Gauḍapāda
- Govinda bhagavatpāda
- Śankara bhagavatpāda, and then Shankara's four disciples
  - Padmapāda
  - Hastāmalaka
  - Toṭaka
  - Vārtikakāra (Sureśvara) and others[5]

Ten Names

Hindus who enter sannyāsa in the ēkadaṇḍi tradition take up one of the ten names associated with this Sampradaya: Giri, Puri, Bhāratī, Vana/Ban, Āraṇya, Sagara, Āśrama, Sarasvatī, Tīrtha, and Parvata. Sanyasis of Advaita Vedanta and Dvaita Vedanta belong to ēkadaṇḍi tradition.Naga Sadhus in the medieval era played a very vital role in protecting the culture, faith, tradition of Hindu Religion from Barbaric Islamic Invaders and also in safeguarding many temples from attack of Mughals, Afghans, Turks. In the 8th century Adi Shankaracharya when saw the frequent assaults on Hindus, desecration of temples and other cultural sites which are of utmost reverence in the Hindu World By Islamic Invader, he then decided to introduce a military curriculum in Naga Sadhus for the sake of protecting the motherland and Religion from plunders of Islamic attackers.[6] They then became the valiant, chivalrous fighter after acquiring a tough military training and in the battlefield played havoc on the enemies army which instill a sense of fear in many Muslim kingdom and empire related to them.It was the time when Afghanistan's Emperor Ahmed Shah Abdali invaded India 4th time in a row, at that Time Mughals were very weak and there is no other Hindu power in the Northern part of India to challenge the Islamic invaders, so Afghans took advantage of the situation and made an outrageous treaty with Mughal King ALAMGIR in which he got the permission of looting Delhi from Mughals and in January 1757 he looted Delhi, decimated the temples but still he wasn't satisfied with the bounties he got in the loot. He instructed his two Afghan commanders Najib Khan [7]and Jahan Khan to take 20,000 afghan soldiers with them and carryout the raids in Ballabgarh, Mathura, Agra, Vrindavan. He also said that The city Of Mathura, Vrindavan is a holy place of the Hindus, let it be put entirely to the edge of the sword, upto Agra leave not a single place and raze every building to the ground, whatever booties you would get in the wars will be yours, behead the Hindu Kafirs and gift their head in Afghan camp to me and take RS 5 as a reward for that.[8]

Discussion

As the afghan army reached in Mathura they started destroying temples, raping women and Hindu men were beheaded and cut into pieces, Children were enslaved, many women for saving their honor dived in the Yamuna river and so many of them died, many people were running here and there to get shelter so as to escape from the murderous Afghan maniacs, a large crowd of Hindus took refuge in the cave which is behind the Shitala Mata Temple,[9]

Afghan soldiers saw them hiding and they then mercilessly went inside cave and killed all Hindus in the cave. For 3 days the holy soil of Mathura was drenched with Blood of Hindus and the number of dead bodies were so much that Mathura's air was producing foul smell for so many months. Afghan army captured bounties worth RS 12 crore, enslaved 6,000 Hindu women for selling them in Kabul. After attacking Mathura Afghan marched towards Vrindavan and that too met the same fate as that of Mathura.[10]

After destroying Vrindavan, Afghan army leapt on Mahaban and looted the treasure and did genocide of Hindus, their next target was to attack Agra but suudenly Sardar khan, an Afghan commander thought why not Plunder and loot Gokul also which is just 9 KM away from Mahaban, He along with 10,000 Afghan soldiers went towards GOKUL where they saw 4,000 Naga Sadhus standing for the war with them.[11] When Naga sadhus heard about the plight caused by the Afghans on Hindus then 10,000 naga sadhus from sacred cities of Hindus like Haridwar, Ujjain started gathering in Gokul but were little late in reaching their since Haridwar, Ujjain was at a comparable distance from Gokul. A war started between Afghan army and Naga sadhus, at first afghans anticipated that nagas wouldn't be able to counter them for long but soon they were proved wrong,[12] Afghan soldiers were overpowered by naga sadhus military skill who were carrying Swords, matchlocks and cannons with faces smeared in ashes was terrifying Afghan soldiers so much that they were unable to give any resistance to nagas at all. With heavy casualties Afghan army started suffering due to which their strength now started decreasing drastically on the battlefield.

This enraged Abdali so much that he threw more troops in the war but it is of no avail, dead bodies of Afghan soldiers were piling and afghans were losing morals, meanwhile the other bands of nagas also entered in the battlefield which intensified attack of nagas, In fear of loosing war and soldiers Afghans started retreating after the order of Sardar khan. More than 5,000 afghan soldiers died and countless soldiers got injuries whereas 2,000 nagas attained martyrdom in this battle.[13] Afghan commander Sardar khan was aware that Abdali would punish him for his decision of retreating from the war with humiliation since they were victories everywhere from kabul to Mathura and defeat from hands of Nagas was a big blow to them. HE bribed Jugal Kishor who was the appointed by Abdali from bengal for inspecting the war, loot and treasure caught in war to frame a false report stating that afghans retreated due to spread of epidemic in Afghan army so that he could escape from the penalty of losing war in Gokul without any bounties.

The Naga Sadhus thus were able to save Gokul from the tyranny of Afghans and many Hindu shrines were rescued from Afghan, the sacrifices given by the gallant, chivalrous Naga Sadhus and the belligerency they exhibited during the war outstripped the unbeatable Afghan army,many Nagas died due to slippery nature of battlefield caused by blood of dead bodies of Soldiers but they still didn't lost hope, such incident juxtaposes the brutal realities of war, oppression with instances of unforgettable spiritual grace and stepping in the history and passing through a turmoil is both thought provoking and gripping[13].

The true of exemplars of courage, faith naga sadhus motivates us on how to protect the motherland and culture from foreign invasion. With no regard for their own lives and firm determination to preserve faith and culture slain afghan army to save holy town of Gokul. The appalling cost paid by them in the battlefield with battle cry of 'Har Har Mahadev' struck Afghans so much that they will not ever in their dream dare to think of attacking hindus in Gokul. Such is the history and long tradition of Naga Sadhus full of valor and indifferent to materialistic desires of the world. Such is the god's way of testing the fibers and spirits of their disciples. The selflessness and love for their culture and defence of the faith they did during the critical stages of History will always remain intact in our heart forever[14].

Results

The history of Indian monasticism is an excellent index of the changing political culture of north India during the transition to colonial rule. Prior to 1800, gosains and bairagis (Shaiva and Vaishnava monks, respectively) exercised broad political and economic influence as merchants, bankers, and, most importantly, soldiers. Powerful mahants (abbots) speculated in real estate and engaged in extensive moneylending activities in order to diversify monastic endowments in urban centers throughout the north, thus facilitating links between the increasingly regional political economies of the late Mughal era.[1]

Indeed, Christopher Bayly has suggested that gosains in particular "came the nearest of any Indian business community to the emerging bourgeoisie that European theorists from Sleeman to Marx wished to see."[2] Gosains were so well entrenched in Asian commerce that Warren Hastings saw fit to avail the English East India Company of their good offices in what was ultimately a failed bid to acquire trade relations with Tibet and China in the late 1700s.[3]

Gosains and bairagis were able to engage successfully in trade and finance during the eighteenth century because they not only possessed excellent commercial intelligence and political connections but had access to a sufficient degree of independent armed force to back their profit-making ventures. In fact, the unsettled conditions of the middle of the century can be seen in retrospect to have benefited the monastic armies, since in addition to protecting monastic endowments, sectarian shrines, pilgrimage routes, and commercial interests, gosain and bairagi regiments were increasingly incorporated in the armies of the major regional powers. Hence, despite the early commonality of commercial interests between the new English trader-rulers and the well-placed gosain and bairagi merchants, it was inevitable that in the rich province of Bengal armed monks and Company soldiers would come into conflict. When it did occur, that conflict took the form of a prolonged series of skirmishes in Bengal and Bihar over four decades (1760s to 1800), usually referred to as the "sanyasi and fakir rebellion."[15]

At one level, this rebellion seems to have stemmed from purely materialist motives, namely, from the excessive revenue burdens introduced by the Company on monastic and nonmonastic landlords alike and from the tendency of Company officials to side with landlords in disputes with powerful gosain moneylenders.[4] More important, however, was the fact that sadhus were accustomed to bearing arms while on pilgrimage routes through Bengal and in some cases possessed the right to levy contributions from villages along those routes; in addition, many sadhus sought military service with landlords and petty rajas in the region.[5] Company officials, for their part, were increasingly opposed to such practices and sought to discourage the armed bands of sanyasis and fakirs from operating in the province. One early encounter, recorded by the noted Company surveyor James Rennell who at the time (1766) was mapping territory just south of the Himalayan foothill kingdom of Bhutan, bears testimony to the martial potential of armed monks and the resentment of armed sadhus at the new impositions being placed on them by the Company state. Rennell happened upon a skirmish in progress between Company troops and a force of seven hundred such sadhus;[16] the wounds he received included a saber gash that "cut through my right Shoulder Bone, and laid me open for nearly a foot 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."[6]

The Company prevailed in that particular confrontation, but over three decades would pass before the akharas (monastic armies) would be disarmed in Bengal or, at the very least, driven beyond Company-controlled territories. This prolonged confrontation between Company soldiers and armed sadhus is generally understood in terms of the Company desire to establish itself as militarily supreme in the province of Bengal. Rarely, if ever, are the ideological implications of the conflict examined by social historians, and the term "rebellion," considered a political overstatement given the nature of the conflict, seems now to have been discarded.[7] However, the phenomenon of armed monasticism certainly posed more than simply a "law and order" challenge for newly ascendant Company officials. Armed sadhus were the very antithesis of the world the company-state was endeavoring to create in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, namely, a settled peasant society that would render forth vast agrarian revenues on a regular basis with as little resistance as possible. The modern state in India could not countenance recalcitrant sadhus wandering about the countryside armed, dangerous, often naked, and claiming to represent an alternate locus of authority.[8] The Company needed a modern sadhu: a priestly monk unconcerned with worldly power and given over completely to religious contemplation and prayer. Hence Warren Hastings's proclamation of 21 January 1773 banishing "all Biraugies and Sunnasses [bairagis and sanyasis, or armed Vaishnava and Shaiva monks] 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 [Ramanand and Gorakhnath] 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's view, be tolerated.[9]

Armed monasticism holds more than just military and political-cultural interest, however. There are

indications that the rise of Vaishnava and Shaiva monastic soldiering afforded, or in some way reflected, increased entry of people of low social status, particularly those deemed shudra by the twice-born elite, into the major monastic orders in Gangetic north India. In this sense, the history of the armed akharas is not unlike that of the Sikhs in the Punjab, the arming of whom, according to W. H. McLeod, was occasioned by the prolonged infusion of Jat peasants into the Nanakpanthi community.[10] By the eighteenth century the profusion of Jat Sikhs cemented in demographic fact the professed egalitarianism that had long been a powerful ideological component of Guru Nanak's teaching. Hence for McLeod, Sikh hagiography (which speaks of a unilateral decision on the part of Guru Govind Singh to militarize the Nanakpanth in 1699) masks slow processes of social and demographic transformation.[17]

Similarly, it is possible to perceive the social dimensions of militarization by looking within Shaiva and Vaishnava monastic traditions regarding the decision to take up arms. For example, a widely accepted Dasnami legend recorded by J. N. Farquhar in the early twentieth century held that Shaiva monks took up arms during the reign (and with the approval) of the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) to defend brahman sanyasis against the persecutions of Muslim fakirs. While the motivational elements of this tradition can be challenged on the basis of both historical and historiographical evidence, it is perhaps more significant that Farquhar also related his general impression that the arming of Shaivas relied on the heavy recruitment of shudras into the elite ranks of the Dasnami order.[11] Whether shudras were indeed actively recruited as soldier Dasnamis, or whether the assertion of past military recruitment became a convenient way of explaining the increasing number of shudras in the order, the fact remains that today certain segments of orthodox, high-caste Dasnamis avoid commensal relations with warrior monks because of the latter's supposedly low origins.[12]

One can see stronger suggestions of the involvement of shudras (and, indeed, others of low and marginal status such as women and untouchables) in traditions relating to Vaishnava monastic soldiering. One important Vaishnava narrative holds that the arming of bairagis was the product of a conscious decision made in 1713 by leaders of the four main Vaishnava sampraday—often referred to collectively as the chatuh-sampraday, namely, the orders organized around the teachings of Vishnuswami, Madhvacharya, Nimbarkacharya, and Ramanujacharya (in which Ramanandis were included).[13] According to this tradition, the major Vaishnava mahants met at Galta, a temple complex and monastic center very near Jaipur, and decided to resort to arms to defend against increasing attacks by Shaiva monks. Significantly, the Galta meeting in 1713 also marked the emergence of Ramanandis (those who look to Swami Ramanand for inspiration) as the dominant force not only among the followers of Ramanujacharya's teachings, but among Vaishnavas in north India generally.[14] The Galta tradition provides an interesting twist, however: it was also decided in 1713 to declare the untouchable, shudra, and female members of Ramanand's original fourteenth-century coterie of disciples as "illegitimate" transmitters of tradition; in other words, untouchables, shudras, and women would continue to be admitted as Ramanandi novitiates, but henceforth they would have to link themselves to the Ramanandi past via one of the original male, twice-born (in this case, either brahman or kshatriya) disciples of Ramanand. While on the one hand this decision may have reflected the rise of caste mores amongst Vaishnavas, I prefer to interpret it as a move by socially conservative Vaishnavas to limit the ideological effects of what may have been a heavy influx of non-twice-born Ramanandis.[15]

According to a related and specifically Ramanandi tradition recorded by the anthropologist Peter van der Veer in Ayodhya in the 1980s, loosely organized bands of armed bairagis wandered about north India long before 1700 and were given formal military hierarchy by one Swami Balanand in the eighteenth century.[16] Today the Balanand math (temple-cum-monastery) in Jaipur continues to claim credit for the formalization of the armed Vaishnava akharas. Though elements of the Galta and Balanand traditions appear contradictory (the reasons for which become clearer in the following chapter), they both point to the importance of Ramanandis, and particularly Ramanandis in the Jaipur region, in the formation of soldiering orders among Vaishnavas. That a Vaishnava call to arms should have been associated with the increased influence of Ramanandis is not surprising, since the social liberalism that is associated with Ramanand would have facilitated the process of military recruitment by opening monastic ranks to the lowly.[17] This point is underlined in Ayodhya itself, where a banner emblazoned with Swami Ramanand's famous admonition against inequality—"Ask not of caste and the like, if you love God you belong to God"—decorates the entrance to the Hanuman Garhi, the main headquarters of Vaishnava soldier monasticism in north India.[18]

Records housed in the Kapad Dwara (warehouse of valuables) of the Jaipur state provide independent corroboration of Vaishnava arms and of attempts to

limit the entry of the low-born into the Ramanandi sampraday in the Jaipur region after 1700.[19] In the 1720s and until his death in 1743, Maharaja Jai Singh II evinced a strong interest in religious affairs, particularly religious affairs having to do with the Vaishnava institutions in his realm.[20] And, not unlike Warren Hastings a half century later, Jai Singh II apparently looked askance at the phenomenon of armed monasticism and sought to discourage it. To this end, he solicited and received four separate bond agreements containing pledges from prominent Vaishnava mahants, nine of whom identify themselves clearly as "Ramanandi," to give up the practice of keeping arms and to boycott or otherwise punish those who continued to do so.[21] From separate correspondences it is evident that the Maharaja also solicited opinions from Bengali Vaishnavas regarding the rights of shudras and other low classes, and obtained pledges from Ramanandi mahants and other Vaishnavas not only to maintain strict caste rules in commensal relations but to no longer accept shudra and antyaj (low-born) disciples.[22] The fact that Jai Singh II's efforts to impose orthodox behavior on Vaishnava monks involved the demilitarization of the armed akharas in tandem with the barring of low-born novitiates suggests that arms and low status were connected not just in the Maharaja's vision of a neo-orthodox Vaishnavism but in the social-historical reality of Ramanandi monasticism.[18]

Hence, though questions and ambiguities remain, both Vaishnava and Shaiva monastic traditions evince links between soldiering and low status. What requires further elucidation are questions regarding functionality and causation: namely, did the need for an armed defense on the part of the monastic orders compel a relaxation of social restrictions in order to spur recruitment? Or, conversely, was the arming of monks the result of the influx of peasants (as with pastoralist-cum-peasant Jats in the Sikh case) and others of low or marginal status into monastic communities, and if so why was militarism the result of that influx? (This is a question that needs greater elaboration with respect to Sikhs as well.) A third possibility that must be considered and that, by implication, obscures any functional relationship between militarization and social change is that the history of monastic soldiering has been used in the more recent past by conservative, high-caste elements in the orders to explain (by way of apologizing for) the contemporary presence therein of shudras, untouchables, and women.[23] An important related question concerns the organizational status of the military akharas in the nonmilitary sections of the religious orders with which they were associated. The tenuous relationships that today exist between "orthodox" (and generally high-caste) Vaishnava and Shaiva monks, on the one hand, and their respective military akharas, on the other, suggest that sectarian traditions regarding the sudden mobilization of the latter in defense of the former may well have masked more prolonged—if contentious—processes of social openness within the orders as a whole. Indeed, the fact that the military akharas survived the monopolization of arms by the East India Company in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and continue to thrive as important sections of both Shaiva and Vaishnava monasticism in the late twentieth century suggests that their significance to the religious life of north India was (and is) more social than military.[24]

Whatever the answers to these questions, more research is necessary to know the exact fate of the monastic armies after the passing of the eighteenth century. Certainly, despite the loss of an explicit military function, the trappings of military culture implicit to armed monasticism remained for the most part intact under British rule. The soldier sadhu would become domesticated as a conventional monastic type (as naga) and would complement other forms of monasticism organized around scholarship, devotion and worship, itinerancy, or some[19] combination thereof.[25] Given the apparent survival of the culture (if not the function) of military monasticism, it seems likely that members of the wealthy akharas were able to fall back on the substantial endowments, mostly in the form of land, acquired during the turbulent eighteenth century when their military and financial services were in demand. It is also possible that the many thousands of soldier monks supported by the frequent warfare of the eighteenth century simply melted back into the peasant countryside after the supremacy of British-Indian arms had been established in the early nineteenth century. Such an eventuality would be difficult to document; nevertheless, this was the argument of W. G. Orr—whose main evidence was the nineteenth-century proverb that "the man who smears his body with ashes [i.e., the naga sadhu] can wash it clean again, but the man who has his ears pierced (that is, becomes a Yogi) is a Yogi all his days."[26]

Implications

As is clear from the foregoing, any detailed discussion of the social and political dimensions of north Indian monasticism prior to the nineteenth century is fraught with historiographic pitfalls stemming from the general lack of strong documentary evidence with which to confirm or refute religious tradition.[27] This situation changes as

we enter the nineteenth century: Company officials sought to gain a more sophisticated social, political, and economic understanding of the society over which they had acquired administrative, judicial, and revenue-collecting powers, and consequently they amassed a wealth of detail regarding the religious dimensions of north Indian life. The history of this acquisition of knowledge about India is well known and need not be repeated here, save to note that the knowledge acquired took a variety of forms. On one extreme was scholarship focused on the literary splendor of ancient India, grounded in Sanskrit philology and brahmanical tradition and best symbolized by the translations of classical texts by such luminaries as Sir William Jones and H. T. Colebrooke. On the other extreme were the likes of James Tod and Francis Buchanan, who combined an interest in traditional Indian historiographies (and particularly kshatriya, or royal, genealogies) with a facility for recording in voluminous detail the political, social, religious, and economic life of specific regions.[20]

Buchanan is of particular importance here, because his accounts of Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh include frequent and detailed reference to religious belief, popular modes of worship and religious instruction, and the regional structure of monastic organizations.[28] Such descriptions appear in these accounts in three discrete forms: first, Buchanan's "topographical" sections, which describe each subdistrict jurisdiction, include an assessment of the relative strength and appeal of monastic gurus; second, his descriptions of each caste usually contain reference to its religious customs and attitudes; and third, the same section on caste concludes with a general discussion of the "sages and sects" of the district, organized according to monastic perspective.[29] The value of such a three-tiered approach is that it affords a textured and multidimensional picture of the monastic and religious life of the Gangetic core.[21]

Perhaps the most immediately revealing feature of Buchanan's Bihar accounts, from the monastic perspective, is what they omit: armed monks. Buchanan made only one brief reference to military monasticism, and that only to explain its absence. Noting that many Ramanandi nagas continued to find service "in the armies of the Rajas beyond the Yamuna" (beyond direct British control in what is now Rajasthan, southern Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh), Buchanan observed that the few who remained in south Bihar "have been obliged to abandon arms and predatory habits, and for some time their bands have not ventured to traverse the country."[30] Buchanan's village-based sages are closer to the normative image of the nonthreatening monk implicit in Warren Hastings's 1773 proclamation barring itinerant, armed sadhus from passing through in the province of Bengal. A similar portrait would be painted by Horace Hayman Wilson, the eminent Sanskritist of the mid-nineteenth century, who observed that "the tenants of these maths, particularly the Vaishnavas, are most commonly of a quiet inoffensive character, and the Mahants especially are men of talents and respectability, although they possess, occasionally, a little of that self-importance, which the conceit of superior sanctity is apt to inspire."[31]

In retrospect, it can be argued that with the gradual removal of armed monks from territories controlled by the Company in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, north Indian monasticism turned inward, away from worldly martial pursuits and toward more aesthetic, devotional, and literary accomplishments. In the Vaishnava context, this would have meant a greater emphasis on rasik-oriented bhakti, or "devotional aestheticism," which had a constituted powerful strand of both Ram and Krishna worship since the sixteenth century. The rasik tradition emphasizes heightened emotion, the careful perception of sensory experience, and in the Ramanandi context, a focus on Sita as a means of access to Ram; consequently, many "rasiks," as the practitioners of this mode of religious devotion were known, adopted the persona of a handmaid to Sita.[32] As we shall see in the next chapter, many of the main players in the politics of the Ramanandi sampraday in Ayodhya and throughout the Gangetic north were associated with the rasik tradition.

Whatever the particular mode of asceticism, the majority of the sadhus in Buchanan's accounts wielded a great deal of popular influence as village gurus—a role that combined the duties of teacher, counselor, spiritual guide, and pious exemplar. Hence it would not be inappropriate to understand them as "guideposts for the common person's society and its changing moral character" and the religious arena they inhabited as a "locus for raising social issues and for initiating and influencing change within Indian society."[33] In addition, these village gurus represented the point of contact between rural peasants and the monastic networks that crisscrossed the subcontinent. Buchanan's work took him through much of deltaic and upper Bengal and the Gangetic core, including regions that became known by 1901 as the Bihar districts of Purnea, Bhagalpur, Monghyr, Patna, Gaya, and Shahabad, and the Uttar Pradesh districts of Basti and Gorakhpur. While all his

accounts are of immense social-historical value, three of them—Bihar and Patna (1811–1812), Shahabad (1813), and Gorakhpur (1813)—possess enough religious and social detail to afford an intriguing statistical snapshot of the demography of monasticism and its popular appeal in the early nineteenth century.[22]

Each account begins with a "topography" of the district, organized according to administrative precinct, or thana. Bihar and Patna (conforming roughly to the 1901 Gaya and Patna Districts, respectively) contained a total of seventeen thanas of widely varying size and population; Shahabad ten; and Gorakhpur twenty-eight (two of which were completely deserted and most of which were relatively sparsely populated). Buchanan's treatment of each begins with a one-paragraph description of the geographical setting and basic demographic and physical dimensions, then turns to a brief mention of the thana's administrative, police, and juridical personnel. This is followed by a much more detailed statement of the institutional strengths and local authority and appeal of each religious perspective in the thana. Rather than percentages, he employed the Indian anna standard of sixteenths; occasionally he would utilize eighths, twelfths, twenty-fourths, and thirty-seconds when greater simplicity could be employed or greater accuracy was called for.[23]

Enumeration

The remainder of Buchanan's discussion in this particular thana (as with most other thanas) is focused on the quality of the soil, the types of irrigation, the number of houses of various kinds and their manner of construction, local fortifications, the main places of worship, the major festivals, local history and legend, and any interesting archeological or antiquarian remains in the vicinity.

A few points that emerge in the above excerpt merit special emphasis, inasmuch as they relate to broader patterns in Buchanan's accounts. First, in each thana Buchanan noted the proportion of the population (usually between one-eighth and one-fourth, but occasionally as high as one-half) considered by his informants (of whom more later) to be "unworthy" of religious instruction. He nevertheless included in most of his topographical descriptions the relatively small proportions dedicated to such reformist sects as the Kabirpanthis and Sivanarayanis, both of which were aggressively egalitarian and, indeed, anti-brahmanical and hence tended to attract followers from a wide social spectrum, including untouchables and "unclean" shudras. Taken together, these facts suggest that while Buchanan's religious description did not altogether ignore the religious views and practices of people deemed extremely low-status, he nevertheless dealt mostly with what may have been considered acceptable and demographically important, if not respectable, religious points of view; again, this would reflect the middle and upper-caste views of the people from whom he gleaned his data, not to mention the Bengali pandits who assisted him in his surveys and who in any case looked askance at much of Bihari culture. In any event, the lengthy discussions that usually followed Buchanan's religious tabulations include local village deities whose worship was often conducted by the socially and culturally marginalized lower classes; these were the kinds of people, and the kind of religious traditions, excluded in the systematic numerical descriptions that began each section.[24]

The second point that requires emphasis is slightly more complex. Buchanan's description of the sectarian dimensions in Gangetic Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh took two complementary forms. On the one hand, Buchanan conceived of three main divisions of Hindu religion: Shaiva-Shakta, Vaishnava, and panthi (the more recent "routes to heaven" espoused by Kabir, Nanak, and the like). On the other hand, within these large (and often overlapping) divisions were religious communities organized around the institutional ties of gurus, which usually took monastic form. Dasnami sanyasis represented the main Shaiva monastic group; Ramanandis (often referred to as Ramawats) the main Vaishnava monastic group. The main panthi community that emerges in Buchanan's accounts was the Nanakpanth, associated with the teachings of Guru Nanak, which was particularly influential in south Bihar. Other, much less prominent (at least, in the Gangetic core regions described by Buchanan) religious perspectives that possessed varying degrees of monastic manifestations were represented by the (Shaiva) Kanphat yogi community, which looked to the teachings of the fifteenth-century Gorakhnath (on account of which they are frequently referred to as Gorakhnathi and Gorakhpanthi); the (Vaishnava) Radhaballabhi sampraday, centered on the worship of Krishna as Radha's lover; the ("reformist") Kabirpanth, and the more recent (also "reformist") Shivanarayani (centered in nearby Ghazipur District in what is now Uttar Pradesh) and Daryadasi communities (centered in Shahabad District).

At the risk of an overly long aside, it should be noted that there is a tendency to be overly schematic when describing the sectarian dimensions of monasticism. Such a tendency should be carefully qualified if not avoided outright. It is best to understand Vaishnava, Shaiva, and Shakta as terms that refer to distinct yet

overlapping, and evolving, systems of religious meaning with broad popular appeal that have been drawn upon in varying degrees by thinkers over the past millennium. Two extremely important figures were Shankaracharya and Ramanujacharya, each of whom is remembered to have identified in complex metaphysical and epistemological discourses the most efficacious way of perceiving divine truth(s).[35] They themselves have long been associated with or, perhaps more precisely, been thought of as founders of major monastic communities with distinct sectarian (Shaiva as opposed to Vaishnava) dimensions. However, while Shankaracharya's status as the founder of the Dasnami order has remained unquestioned by Dasnami sanyasis, Ramanujacharya's status as a formative figure in the Ramanandi sampraday has been a matter of major contention, particularly in this century—a contention best symbolized by the very name that has come to be associated (even as early as the eighteenth century) with the monastic community that for many years viewed Ramanujacharya with great reverence. The examination of the history of this contentious moment in the Ramanandi sampraday, and of the socially radical understanding of the life of the fourteenth-century Ramanand that was re-crystallizing at this time, is the central object of the next chapter. What is important to recognize here is the manner in which individual monks were able to endow the doctrinal tenets and social philosophies of their orders with wider Indic meanings.[25]

Another important and more recent figure in the religious history of the subcontinent is, of course, Guru Nanak, whose perception of an ineffable god became the spiritual fount for Sikhism.[36] However, interpretations of Nanak's teachings varied, and as a result the Nanakpanthis observed by Buchanan in early nineteenth-century Bihar should not be confused with the khalsa Sikhs of the Punjab, though the communities were closely related. Buchanan himself noted that the followers of Nanak were divided into two groups: "the Khalesah sect founded by Govinda [i.e., Guru Govind Singh], and confined in great measure to the west of India," and "the Kholesah or original Sikhs who prevail in Behar."[37] In other words, most Nanakpanthis in Bihar remained aloof from the khalsa-fication of the sampraday. Today, the Nanakpanthis described by Buchanan would be referred to as "Udasin" and see themselves as the caretakers of universal truths articulated by Guru Nanak, particularly as mediated through Nanak's eldest son, the exceptionally long-lived Shri Chand (1494–1629). Upon the death of Nanak, the mantle of leadership in the Nanakpanth passed not to Shri Chand but to one of Nanak's favored disciples, who became known as Guru Angad, thus beginning the succession of ten gurus that would end with Govind Singh.[38] According to modern histories based on prevailing khalsa Sikh hagiography, Shri Chand and his followers were expelled in the sixteenth century from the Sikh community.[39] According to Udasin tradition, by contrast, the links between the Shri Chand and his followers, on the one hand, and the Sikh gurus and their adherents, on the other, remained strong well into the seventeenth century. For example, Udasins have long maintained that the sixth guru, Hargovind Singh, placed his son Gurditta under the personal and spiritual care of Shri Chand, who by this time was nearing the end of his long life. Indeed, not only is Gurditta himself remembered as an important Udasin guru, four of his disciples are said to have founded the principal Udasin subsects.[40]

The history of the gradual bifurcation of Nanakpanthis into what Buchanan called the Khalesah versus Kholesah divisions, or what today would be called Sikh versus Udasin, is closely linked to the changing demography of Sikhism in the Punjab and the rise of a khalsa military culture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—in contrast to developments in the Gangetic north, where the rise of a military ethos in religious communities occurred primarily among Vaishnavas and Shaivas. That division was further hardened by the British recruitment of Sikhs into the Indian army, the rise of the Singh Sabha in and beyond the Punjab, and the emergence of Akali politics surrounding the status of Sikh shrines (controlled before 1925 by Udasins) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[41]

Buchanan's tabulations of monastic groupings within either the Shaiva-Shakta or Vaishnava rubric are further complicated by the fact that he tended to draw a distinction between monastic gurus and brahman gurus. This practice probably reflected the fact that many of his local monastic informants themselves drew such a distinction;[42] it may also have reflected the socioreligious predilections of the Bengali pandits who assisted him in his data gathering. Despite these factors, however, it is likely that in the case of Vaishnavas, brahman gurus such as the influential Pandit Ritu Raj Misra, mentioned in the extract cited above, were affiliated with Ramanandi teachings—though the exact nature of that affiliation remains unclear.[43] The Ramanandi connections of Vaishnava brahmans emerge in a later passage describing monastic establishments in Buxar (which was, Buchanan noted, the main Ramanandi center in Shahabad District). Buchanan observed that in Buxar "the convents of the Brahmans, who have adopted this [the Ramanandi] order, as usual are confounded with those occupied by Sudras, nor have I been able

to distinguish the number of each"; in a characteristic aside, he added that "my Bengalese assistants[,] confounding them [Bihari Vaishnavas] with the Vaishnavas of their own country, hold them in the utmost contempt."[44] In contrast to the Vaishnava credentials of most brahman gurus in Shahabad, Buchanan observed that "most of the Pandits, who act as Gurus in [Bihar and Patna] districts, worship Sakti as their favourite, and are Tantriks."[45] As he proceeded northwest from Shahabad into Gorakhpur District and closer to Ayodhya, which by this time was firmly established as a major Ramanandi monastic and pilgrimage center, Buchanan recorded increasing numbers of brahmans serving as Vaishnava gurus.[46]

Buchanan's observations respecting the religious appeal of gurus may be represented in tabular form. Table 1 below shows the population ratios (shown here as percentages) claimed as adherents by the main monastic communities and brahmans out of those persons said to "receive religious instruction" in the three most detailed of Buchanan's accounts—Bihar and Patna (two separate districts), Shahabad, and Gorakhpur. "Guru patronage" figures are shown for Brahmans, Dasnamis, Ramanandis, and Nanakshahis (from considerations of space, the less prominent religious perspectives, such as Kabirpanthi and Radhaballabhi, are not included). The column to the far right under the heading "RRI/Hindus" shows the total percentage of Hindus who, according to Buchanan, "received religious instruction" from gurus; the four columns to the left show percentages of that total number of Hindus who received religious instruction.[26]

1. Guru Patronage in the Gangetic Core, 1811-1813 (percent)

	Brahman	Dasnami	Ramanandi	Nanakshahi	RRI/Hindus
SOURCE: Buchanan, Bihar and Patna, 1811-1812; 1:57-262, and 2:723, table 4 (population); Shahabad, 1812-1812, 51-151; "An Account of the Northern Part of the District of Gorakhpur, 1812," 139-345. The population figures used to calculate the above percentages for Shahabad and Gorakhpur rely on the tables provided in Martin, The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India, vol. 1 (Behar and Shahabad), Shahabad Appendix, 44; and vol. 2 (Bhagalpoor, Goruckpoor, and Dinajpoor), Goruckpoor Appendix, 9, respectively.					
Patna	14	30	8	39	53
Bihar	14	40	9	37	62
Shahabad	37	23	16	20	76
Gorakhpur	64	11	20	1	85

Two points should be kept in mind when reading Table 1. First, and most important, higher percentages of brahman gurus in Shahabad and, more especially, Gorakhpur Districts were Vaishnava in their religious outlook, and though it is difficult to quantify, many of them would have had ties to the Ramanandi sampraday, particularly as Buchanan moved closer to Ayodhya on the western edge of Gorakhpur. This means that the percentage of guru patronage for Ramanandis is much higher in those districts than shown in the table. Second, the gradual rise in the strength of Ramanandis (particularly if we understand increasing numbers of brahman gurus to be Ramanandi) as Buchanan traveled west from Patna and Bihar to Shahabad and thence to Gorakhpur was, in all likelihood, directly related to the gradual rise in the percentages of Hindus who "received religious instruction." The reason for this is the liberal social philosophy of the Ramanandi sampraday, which would have attracted many low-status groups into the institutional and ideological ambit of Vaishnava belief.[27]

Indeed, Buchanan's remarks on religious practice in the Gangetic core, together with comments by other observers through the nineteenth century, indicate that Vaishnava gurus (and Ramanandis in particular) pursued a far more aggressive program of social and religious reform in comparison with their Dasnami and Nanakpanthi counterparts. Consequently, Vaishnava bairagis were drawn from the entire varna spectrum and included not only brahmans but many shudras. I have already related Buchanan's observations respecting the profusion of both brahman and shudra Ramanandi gurus in Buxar, the Vaishnava center of Shahabad District. In Patna, Buchanan remarked that while some Vaishnava gurus are brahman, "most are Sudras."[47] And even in Purnea District near the border of Bengal, where most of the Vaishnava gurus tended to follow the teachings of the Bengali saint Chaitanya, Buchanan noted that "the Ramanandi Brahmans and Vairagi Sudras are usually confounded together, and the name Ramayit [var. Ramawat] is given to both."[48]

Equally important was the fact that Ramanandis, according to Buchanan's accounts, encouraged their lay followers to adhere to a rigid moral code and a strict daily regimen. Describing Vaishnavas as "everywhere the most strict," Buchanan noted that

"some few of them here [Bihar and Patna] will neither pray nor even show common civility to any god but those of his own sect."[49] The emphasis on a pure life applied as well to daily diet: "All the Hindus, Brahman or Sudra, of the sect of Vishnu [i.e., Ramanandis or their adherents], are remarkably strict in eating, reject altogether rice cleaned by boiling, all parched grains, and animal food"; by contrast, Buchanan observed that "all the Sudras, except those of the sect of Vishnu, drink avowedly."[50] Adherence to rigorous Vaishnava mores under the tutelage of Ramanandis, even for untouchables, thus afforded a substantial aura of self-respect. Again, Buchanan: "men of impure or vile tribes, who wish to be thought better than their neighbors, and who abstain from meat, fish, and spirituous liquors, are called Bhakats [devotees] . . . and at the recommendation of the Vairagis [var. bairagi], who are their gurus, have given up an indulgence of their appetites."[51] Not only were Ramanandis eager to attract followers into the sampraday irrespective of status, especially those derided as "vile" and "impure," but they were ready to encourage a pure lifestyle as a way of undermining the caste discrimination that stigmatized low-status populations.[28]

For Buchanan this picture of purposeful, upright Ramanandi behavior stood in stark contrast to the conduct of the Dasnamis and Nanakshahis. Adherents of the former were "so careless or ignorant that they never have taken the trouble to inquire from their instructor whether the secret prayer is addressed to Siva or Sakti, and they do not understand a word of it." He added in a later passage, while Dasnamis "affect a life of mortification, . . . they are accused of being in private very indulgent to their sensual appetites."[52] Further, he mentioned no special dietary restrictions prescribed by Dasnamis that might have enhanced both the self-image and the social respectability of the lower status groups among their followers. Perhaps more revealing was Buchanan's observation that while Dasnami gurus benefited from the patronage of numerous shudras as lay followers, "Sudras are not admitted into the order."[53]

Buchanan recorded similar criticisms with respect to Nanakpanthis. Based on his extensive discussions with Mahant Govinda Das, a leading Nanakpanthi of Bihar, Buchanan observed that "the Fakirs [Govinda Das's own term] of the Kholasah sect of Sikhs [i.e., Nanakpanthis or Udasins] admit into their own order only Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas; but among their followers they admit all Hindus, who are not vile; and they entirely exclude all Mlechchhas, such as Muhammedans or Christians."

Buchanan also noted that inclusion in the Nanakpanthi community as lay followers did not necessarily involve an abandonment of prior religious practices and convictions: devotees "follow exactly the same customs that they did before their admission" and "observe the same rules of caste, employ the same Brahmans as Purohits [ritual officiants] in every ceremony, and in all cases of danger worship exactly the same gods." However, while Govinda Das asserted that "Vishnu, Brahma and Siva are gods [and that] he occasionally makes them offerings," he claimed to do so "merely in compliance with the custom of the country." By contrast, in personal spiritual instruction Govinda Das acknowledged "only one supreme God (Parameswara)" who "ought to be the only object of worship," to the exclusion of the secondary Hindu deities listed above. These latter admissions by Govind Das would seem to imply a conscious recognition on his part of the divergence that had developed between the normative dictates of religion set out by Guru Nanak in the sixteenth century and Nanakpanth religious practice extant in the early nineteenth century.[54]

Though he did not remark upon it, Buchanan's descriptions of Dasnamis and Nanakpanthis reveal interesting similarities, particularly with respect to social exclusivity in matters of monastic recruitment and a general impression of laxity in religious observances.[55] Today there is little question of the strong affinity between Dasnamis and Nanakpanthis (or Udasins). Ghurye noted in the 1950s that "the philosophy of the Udasi ascetics is the same monistic Vedanta as that of the Dasanamis," and that "whenever there is any quarrel with the Vaishnava ascetics, they [Udasins] are always to be found on the side of the Saiva sadhus."[56] The anthropologists Baidyanath Saraswati and Surajit Sinha recorded in Banaras in the 1960s an Udasin tradition that the first person to take initiation from Shri Chand was Bhakta Giri, a Dasnami sanyasi of Bodh Gaya.[57] And Udasins assert that not only was Shri Chand an avatar of Shiva, but that Shri Chand and Guru Nanak only articulated Udasin truths that had existed since time began.[58]

Though measuring sectarian prosperity and decline is exceptionally difficult, it would appear that the proximity to Shaivism and the rise of khalsa politics conspired to diminish the institutional fortunes of the Nanakpanthi community in Bihar by the end of the nineteenth century. Such a conclusion is at least suggested by the meager returns for Nanakshahis of any kind, particularly as compared to Ramanandi bairagis and Dasnami sanyasis, in the census figures

for the years 1891 and 1901 in the Bihar districts of Patna, Gaya, and Shahabad (roughly congruent with Buchanan's Patna, Bihar, and Shahabad districts).[59] In retrospect, Nanakpanthis in Bihar may be understood to have experienced what Richard Eaton has described as a process of "accretion": Udasins in Bihar, by gradually approximating Shaiva beliefs and practices, came to be regarded (and, indeed, regarded themselves) as Hindu by the early twentieth century.[60] This process would have been spurred as well by khalsa Sikh reforms emanating from the Punjab after the middle of the nineteenth century, which were designed to purge from Sikhism "corrupt" Hindu practices, establish for Sikhs a distinct, non-Hindu religious identity, and bolster khalsa Sikh institutional fortunes in the twentieth century at the expense of Udasins.

Perhaps not unlike khalsa Sikhs in the Punjab, Ramanandis in the early nineteenth century were exceptional for their unwavering, aggressive moral posture in the Gangetic core districts surveyed by Buchanan. This was coupled with, and possibly contributed to, the improving material fortunes of the sampraday in the central Gangetic region during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the evidence for which exists in the history of the major pilgrimage centers of Banaras and Ayodhya. In their anthropological survey of Banaras carried out in the 1960s and '70s, Baidyanath Saraswati and Surajit Sinha discovered that the two most prolific monastic communities were the Dasnami and the Ramanandi. That Dasnamis predominated in Banaras is not at all surprising given that the city, as Kashi, was long regarded as Shiva's place, but the rise to prominence of Ramanandis there is a fact worthy of note. Even more remarkable is that, according to Saraswati and Sinha, of the forty Ramanandi institutions in Banaras, two were claimed to have been founded by Ramanand himself in the fifteenth century, while the remaining thirty-eight were founded between 1700 and 1968 (with over half founded after 1900).[61] Likewise, in his own very different anthropological exploration, van der Veer observes that "there can be no doubt about the fact that Ayodhya became an important pilgrimage centre only in the eighteenth century," and that Ramanandis rose to dominate the religious topography of the town at the expense of an established Dasnami presence and with the patronage of Awadhi nawabs headquartered in Lucknow.[62]

Conclusions

One large agricultural community of Bihar that increasingly patronized Vaishnava monks, according to Herbert Hope Risley, the celebrated ethnologist-anthropometrist of the late nineteenth century, were Kurmi peasants. This is a remarkable transformation, given Buchanan's observation eighty years earlier that the vast majority of Kurmis in Bihar looked to Dasnami sanyasis for religious guidance.[64] An important observation made at the end of the nineteenth century by Jogendra Nath Bhattacharya, president of the College of Pandits in Nadia (in Bengal), helps to put these changes in religious-historical perspective: "the Vaishnavas are very fast extending the sphere of their influence, and many of the Tantrics [Shaivas and Shaktas] are now espousing Vaishnava tenets in order to have the advantage of enlisting among their followers the low classes that are becoming rich under British rule."[65] That such a process was already under way in the early nineteenth century is suggested by Buchanan's surprised observation that Vaishnava images were installed in a prominent Dasnami math in northern Gorakhpur and were receiving the undivided attention of the gosains there.[66]

These religious transformations may help explain, in turn, the terminological ambiguities that plague any historical discussion of monasticism in the Gangetic north. Perhaps the best example of such ambiguity is the term gosain itself, which even in the early nineteenth century had begun to lose its specific Shaiva and Dasnami connotations in the Gangetic core of Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh to become a general term denoting sadhus.[67] Prior to 1800, "gosain" in the Gangetic core referred primarily to Dasnami nagas. This continued to be the case in the vicinity of Patna as late as 1810, during Buchanan's visit: describing the mutual enmity felt by monks in the various orders in Patna and Bihar (later Gaya) Districts, he remarked that "the title Gosaing, which the Brahmins of the sect of Vishnu adopt in Bengal, is considered by the followers of Ramananda as highly disgraceful, and as appropriate to the Dasnami-Sannyasis, their most bitter enemies."[29] However, upon heading west from Patna and crossing the Son river, which separated Shahabad from Patna and Bihar (later Gaya) Districts, Buchanan found that the usage of the term gosain began to alter: in the town of Ara, less than ten miles west of the Son, the principal Ramanandi referred to himself as Gosaing. As Buchanan moved further west into Gorakhpur, he observed that "here the term Guru is not very commonly used, and that Gosaing is applied as synonymous, and is applied to the sages of all castes and sects." By the close of the nineteenth century, Risley found that the term in Bihar also applied to house-holder Vaishnavas, in addition to being employed as a synonym for bairagi.[68] By 1910 the term gosain had become fully applicable to both Shaivas and Vaishnavas, even in Patna and Gaya

Districts. Hence, local subdistrict officers conducting village-by-village surveys in Bihar were describing thakurbaris, or Vaishnava temples, erected or inhabited by gosains.[69] However, the term "gosain" also continued to refer to Shaiva monks throughout Gangetic south Bihar, as illustrated by the existence of "a pucca Shivalay [brick-built Shiva temple] built by Gosain Bisun Puri 30 years ago at the cost of about Rs. 2000/-."[70] Conversely, there were no references to bairagis having constructed Shaiva temples or tending to Shaiva images in the village notes of Patna, Gaya, and Shahabad Districts; furthermore, the term "bairagi" continued throughout the nineteenth century (and continues today) to refer specifically to Vaishnava sadhus.[30]

Given the increased applicability of the term "gosain" and the general impression among nineteenth-century observers of the spread and dominance of Ramanandis in the Gangetic north, it seems likely that as non-Vaishnava sadhus increasingly adopted Vaishnava tenets or melted into Ramanandi institutions, the terms that had heretofore described those sadhus began to be lose their specific sectarian associations. An additional factor that has already been noted was that in the eighteenth century Ramanandis had gained control of major monastic centers in the Gangetic north, such as Ayodhya; consequently, much of the terminology and religious practices associated with those places would have been absorbed by the Vaishnava newcomers.[71] These explanations, if correct, would imply that the terminological shift would have already begun by the early nineteenth century in regions considered Vaishnava strongholds, and indeed, Buchanan's observation (noted above) on the loose applicability of the term "gosain" in Gorakhpur and, to a lesser extent, Shahabad Districts seems to bear this out. This explanation is further supported by a consideration of the term atit (literally, detached) which, in the early nineteenth century, referred specifically to the less orthodox ranks of Dasnamis who made up the vast majority of Shaiva sanyasis in the north.[72] Atits, according to Wilson, were not nearly so strict in their ascetic practices as dandi (orthodox) sanyasis, and consequently could engage in business transactions, own property, and officiate as temple priests; many atits, then, would have been far more susceptible to popular religious attitudes than their dandi counterparts. By the late nineteenth century, Risley observed that the term applied both to Vaishnava sadhus and to "degraded" Shaiva sanyasis, which for Risley meant those who had "succumbed to the temptations of the flesh"; meanwhile, William Crooke, who directed the census in Uttar Pradesh, argued that a distinction needed to be drawn between householder (or married, gharbari) and sanyasi atits, and that while the latter were generally regarded as Shaiva, they were addressed with the Vaishnava invocation, "Namo Narayanaya," or "bow to Narayana."[73] By the mid twentieth century, "atit" (like gosain) had ceased to have a specific Shaiva connotation.[74]

An unfortunate consequence of this growing terminological imprecision is that it renders useless from the ascetic perspective much of the strictly quantitative data generated by the colonial censuses of the late 1800s and early 1900s. This is because far more individuals in Patna District referred to themselves in the 1891 census as gosain (3,438) and atit (1,218) than as bairagi (546) or sanyasi (621); likewise a decade later, in the 1901 and 1911 censuses for Patna District, there were many more gosains than atits, bairagis, and sanyasis combined.[75] Shahabad District, by contrast, showed large returns (around 7,000) for atits in all three censuses, on average nearly three times that of all other sadhus combined. In addition, the population figures referring to one or another ascetic identity were highly aberrant over the three censuses in Bengal province (which included Bihar), rendering any interpretation virtually impossible. Indeed, so pronounced were the aberrations in the first large-scale British-Indian census in 1872 that census officials decided to omit the returns for the relative numbers of "various religious sects" in the province of Bengal.[76] The situation had not improved even by the 1911 census, the director of which noted that "it was decided not to attempt to obtain a record of Hindu sects, previous experience having shewn that the results are so inaccurate or incomplete as to be of little or no statistical value."[77]

The interpretive problems were particularly pronounced in Bihar, and one source of confusion for census officials there may well have been the general terminological fluidity noted above, which in all likelihood enabled sadhus to refer to themselves in a variety of ways depending on the phrasing of census inquiries regarding identity.[78] Another factor that would have further complicated the task of interpreting the aggregate data was the very size and diversity of the province of Bengal, which until 1912 included the culturally distinct regions of Bihar, Bengal, and Orissa. Though those regions possessed a shared religious vocabulary, that vocabulary did not necessarily refer to comparable religious phenomena. The situation was less complex to the west, in Uttar Pradesh, which was not only more homogeneous culturally but, especially in the western plain between Banaras and Agra, predominantly[31] Vaishnava.[79]

However, as we shall see in the next chapter, by the early twentieth century the Vaishnava ascendancy over sectarian rivals was of less significance than internal distinctions among Vaishnavas themselves, particularly among Ramanandis.For the historian, religion cannot not be understood independently of status and the social order, however these are expressed. Thus far I have concentrated on the social dimensions of monastic sampraday in the Gangetic core as revealed in Vaishnava and Shaiva soldiering prior to the nineteenth century, in the religious networks described by Buchanan in the early nineteenth century, and in random observations up to 1900. My primary aim here has been to describe the presence of a Vaishnava reform-mindedness in the Gangetic north, rooted in the greater social openness and broader socioreligious vision evident in the Ramanandi sampraday as compared with the other major monastic communities. My discussion reflects approaches to social relations either implicit in religious tradition (particularly with regard to monastic soldiering) or, more particularly, explicit in the opinions articulated by gurus, particularly in Buchanan's accounts. Hence, thus far, the discussion reflects the views of sadhus. By contrast, it is much more difficult to discern for this period—even in Buchanan's rich prose—the opinions that low-status people (whether shudra or untouchable) may have held on issues of status, religious identity, and monastic recruitment. As we shall see more clearly in chapter 2, sadhus were often self-conscious social actors, accustomed to offering guidance based on their worldviews and to having their opinions solicited and registered with care. By contrast, the opinions of shudras and untouchables (whether cultivators, artisans, or laborers) were generally unsolicited, and as a result their voices were not heard—at least, not until the early twentieth century when, abruptly, many erstwhile shudras emerged as able social activists and vociferous articulators of kshatriya (and decidedly non-shudra) status.[32]

I take up in detail that early twentieth-century "kshatriya reform" history and historiography, and the ways in which it drew on and intersected with the religious institutions in the Gangetic north, in chapters 3 and 4. However, it is important to note here a key element of those chapters so as to place the present discussion in broader perspective. The success of kshatriya reform movements depended on the ability of popular intellectuals (who, in most cases, were not sadhus) to initiate new kinds of religious discussions as a basis for social change. Kshatriya reform did, at times, benefit from the intellectual contributions of individual sadhus and, more frequently, from the authoritative opinions of prominent swamis recorded in regional publications. However, it did not depend upon the leadership of monks or even the active complicity of monastic institutions. The fact that peasant and artisan intellectuals could initiate a religious discourse to advance a specific social agenda meant that religion for them (the intellectuals, if not all peasants and artisans) had become, at some fundamental level, a more private affair, and that the sadhu either as holy man or as guru and counselor was no longer as crucial a component of popular religious life. This should not, I would argue, be taken to signify the decline of monasticism in north Indian peasant life as such. However, the increasing "laicization of religion" should be understood as one among several challenges facing Indian monasticism, particularly after the middle of the twentieth century.[80]

References

[1] See Bernard Cohn, "The Role of the Gosains in the Economy of Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Upper India," Indian Economic and Social History Review 1, no. 4 (1964): 175–82; Dirk Kolff, "Sanyasi Trader-Soldiers," Indian Economic and Social History Review 8 (1971): 213–20; and Christopher Bayly, Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770–1870 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), esp. 125–44. [BACK]

[2] Bayly, Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars, 242. [BACK]

[3] Sushobhan C. Sarkar, "A Note on Puran Giri Gosain," Bengal Past & Present 43 (April-June 1932): 83–87; see also Jonathan Duncan, "An Account of Two Fakeers, with their Portraits," Asiatic Researches 5 (1808): 45–46. [BACK]

[4] See Suranjan Chatterjee, "New Reflections on the Sannyasi, Fakir and Peasants' War," Economic and Political Weekly 19, no. 4 (28 January 1984); and Atis K. Dasgupta, The Fakir and Sannyasi Uprisings (Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi, 1992), 34–40. [BACK]

[5] See David Lorenzen, "Warrior Ascetics in Indian History," Journal of the American Oriental Society 98, no. 1 (1978): 72–75, who examines briefly the underlying causes of the conflict. Jamini Mohan Ghosh, Sanyasi and Fakir Raiders in Bengal (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1930), provides a narrative of the skirmishes primarily from the imperial military perspective. [BACK]

[6] 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]

[7] Of course, the late nineteenth-century novelist Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay took a keen interest in the conflict as a Bengali nationalist, the result of which was the novel Anandamatha (1882; first translated into English as The Abbey of Bliss by Nares Chandra Sen-Gupta [Calcutta: P. M. Neogi, 1906]), a portrayal of sanyasi soldiers as prototypical Indian freedom fighters. On "rebellion" as a misnomer, see Lorenzen, "Warrior Ascetics in Indian History," 72–75. [BACK]

[8] Hence the term naga (Sanskrit nagna and Hindi nanga, meaning "naked") by which they are generally known. However, nakedness was and continues to be a bone of contention between Shaiva and Vaishnava nagas at the kumbh and elsewhere. See Surajit Sinha and Baidyanath Saraswati, Ascetics of Kashi: An Anthropological Exploration (Varanasi: N. K. Bose Memorial Foundation, 1978), 121–22. There are also indications that the term is related to nag, or snake, especially given the symbolic importance of the snake to both Shaiva and Vaishnava arms. [BACK]

[9] Government of India, Foreign Department, Secret Branch proceedings, nos. 5 and 6 of 21 January 1773, National Archives of India, New Delhi. [BACK]

[10] W. H. McLeod, The Evolution of the Sikh Community: Five Essays (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975), 1–19. McLeod argues that the arming of Sikhs was not a consequence 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 deemphasizing the political context, however, McLeod fails to explain why Jat peasants were armed in the first place; instead he assumes 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, "Presidential Address," Proceedings of the Punjab History Conference 1971 [Patiala: Punjabi University, 1972], 49–54.) 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]" (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]

[11] J. N. Farquhar, "The Fighting Ascetics of India," The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 9 (1925): 444; and "The Organization of the Sannyasis of the Vedanta," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, July 1925, 483 n. 1. Ghurye, Indian Sadhus, 92, 101, agrees that shudras provided the main breeding ground for warrior sanyasis. This continues to be the general perception among sanyasis, as indicated by Ramchandra Giri, mahant of Damami math near Sitamarhi in north Bihar, in conversation with the author, 25 November 1994. For challenges to the communal basis of the arming of Shaivas, see Ghurye, Indian Sadhus, 108–9; cf. also the version given in Sinha and Saraswati, Ascetics of Kashi, 94–95. The Dasnami order is said to have been founded by the ninth-century south Indian philosopher-theologian Shankaracharya. [BACK]

[12] For example, 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 a distinct scorn on the part of orthodox Dasnamis for the extant akharas of soldier sadhus (37). [BACK]

[13] Ramanand's status as a follower of Ramanujacharya became a contentious issue in the early twentieth century, at which time a radical faction succeeded in transforming the hagiography of the order by removing Ramanujacharya from the preceptor genealogy, or guru-parampara. See chapter 2 for an extended discussion of the debate surrounding this ideological change and its social and cultural dimensions. [BACK]

[14] For the Galta tradition, I rely on Richard Burghart, "The Founding of the Ramanandi

Sect," Ethnohistory 25, no. 2 (Spring 1978): 129–31. [BACK]

[15] Cf. Burghart, "Founding of the Ramanandi Sect," 131. Two of the banned disciples of Ramanand, namely, Kabir and Ravidas (and particularly the former), are known for their pointed critiques of caste hierarchy. [BACK]

[16] Van der Veer, Gods on Earth, 139; B. P. Sinha, Ram Bhakti men Rasika Sampraday [The Rasika sampraday in Ram worship] (Balrampur: Avadh Sahitya Mandir, 1957), 119–21. [BACK]

[17] On the social dimensions of nonmonastic military recruitment during this period, see Kolff, Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy. [BACK]

[18] Van der Veer, Gods on Earth, 88. [BACK]

[19] See Monika Thiel-Horstmann, "Warrior Ascetics in Eighteenth-Century Rajasthan and the Religious Policy of Jai Singh II" (unpublished essay, no date). I am grateful to the author for providing me a copy of this essay. [BACK]

[20] In addition to Thiel-Horstmann, see Gopal Narayan Bahura and Chandramani Singh, Catalogue of Historical Documents in the Kapad Dwara [royal warehouse], Jaipur (Amber-Jaipur: Jaigarh Public Charitable Trust, 1988), v–vii, on Jai Singh II's growing attraction—which, in part, accounts for his interest in Vaishnava affairs—to the Bengali Vaishnavism of Chaitanya and the Gauriya Vaishnava Goswamis of Vrindaban. [BACK]

[21] Documents nos. 1176 (undated, from the nine Ramanandi mahants), 1483 (also undated), 1277 (referring to bairagis, dated 29 April 1733), and 1275 (dated 28 March 1736), listed in Bahura and Singh, Catalogue of Historical Documents in the Kapad Dwara, Jaipur. [BACK]

[22] See nos. 1506, 1507, 1518, and 1520 (all undated), ibid. The last of these, in which several Ramanandi mahants make a series of specific pledges to Jai Singh II, is reproduced as well in A. K. Roy, History of the Jaipur City (New Delhi: Manohar, 1978), 26, and is discussed in Thiel-Horstmann, "Warrior Ascetics in Eighteenth-Century Rajasthan." [BACK]

[23] In this argument, soldier monasticism and the entry of the lowly into the monastic orders would have been joined in the institutional memory of the monastic orders at some later date. Pursuing this line of reasoning would require great care in amassing, and dating, oral tradition, since such tradition would be held to reveal more about the contemporary constitution of the orders than about recruitment alleged to have occurred in the distant past. I should note that I am raising all these questions in current research on the history and historiography of armed monks in northern India. [BACK]

[24] Perhaps the strongest indication of their continued relevance in the religious life of northern India is the central ritual role played by the military akharas during the main bathing days of the kumbh mela, India's premier pilgrimage festival, which lasts a month and takes place every three years, alternating between Hardwar, Prayag (Allahabad), Ujjain, and Nasik. During the last maha (great) kumbh at Prayag (in early 1989), the main day for immersion in the triveni (the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and subterranean Saraswati) fell on 6 February: approximately five million people, including most importantly tens of thousands of naga sadhus whose akhara processions are the centerpiece of the event, immersed themselves in the sacred water on that day alone; the total festival population was over ten million. See "Pilgrims Pouring in for Holy Dip," Hindustan Times, 6 February 1989, 10; and "Over a Crore for Kumbh," Hindustan Times, 13 January 1989, 9, for details of important bathing dates and astrological calculations. [BACK]

[25] For a discussion of this typology, see Peter van der Veer, "Taming the Ascetic: Devotionalism in a Hindu Monastic Order," Man, n.s., 22, no. 4 (December 1987): 680–95. [BACK]

[26] W. G. Orr, "Armed Religious Ascetics in Northern India," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 25 (1940): 96. This adage appears in slightly different form in a collection of proverbs by C. E. Luard, compiled around 1900. Luard, "Central Indian Proverbs," Mss.Eur.E.139, Oriental and India Office Collection, British Library, London, ff. 381–82. [BACK]

[27] This is not to say that such documents do not exist. To the contrary, substantial records are housed in monastic institutions throughout the north; the issue is primarily one of access, particularly to records held by the military akharas. For example, van der Veer, Gods on

Earth, 154, reports that he was refused access to the papers in the Hanuman Garhi, the main naga institution in Ayodhya. [BACK]

[28] Francis Buchanan, An Account of the District of Purnea in 1809–1810 (Patna: Bihar and Orissa Research Society, 1928; reprint, New Delhi: Usha Jain, 1986); An Account of the District of Bhagalpur in 1810–1811 (Patna: Bihar and Orissa Research Society, 1939); An Account of the Districts of Bihar and Patna in 1811–1812, 2 vols. (Patna: Bihar and Orissa Research Society, 1934; reprint, New Delhi: Usha Jain, 1986); An Account of the District of Shahabad in 1812–1813 (Patna: Bihar and Orissa Research Society, 1934; reprint, New Delhi: Usha Jain, 1986); and "An Account of the Northern Part of the District of Gorakhpur, 1812," Buchanan-Hamilton Papers, Mss.Eur.D.91–92, Oriental and India Office Collection, British Library, London. Given the dates for the Shahabad account, the true dates for Gorakhpur are probably 1813–14. See Appendix 1 for a discussion of Buchanan's life and work. The accounts of the Bengal (proper) and Gorakhpur districts have never been published in their entirety, though substantial extracts were published in Robert Montgomery Martin, The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India. . . ., vol. 1: Behar and Shahabad; vol. 2: Bhagulpoor, Goruckpoor, and Dinajapoor; vol. 3: Puraniya, Rongopoor, and Assam (London: Wm. H. Allen, 1838). I refer to this work below as Eastern India. [BACK]

[29] See, for example, Buchanan, Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812, 1:57–262 ("Topography of the Division"), and 313–85 ("Of the Hindus"); and Shahabad, 1812–1813, 38–151 ("Topography of the Division"), and 182–226 ("Of the Hindus"). In each work, the sections entitled "Of the Hindus" include the discussions of both caste and sect. It should also be noted that Buchanan's interest in the religious dimensions of north Indian life seemed to increase as he progressed from Bengal into Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. As evidence one need only peruse his Purnea, 1809–1810, which offers comparatively less detail on sects, gurus, and belief; in the subsequent accounts westward, Buchanan devoted much greater attention to such matters and even provided detailed numerical data, which I discuss below. Buchanan's seeming lack of interest in such matters in his accounts of Purnea and of districts in Bengal proper may have been due to the Bengali pandits who accompanied him, who would have seen no reason to comment on religious details familiar to them in Bengal; once they entered Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh they may have had occasion to remark on the dramatic differences in monastic tradition and forms of worship. [BACK]

[30] Buchanan, Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812, 1:375. Dasnamis also sought service outside British territory after 1800, as was clear by the brief visit of Kamptagiri's force of fifteen hundred mounted soldiers to the encampment of the Maratha Mahadji Scindia in Malwa in 1809. See Thomas D. Broughton, Letters Written in a Maratha Camp in 1809 (London: J. Murray, 1813), 129. Kamptagiri was a disciple of Kanchangiri, himself a disciple of the celebrated gosain commander Anupgiri who served the nawabs of Awadh and others in the latter half of the eighteenth century. [BACK]

[31] H. H. Wilson, Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus (Calcutta: Bishop's College Press, 1846; reprint, New Delhi: Cosmo, 1977; first published 1828–31), 53. He added, however, that "there are, it is true, exceptions to this innocuous character, and robberies, and murders have been traced to these religious establishments" (53–54). [BACK]

[32] On rasiks as part of a threefold typology of Ramanandi asceticism (along with naga and tyagi), see van der Veer, Gods on Earth, 159–72; on rasiks as practitioners of Vaishnava devotion and performance, see Lutgendorf, The Life of a Text, 309–21. Both Lutgendorf and van der Veer rely in large part on the detailed study of Bhagwati Prasad Sinha, Ram Bhakti men Rasika Sampraday. [BACK]

[33] This theorization of the ascetic is from Khare, The Untouchable as Himself, 25. [BACK]

[34] Buchanan, Account of Shahabad, 1812–1813, 63–64. [BACK]

[35] Shankaracharya, according to his advaita (or nondualist) philosophical vision, posited plural reality to be a product of delusion and argued that cognitive unity could only be achieved through the exploration and perfection of knowledge. Ramanujacharya responded to this strict monism by positing that while final and unequivocal truth is to be found in the divine, the divine expresses itself in the multiplicity of the material world; therefore, to seek to discern the falseness of plural reality is a singularly

misguided endeavor. Ramanuja favored bhakti as the best and highest way of reconciling the contradictions of existence, perceiving divinity, and achieving supreme bliss. [BACK]

[36] See McLeod, Evolution of the Sikh Community, 6–7, on the several religious strands in Guru Nanak's teachings. [BACK]

[37] Buchanan, Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812, 1:67–68. In the published version of this passage, kholesah is spelled khalesah, an error that would have rendered Buchanan's observation devoid of meaning were it not for his qualifier ("or original Sikhs") and his use of the term kholesah elsewhere (see, for instance, the description on p. 368). [BACK]

[38] Many Dasnamis sanyasis today contend that Shri Chand was saddened (udas) at being passed over by his father for leadership of the religious community, and hence his followers have since borne the appellation "Udasin," or full of sorrow (see Ghurye, Indian Sadhus, 141–43). Ghurye views this etymological explanation with skepticism, noting that "even the sectarian Udasins themselves are hard put to it to provide a rational explanation of the term." [BACK]

[39] Ved Parkash, The Sikhs in Bihar (Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1981), 152: "Amar excommunicated the Udasins, lest the new Sikh religion should meet the same fate as the other mendicant orders of the country." Parkash does not elaborate on the nature of that fate. [BACK]

[40] H. A. Rose, "Udasis," in James Hastings, ed., Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1921), 504. Rose notes that one of these subsects, Bhagat Bhagwan, claims a large following among Udasins in Eastern India. This statement is corroborated by Ghurye, Indian Sadhus, 145, who, however, notes a comparatively small following in western Bihar. Though Buchanan refers to the prevailing Nanakpanthis in Bihar only as Kholesah Sikhs and Nanakshahis, it seems probable that they belonged to the Bhagat Bhagwan subsect of Udasins. [BACK]

[41] On the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Rajiv A. Kapur, Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986); and Fox, Lions of the Punjab. Sachchidanand Sharma, Udasi Sampraday aur Kavi Sant Rena [The Udasi Sampraday and the Poet-Saint Rena] (Dehradun: Sahitya Sadan, 1967), 22–23, argues that many Udasins no longer wish to acknowledge their historical connection to Guru Nanak and the Sikhs because the Akali-led Gurudvara reclamation movement of 1921 displaced Udasin control of many Sikh shrines in the Punjab. [BACK]

[42] On this point, see H. H. Wilson's observations with respect to brahman versus ascetic gurus in his Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus, 30–31. [BACK]

[43] It is entirely possible, however, that tensions within the Ramanandi sampraday over the question of status and attitudes toward caste may have had a role in the distinctions being posited between brahman and nonbrahman Ramanandis. See the following chapter on these tensions, which erupted into a full-blown dispute in 1918 and remain unresolved today. [BACK]

[44] Buchanan, Shahabad, 1812–1813, 219–20. Elsewhere (Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812, 1:374), Buchanan noted that "The term Vaishnav is not considered as disgraceful for a Brahman, as is the case in Bengal and in the south." [BACK]

[45] Buchanan, Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812, 1:369. [BACK]

[46] Buchanan, "Account of Gorakhpur, 1812," 139–345. [BACK]

[47] Buchanan, Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812, 1:68. Followers of Vaishnava gurus in Patna city itself were divided almost equally, according to Buchanan, between "Ramawats" (Ramanandis) and Radhaballabhis. However, outside of Patna Radhaballabhis were notable for their relative scarcity. Later, Buchanan noted (1:374) that [BACK]

[48] The Ramanandis indeed will instruct their followers in the worship of any god of the side of Vishnu, such as Rama, Krishna, Nrisingha, and Bamana among the Avatars, or Narayan, and Vishnu among his heavenly forms. Although all these are considered as various forms of the same god, yet the mode of worshipping each is different; Vasudeva is considered as the same with Krishna. No separate worship is by this sect offered to the spouses of these gods; but their worship is always conjoined with that of the male, so that Krishna is never worshipped without Radha, nor Rama without Sita. Rama and Sita are, however, considered as the proper deities of this sect; and the Ramanandas have not the

presumption to consider themselves as above the worship of the gods.

[49] Buchanan, Purnea, 1809–1810, 274. However, an inkling of the social inequities that would come to divide the Ramanandi sampraday a century later can be discerned here. Buchanan noted that "Part [of the Ramanandis] are descended of Brahmans, have images, and bestow instruction on the followers of Vishnu, who worship that god under the form of Ram. There are also some Ramayits who are Sudras, and serve the others in bringing water and other such occupations, but are not allowed to eat in company" (my emphasis). The phrase "descended of Brahmans" points to the fact that whether or not the individual guru was himself a brahman, his guru genealogy (or guru parampara) could often reveal the individual's predilections regarding caste commensality. I take up this point in detail in the following chapter. [BACK]

[50] Buchanan, Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812, 1:357. [BACK]

[51] Ibid., 1:352. Buchanan's observations on the stringent gastronomy of Vaishnavas are repeated in Shahabad, 1812–1813, 220. [BACK]

[52] Buchanan, Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812, 1:376. [BACK]

[53] Ibid., 1:358, 369. [BACK]

[54] Ibid., 1:369. See also Purnea, 1809–1810, 269. Further, a perusal of the caste enumerations in any of the Bihar accounts (e.g., Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812, 1:330–50; Shahabad, 1812–1813, 195–211) will reveal many communities classified as shudra and lower who looked to Dasnamis as spiritual guides in the early nineteenth century. [BACK]

[55] Buchanan, Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812, 1:387–89; see also 358. Parshuram Chaturvedi, an encyclopaedic source on medieval saints and bhakti literature, has noted more recently that Udasins have assumed many of the superficial traits of Hindu sadhus, and have assimilated many standard Hindu customs; see Uttari Bharat ki Sant-Parampara, 425. [BACK]

[56] Indeed, Buchanan mentioned one wealthy Dasnami near Patna who transferred his monastic allegiances to the Nanakpanthi order (Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812, 1:81). Buchanan noted as well that the individual in question was known for his eccentricity and occasional bouts of violent behavior, brought on in part by his disappointment at the loss of followers subsequent to his conversion. "Being a violent man, this disappointment, it is said, has made him outrageous and fearless, and it is alleged that he attacks all traders passing his house with loaded cattle, and partly by importunity, partly by force compels each to give him a trifle, and they do not think it worthwhile to complain." It should be noted, however, that there were exceptions to the Nanakpanthi-Dasnami affinities. For example, Buchanan mentioned elsewhere (Purnea, 1809–1810, 272) that about seventy akharas of Bengali Vaishnavas (followers of Chaitanya) had been Udasins, or Nanakpanthis. [BACK]

[57] Ghurye, Indian Sadhus, 142–43. "Vaishnava ascetics" for Ghurye meant primarily those sadhus associated with the Ramanandi sampraday, while "Saiva sadhus" meant those attached to Shankaracharya's Dasnami organization. "Vedanta" refers to the "the end of the Vedas," signifying the philosophical discourses based on Vedic texts that led to the resurgence of Hindu thought with Shankaracharya and, hence, monist. [BACK]

[58] Sinha and Saraswati, Ascetics of Kashi, 138. Nevertheless, it would also seem that at least some Udasins joined ranks with Ramanandis, a point I return to in chapter 2. [BACK]

[59] Amardas Udasi, Udasi Mat Darpan (no bibliographic information provided), 491–92, cited in Sharma, Udasin Sampraday, 23. [BACK]

[60] Government of India (hereafter GOI), Census of India, 1891, vol. 5: The Lower Provinces of Bengal and Their Feudatories (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1893), table 16, 76; GOI, Census of India, 1901, vol. 6-A: The Lower Provinces of Bengal and Their Feudatories, part 2 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1902), table 13-A, 194–256. As I note below, however, terminological imprecision with regard to religious identity rendered much of the census data on monasticism of little value. [BACK]

[61] See Richard Eaton, "Approaches to the Study of Conversion to Islam in India," in R. C. Martin, ed., Approaches to Islam: Religious Studies (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 107–23. A more elaborated consideration of the process, termed "inclusion, identification, and displacement," can be found

in Eaton's more recent work, The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 268–90 and passim. [BACK]

[62] Sinha and Saraswati, Ascetics of Kashi, 49–52, 115. [BACK]

[63] Van der Veer, Gods on Earth, 37 (for the quote) and 143–46. On Shuja ud-daula's patronage of the sampraday, see Buchanan in Martin, Eastern India, 2:485. [BACK]

[64] Wilson, Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus, 67–68. [BACK]

[65] Herbert Hope Risley, The Tribes and Castes of Bengal (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1891; reprint, Calcutta: Firma Mukhopadhyay, 1981), 1:533–34; Buchanan, Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812, 1:334; Shahabad, 1812–1813, 198. Unfortunately, Risley's survey was organized strictly according to caste, listed in alphabetical order by jati nomenclature (cf. the methodology employed by Buchanan, described above); Risley paid little direct attention to religious communities that appealed to supracaste loyalties, in part because the existence of such loyalties undermined the supposed impermeability of caste boundaries on which his racial theories were grounded. (On these theories, and the anthropometry and nasal indeces that sustained them, see Risley, The People of India [Calcutta: Thacker, Spink, 1915] and Christopher Pinney, "Colonial Anthropology in the 'Laboratory of Mankind,'" in C. A. Bayly, ed., An Illustrated History of Modern India, 1600–1947 [London: National Portrait Gallery, 1990], 252–63.) As a result, even though the information under each of Risley's jati headings contained potentially valuable descriptions of the culture, religion, and mythology of the eastern Gangetic Plain, it is more difficult to elicit religious trends for the population as a whole. In addition, Risley referred not to specific monastic communities, such as Ramanandis and Dasnamis, but to the broad sectarian components of modern Hinduism, namely Vaishnava, Shaiva, and Shakta belief. Nevertheless, if the peasants of Gangetic India found Vaishnava belief and institutions increasingly relevant to their lives, it is certain that this boded well for the Ramanandi sampraday. [BACK]

[66] Jogendra Nath Bhattacharya, Hindu Castes and Sects: An Exposition of the Origin of the Hindu Caste System and the Bearing of the Sects toward Each Other and toward Other Religious Systems (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink, 1896), 29. Bhattacharya's observation is particularly revealing. First, it implies that many "low" people (no doubt a reference to shudra and untouchable peasants and artisans) had advanced economically in the preceding century, and that they were directing their newfound wealth toward the articulation of a new religious and social ideology. Second, it captures the sensitivity of monks to both prevailing public opinion and hard economic realities. In other words, notwithstanding the fact that Bhattacharya—an elite, educated Bengali pandit—took a dim view of the process (he decried the spread of Vaishnavism as little more than the constant, mindless repetition of Hari, or Vishnu), he saw it as entirely natural and appropriate that sadhus would desire to attract followers, for whatever motives, be they material or spiritual. [BACK]

[67] Buchanan, "Account of Gorakhpur, 1812," 336. This observation occurs in Haripur town, Nichlaul thana. [BACK]

[68] Of course, the term possessed a strong Vaishnava connotation in Bengal and western Uttar Pradesh. Bengali Vaishnavas were followers of the ecstatic bhakti of Chaitanya; see Sushil Kumar De, Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal (1942; 2d ed., Calcutta: K. L. Mukhopadhyaya, 1961). An account of the Vaishnava gosains who worship Krishna and Radha in and around Mathura and Vrindaban in the nineteenth century can be found in F. S. Growse, Mathura: A District Memoir (1880; 3d ed., revised and enlarged, Allahabad: Northwest Provinces and Oudh Government Press, 1883), 192–98. [BACK]

[69] Buchanan, Bihar and Patna, 1811–1812, 1:374; Shahabad, 1812–1813, 53 (Buchanan spells the name Arah; later British-Indian maps refer to Arrah); Buchanan in Martin, Eastern India, 2:483; Risley, The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, 1:300. [BACK]

[70] For instance, in Bhagwanpur, a large village three miles north of Nawada town in Gaya District, the assistant subdivisional officer observed that "there is . . . an old Thakurbari which is erected by Gosain-ji, which is taken care of by the residents." Village Notes (hereafter VN), Gaya District, Thana Nawada, no. 400, Gaya Collectorate Record Room, 1909–14, Bihar. Other similar instances of gosains associated with Vaishnava temples are

described in VN, Patna District, Thana Barh, no. 254, Patna Collectorate Record Room, 1909–14, Bihar; VN, Gaya District, Thana Mufassil Gaya, no. 35, Gaya Collectorate Record Room. The "Village Note" surveys were carried out to facilitate land settlement operations in Bihar in the early 1900s. Each village note was a four-page form upon which an assistant subdivisional officer recorded his observations and interviews in an ordered sequence of fifteen categories. The social and cultural complexion of a village was captured at the end of every village note in section 15, entitled "General Notes." For a discussion of some research implications of the village notes, see James R. Hagen and Anand A. Yang, "Local Sources for the Study of Rural India: The 'Village Notes' of Bihar," Indian Economic and Social History Review 13, no. 1 (January-March 1976): 75–84. [BACK]

[71] VN, Gaya District, Thana Aurangabad, no. 934, Gaya Collectorate Record Room. The subdivisional officer added, "There is a pucca Samadhi [burial site for a gosain] near it also built by him. The gosain Bisunpur is a very old and respected man. People go to him and give him money as offering. He has many chelas." Additional instances of Shaiva gosains can be found in VN, Gaya District, Thana Nawada, no. 445, Gaya Collectorate Record Room; VN, Patna District, Thana Hilsa, no. 78, Patna Collectorate Record Room; VN, Shahabad District, Thana Piro, no. 189, and Thana Mohania, no. 663, Arrah Collectorate Record Room, 1909–14, Bihar. [BACK]

[72] It has been suggested as well that the monastic distinctions evident today among Ramanandis—namely, between nagas, tyagis (or austere ascetics), and rasikas (or aesthetes)—enabled them to absorb all manner of Shaiva ideas and practices and relate them to the worship of Ramchandra; while such structural looseness certainly would have contributed to the increasing strength of the Ramanandi sampraday, I am wary of relying on a modeling of the Ramanandi present to explain the Ramanandi past. It is possible, for example, that the absorption of Shaiva ideas and practices produced, or at least further accentuated, some of the present-day typological distinctions between Ramanandis. On the structure of the present-day Ramanandi sampraday, see van der Veer, Gods on Earth; the general point was raised in a reader's report on the present work, received in January 1994. [BACK]

[73] Buchanan in Martin, Eastern India, 2:483; Wilson, Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus, 204. [BACK]

[74] See Risley, The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, 1:26; and William Crooke, The Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India, 2d ed. (London: A. Constable, 1896; reprint, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978), 1:86. [BACK]

[75] Ghurye, Indian Sadhus, 79. [BACK]

[76] GOI, Census of India, 1891, vol. 5, table XVI, 76; GOI, Census of India, 1901, vol. 6-A, part 2, table XIII-A, 194–256; GOI, Census of India, 1911, vol. 5: Bihar and Orissa, part 3: "Imperial Tables" (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1913), table 13-A, 97–119. [BACK]

[77] GOI, Report on the Census of Bengal, 1872 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1872), 136. [BACK]

[78] GOI, Census of India, 1911, vol. 5: Bihar and Orissa, part 1: "Report" by E. A. Gait (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1913), 239 (remarks by L. S. S. O'Malley). [BACK]

[79] The subjective nature of the census interview as a methodological failure of previous censuses is raised by E. A. H. Blunt, director of the 1911 census for Uttar Pradesh, in vol. 15: United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, part 1: "Report" (Allahabad: Government Press, 1912), 131. [BACK]

[80] Ibid., subsidiary table 8-A, 156–57. Even in the eastern Uttar Pradesh districts, Vaishnavas had the edge on Shaivas and far outnumbered Shaktas. [BACK]

[81] At the risk of jumping ahead to the last decade of this century, it can be suggested that the successful (if short-lived) recruitment of many—but by no means all—sadhus into the political campaigns of the essentially middle-class Hindu right (particularly as spearheaded by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and organized around the reclamation of the birthplace of Ramchandra) is an attempt by some sadhus to reoccupy a position of political and social centrality in modern Indian life.