

## ARMED RELIGIOUS ASCETICS IN NORTHERN INDIA.

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THE scholarly researches of the late Professor J. N. Farquhar brought to light, some fifteen years ago, much interesting information regarding the fighting ascetics of India, and more particularly regarding the armed Sannyāsīs, to the unravelling of whose history his attention was specially directed. The subject was one on which little information was available, and the further elucidation of which would, he believed, contribute much to the understanding of the present-day confusion of sects in North India. It was a keen disappointment to Dr. Farquhar, as to many of his friends, that he was obliged by ill-health to leave India before completing an investigation which had already begun to yield valuable results. The fruits of his study were embodied in two articles published in June, 1925 : one entitled " The Organisation of the Sannyāsīs of the Vedānta ", in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, and the other entitled " The Fighting Ascetics of India ", in the BULLETIN OF THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY (vol. 9, no. 2).

The present article is intended as a supplement to these two studies, and aims at bringing together such additional material as research has made available since the date of their publication. For the sake of clearness some of the main facts established by Dr. Farquhar are incorporated in the account which follows.

The warrior monk is a familiar figure in the history of mediæval Europe and the Near East. Much less has been heard of the armed Hindu devotees who played so stirring a part in the Indian wars of the eighteenth, and the opening decades of the nineteenth centuries. The letters and memoirs of the period,

from the days of the French traveller Tavernier onwards,<sup>1</sup> make frequent allusion to these doughty warriors, but little attempt is made to establish their identity. The standard text-books on Indian history are almost silent on the subject. It can hardly be said to be even widely known that, in the troubled years that witnessed the decline and final break-up of the Mogul power in India, a large part of northern India was overrun by marauding bands of armed religious ascetics, who usually travelled in large companies of horse and foot, taking heavy toll in the name of alms from the districts through which they passed, and ready to give battle to any who opposed their progress. Still less is it generally recognised that in the ranks of these warrior monks were to be found representatives of all the chief religious orders then established in North India.

The ancient orders, be it said, are not at all proud of this remarkable episode in their history. Some would go so far as to deny that their own particular fraternity had any part or lot in it. Apart from other conclusive evidence, however, the clear distinction still drawn in the several orders between the *bona-fide* initiate and the modern descendant (lineal or spiritual) of the old fighting Nāgā places the matter beyond dispute.

To speak of a brotherhood of peaceful ascetics suddenly "springing to arms" is indeed hardly to put the facts quite fairly. In the case of a warlike body such as the Sikhs the description may not be wholly inaccurate, though even the Sikh community has never been without its non-combatant members.<sup>1</sup> What happened as a rule, however, was something different. It was, in fact, simply the admission to the various orders, with or without some formal ceremony of initiation, of large numbers of fighting men, purely for purposes of defence. To call such an armed force into being was clearly an easier thing than to disband it when its presence began to prove an embarrassment. Had the situation been less perilous it is difficult to imagine resort having been had to so desperate an expedient. At the

<sup>1</sup> Towards the middle of the seventeenth century. Prof. Farquhar quotes Tavernier's description (*Travels in India*, i, 81, 1889 edn.) of an encounter with a party of armed faqirs (*Fighting Ascetics*, p. 10).

<sup>2</sup> The fighting Sikhs are distinguished by the title of *Akālī*, the "deathless ones". The order was founded by the Tenth Guru.

moment it seemed to be the one alternative to total extinction. Inoffensive sadhus attending the great religious fairs naturally chose to travel in the company of the armed champions of their cause. In times of imminent danger rival sects, forgetful of their theological differences, turned to the military leader who, in the rôle of *mahant*, or abbot, presided over the *aḳhārā*, or monastic settlement, best able to afford effective protection. Nevertheless, the opening of the doors of the religious orders to this undisciplined rabble of nominal devotees could not but have a profound influence on their later history.

The origin of the movement is of great interest. Successive tides of Muhammadan invasion, from the twelfth century onwards, had brought into India in the train of the conquering armies swarms of reckless adventurers of every description. Among these were large numbers of Muslim faqirs or dervishes (*darwesh*) whom the religious wars of the time had made familiar with the use of arms. Equipped with spear and battle-axe, these roamed at large throughout the subdued territories, murdering and pillaging at will. The Hindu ascetic orders were among the worst sufferers at their hands. Places of religious pilgrimage, with their steady flow of pious offerings, were a favourite hunting-ground of the fanatical faqir. Murderous assaults were made on parties of defenceless pilgrims bathing at these sacred spots. The sympathies of the Muslim authorities were for the most part on the side of the aggressors. In the absence of legal means of redress this wanton violence inevitably provoked reprisals.

Of the well-known Hindu ascetic orders, the first to have resort to arms were the Yogīs, or Nāths, disciples of Gorakhnāth, popularly known as *ḳānpḥaṭā* (split-eared) on account of the heavy pendants of stone or metal worn in the ears. Both in theory and in practice the Yogi was less hampered by the characteristic Hindu doctrine of *ahimsā* (harmlessness) than members of other religious orders. From very early times the cult was associated with dark and fearsome rites in which the sacrificial sword played an important part, and human sacrifice was not uncommon. The Yogis were also great practisers of magic, and were widely credited with the possession of occult powers as the result of their austerities : a reputation which enabled them to

play with peculiar effect on the hopes and fears of those who aspired to temporal power. The Yogi adept thus became the trusted counsellor of kings and nobles, and often a secret agent in the forwarding of their designs.<sup>1</sup> There can be no doubt that it is in the capacity, not merely of "ghostly comforters", but of powerful temporal allies, that we find these "Druids of India", as Tod picturesquely styles them, attached at an early date to the courts of several Rajput princes, such as Bāppa Rāwāl of Mewār (Udaipur), and Rāo Jodhā of Mārwar (Jodhpur).

It is thus hardly surprising that, of the famous historic orders, the Yogis should be the first to offer armed resistance to the Muslim oppressor. It is also easy to see how, with their growth in numbers and power, the war of self-defence soon developed into one of active aggression, not only against the offending Muslim, but against their Hindu co-religionists as well. Dr. Farquhar quotes, among other instances, the case of a Yogi king who, about A.D. 1500, "had his lands in western India and kept a considerable body of Yogis. Once in three or four years some three thousand of these warriors went on pilgrimage and laid the whole country under contribution".<sup>2</sup> "Never have I seen Yogi like this", exclaims the reformer Kabīr, about the same date. "Shall I call such men ascetics or bandits?"<sup>3</sup>

The next important group to join the militant movement is believed to have been the Sannyāsīs, the most venerable of all the classical religious orders. The Sannyāsīs, as reorganised by the eminent Vedantist scholar Śankarāchārya in the ninth century, were divided into ten sections, each with its own special designation. "Monasteries of all the ten sub-orders are still found in the South, their Sannyāsīs being all Brahmans; but in the North there are pure monasteries only of the Tīrtha, Āśrama, and Sarasvatī sub-orders."<sup>4</sup> It was left to Professor

<sup>1</sup> Of one of these Yogi advisers of a later day who, when his master's fortunes were at their lowest ebb, predicted his speedy accession to the throne, Colonel Tod caustically remarks: "Prophetic gurus who beset the persons of princes prove dangerous companions when, in addition to the office of compounders of drugs and expounders of dreams, they are invested with the power of realising their own prognostications!" (*Annals of Rajasthan*, vol. 2, cap. xiv.).

<sup>2</sup> *Fighting Ascetics*, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> The passage from the *Bījaḥ* of Kabir is quoted in full, pp. 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> Farquhar, *Organisation of the Sannyāsīs of the Vedānta*, p. 485.

Farquhar to make clear the meaning of this distinction, and incidentally to supply an approximate date for the arming of the Sannyāsīs.

What appears to be an authentic tradition declares that in the reign of Akbar (1556-1605) a famous Sannyāsī scholar of Benares, Madhusūdana by name, belonging to the Sarasvatī sub-order, approached the Emperor with a request that his order be permitted to take suitable measures for its own defence. It was proposed that "twice-born" non-Brahmans (that is, men of the warrior and mercantile castes) should now be enrolled as fighting Sannyāsīs. The Emperor is said to have given his consent. In confirmation of this bit of unwritten history is the fact already mentioned, that in North India to-day only three (three and a half, to be exact) of the ten sub-orders of Sannyāsīs are designated "pure", i.e. as consisting entirely of Brahmans. In the South, which the movement hardly touched, all the sub-orders are "pure".<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Farquhar dates the arming of the Sannyāsīs from about 1565. It may even have begun earlier. The habit of carrying weapons in self-defence may have grown to such an extent that it was deemed advisable to obtain the Emperor's sanction before the right to do so was challenged.

Hardly had the Sannyāsīs got permission to bear arms than dissensions broke out among them. History relates that, when in camp at Thanesar in 1567, Akbar witnessed with keen enjoyment an armed encounter between members of the Giri and Purī sub-orders, and even sent some of his own men to aid the weaker side.

The armed Sannyāsīs were generally known as Gosāīs (*Goswāmī*, 'lord of cattle', a name applied to various types of ascetic),<sup>2</sup> and also as Dasnāmīs, members of the 'order of ten names'. Other more general titles were Atīt (destitute), Swāmī

<sup>1</sup> "The saying, still common in the North, that three and a half sub-orders are pure, refers to the fact that when Madhusūdana introduced non-Brahmans into the seven groups, one half of the Brahman membership of the Bharati sub-order would not have anything to do with the defilement, and, in consequence, went South to Sringeri and were incorporated into the pure Bharati sub-order there. Thus, half the Bharati sub-order of the North retained its purity" (*Organisation of the Sannyāsīs*, p. 486).

<sup>2</sup> The spiritual heads of the Vallabhāchārya sect are also called Gosains.

(master), and Mahāpurusha (dignitary or saint). In violation of the rules of their order, they accepted money, and also (like the Yogis) indulged freely in the use of flesh and intoxicating liquors. Unlike the Sannyāsī proper, they were keen partisans of the god Śiva, and sworn enemies of the worshippers of Vishṇu. Tradition tells of two notorious Gosain leaders who had taken a vow to slay two Vairāgīs (Vaishṇava ascetics) daily before tasting food. When unable to achieve their purpose their custom was to make clay models of their foes, affix the appropriate sect-mark, and destroy them in effigy. This was believed to result in the death of the victim.

There is good reason to believe that it was the violence suffered at the hands of their brother ascetics, the Yogis and Sannyāsīs, quite as much as Muslim persecution, that led to the arming in large numbers of the third main group of Hindu devotees, the Vishṇu-worshipping sects, whose members were generally designated Bairāgīs (*vairāgī*, one who has subdued his passions). It is not easy to fix a precise date, but the event cannot have been much later than the arming of the Sannyāsīs. One incident in their history might tempt us to put it a good deal earlier. This was the apparently forcible expulsion of the Yogis, under their leader Tārā Nāth, from the Galtā, a sacred bathing pool in a narrow gorge to the east of the modern city of Jaipur, in the reign of Prithivī Rāj of Amber (1502-1527). As spiritual advisers of the rulers of Amber (the ancient capital of Jaipur) the Yogis had long held a strong position at the Galtā. At the period mentioned, a body of Vaishṇava ascetics, led by the far-famed saint Krishnadās Payahārī, succeeded in ousting their rivals and taking permanent possession of the Galtā. Whether the weapons of their warfare were entirely spiritual may well be doubted. The legendary tales of the miraculous feats by which Payahārī and his following frustrated the murderous designs of their Yogi adversaries suggest that, if not yet fully armed, the Bairagis were at least capable of meeting force with force. It is significant that the combatant (*lashkari*) section of the Rāmānandīs, which long held the undisputed leadership of the fighting Bairagis, dates its existence as a separate organisation from this period. It was not till well on into the following century,

however, that the Bairagis began to come into prominence as a formidable army.

Throughout the reign of Akbar and his two immediate successors, nothing further is heard of armed Yogīs, Sannyāsīs, or Bairāgīs, but it would be a mistake to conclude that they were entirely quiescent. The vigilance of the authorities no doubt placed a check on overt hostilities, but the alacrity with which they took the field in response to the challenge thrown down by Aurangzeb suggests long practice in the handling of arms. The period was marked by a growing estrangement between the Hindu populace and its Muslim rulers. Almost within a year of Akbar's death the arming of the Sikhs, in consequence of the execution of Guru Arjun, began. The imprisonment of Guru Hargovind checked the movement for a time, but the preparation of the Sikhs for an open breach with the Mogul power went on. Finally, on the execution, in 1675, of Guru Tegh Bahādur on account of his refusal to embrace Islam, the Sikhs, led by their Tenth Guru, received the "baptism of the sword" and virtually declared war on the Mogul Empire. To the same period belongs the revolt of the obscure sect of the Satnāmīs at Narnaul, in Patiālā, and their virtual extermination after fierce resistance. Hundreds of temples were razed, and their images destroyed.

Sannyāsīs and Bairāgīs, despite their mutual enmity, were wholly at one with the disciples of Guru Govind in their bitter hatred of Muslim rule, and in their readiness to seize every opportunity of setting its authority at defiance. While the aged Emperor was becoming ever more deeply involved in his disastrous wars in the South, we find several noted Bairagi leaders moving in full military array, without let or hindrance, about the northern country.<sup>1</sup> It may be safely assumed that the Sannyāsīs

<sup>1</sup> There is in possession of the head of the Balanand temple at Jaipur what purports to be an original order or passport issued by the Emperor Ālamgīr (Aurangzeb) in the 35th year of his reign (A.D. 1692), authorising five Bairagis, whose names are given, "to move freely about the whole Empire with standards and kettledrums, at the head of companies both of horse and foot", and enjoining local governors, police officers, and landholders, "that no obstacle or hindrance be put in their way, so that they may travel without molestation from one province to another".

Whether or not the document be genuine—and such forged permits were not unknown—it affords convincing evidence of the military pretensions of the Bairagis at this time.

were pursuing a similar course in other provinces of the Empire. In presence of their powerful rivals the armed Yogis were already beginning to take a second place. Enriched with the spoils of earlier conquests and secure in their fortified temples and monasteries, they seem to have played a minor part, as actual combatants at least, in the later wars.

With the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 organised persecution came to an end. But this change brought no corresponding reduction in the warlike activities of the Hindu ascetic orders. By this time the militant movement had begun to lose even the semblance of a religious war. The existence of so mighty a host of professional warriors, called into being for a special purpose, and required to maintain itself by means of forced levies on the populace, inevitably led to violence and pillage on an extensive scale. The prevailing disorder was highly favourable to the designs of the monastic militants. Strong bands of naked warriors ravaged the country, striking terror to the hearts of the inhabitants. No longer united against a common foe, their arms were turned against one another.

Of the fighting orders the Sannyāsīs were by far the most numerous, as well as the most aggressive. Not only the "twice-born", but bravoës of all ranks and classes, seem to have flocked to their standard. There were continual armed clashes between the Sannyāsīs and the Bairāgīs, frequently over the policing of the great religious fairs, and the collection of pilgrim dues. For a time the Bairagis were generally worsted in these conflicts. It is related that while a company of the latter were performing their ablutions in the Sīprā river at Ujjain they were suddenly overwhelmed by a deadly rain of arrows from the Gosain fort or monastery of Bhairongarh overlooking the river. It is said to have been the brutal murder, while on a peaceful journey, of a trusted Rāmānandī leader that led to the final mustering of the Bairagi forces at the Galtā to concert measures of defence. Under the able leadership of Bālānand, a Rajput from the Delhi district, the "Four Sampradāyas",<sup>1</sup> as they were called—the Rāmānandīs,

<sup>1</sup> Known as the Śrī Sampradāya (Rāmānandī), the Brahmā Sampradāya (Mādhva), the Rudra Sampradāya (Vishnusvāmī), and the Sanakādi Sampradāya (Nimbārka). The Vishnusvāmīs were later almost entirely absorbed into the



the Mādhyas, the Vishnudevāmīs, and the Nimbārkas—were welded into a strong confederacy which for the first time was able to meet the Dasnāmīs on something like equal terms.

The Bairagis were divided, irrespective of sect, into seven sections, each attached to a separate *akḥārā* or monastic settlement, its military headquarters, presided over by a *mahant* or abbot, who was recognised as its military leader. Members of each Sampradāya continued to use their own sect-mark, worshipped their own special deity (*ishṭa-devatā*), and retained their connexion with their own temple (*dwārā*, door); but for defensive purposes they belonged “body and soul” to their respective *akḥārās*.<sup>1</sup> The seven *akḥaras* later became sixteen, of which the Rāmānandīs had seven, the Nimbārkas seven, the Mādhyas one, and the Vishnudevāmīs one.

An interesting survival of the old military organisation may still be seen at the great religious fair known as the Kumbh Mela. Ascetics attending the fair encamp, not as one would expect with members of their own Sampradāya or sub-order, but with a mixed company of various denominations historically associated with the same *akḥara* as themselves.

Among the fighting Bairagis, caste-distinctions were put aside, and members of the various groups shared a common mess. This relaxation of caste-rules extended only to actual combatants. The Bairagis were nominally vegetarians, but this rule was also largely disregarded. Free use was likewise made of hemp, opium, and other narcotics.

Early in the reign of Sawai Jai Singh, the founder of Jaipur city (1699-1743), we discover a strong body of armed Rāmānandīs (henceforth known as “Balanandīs”) permanently established in

newer sect of the Vallabhāchāryas (Gokulāstha Sampradāya), with which, despite doctrinal differences, they were closely associated. It was at the Vallabhacharya temple at Nāthdwārā that, in 1779, Raja Bijay Singh of Jodhpur met the body of armed Vishnudevāmīs who later entered his service as mercenaries.

<sup>1</sup> The word *akḥārā* came to be used simply as a convenient designation of the military group to which the ascetic warrior belonged. Thus a man would describe himself as a “Nirvānī” of the Nimbārka Sampradāya, for example, and give his proper *dwara*, and *guru*. The titles of the *akḥaras* were Nirvānī, Digambara, Nirmoi, Khākī, Mālādhārī, Santokhī and Nirālambī.

The Dasnamis had also their seven *akḥaras*, Nirvānī, Aṭal, Niranjanī, etc., embracing in each members of the different sub-orders of Sannyāsīs.

a small fort <sup>1</sup> at the base of the Nahargarh hill which forms the city's northern boundary. To the last the advantage of numbers remained with the Sannyāsīs, but it was not until near the close of the eighteenth century, and then only as hired mercenaries, that they were able to secure a footing in the Rajput States.

Sannyāsīs were to be found in great numbers in Bundelkhand and other outlying districts of the Mogul Empire. Of the Sannyāsī hordes that infested Bengal in the days of Warren Hastings we are told that they "often numbered several thousand in each band, and at one time no less than five Sepoy regiments were engaged in hunting them down".<sup>2</sup> Hastings' own description <sup>3</sup> of these "Senassies, the gipsies of Hindostan", leaves no doubt of their identity.

By the latter half of the eighteenth century the monastic militant movement, which began as a measure of self-protection, and later developed into sheer brigandage, had already entered on its third and last phase, that of professional military service. From the first the tendency had been for the big confederacies to break up, and for each band of ascetic warriors to follow where fortune beckoned. The ceaseless wars of the time provided unlimited scope for their energies. The Rajput kingdoms especially, torn by internal dissensions, and bled white by endless exactions, stood in constant need of military reinforcements to aid them in their desperate struggle. Jealous of their independence and impatient of military discipline, the armed ascetics clung obstinately to their own methods of warfare, and to the last refused to enlist in the regular armies.<sup>4</sup> But many were only too ready to exchange the precarious life of the irresponsible freebooter for steady employment with some ruling prince or military adventurer who was willing to engage them as irregular troops on their own terms. The usual pay of such mercenaries at this time was only half an anna a day, but it need hardly be said that this was the smallest part of their earnings.

<sup>1</sup> Still known as the "temple of Balanand".

<sup>2</sup> *Oxford History of India*, p. 516.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Vincent Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 515-516.

<sup>4</sup> In the Great War of 1914-1918 a body of Dādūpanthī Nāgās offered their services to the Government of India, but as they refused to enlist as regular soldiers in the army their offer was refused.

Students of Maratha history are familiar with the name of Himmat Bahādur, the famous Gosain leader, who with a body of fighting ascetics entered the service of Mahādājī Sindhiā, and at a later date aided the British in the conquest of Bundelkhand. Himmat Bahadur had his headquarters at Jhansi. Broughton, in his *Letters from a Mahratta Camp*,<sup>1</sup> gives an interesting account of a grand-disciple of this famous warrior, Kamptā Giri by name, who with a strength of 1500, mostly horse, joined the camp of Daulat Rao Sindhia in Rajputana in 1809. After Himmat Bahadur's breach with Sindhia, many of the Gosain fighters he had brought with him remained in the service of the latter. Mahādājī Sindhia was the first of the Maratha leaders to employ Sannyāsīs in large numbers as soldiers.

Grant Duff<sup>2</sup> mentions a strong force of Gosains in the service of Shuja-ud-daula, the Nawāb Vazīr of Oudh. This gives a clue to the identity of "five thousand fanatics, all perfectly naked, and covered with paint and ashes", described by Colonel Malleison<sup>3</sup> in his account of the Nawab Vazir's assault on the British lines at Patna in 1764. It will be noted that the "fanaticism" of these Hindu ascetics did not prevent their taking service with the Muhammadan ruler of Oudh.

In his account of the battle of Pāṭan, in Rajputana, in 1790, Count de Boigne, who was then in the service of Sindhia, mentions<sup>4</sup> as among the forces of the Jodhpur and Jaipur allies "5000 *Fakirs*, called *Brakys* and *Attyles*". The term "faqīr" is often loosely used for Hindu as well as Muslim ascetics, to whom it more correctly applies. The "*Brakys*" can of course only be "Bairāgīs", and the "*Attyles*" must be "Atīt", a term often used of Sannyāsīs—either de Boigne or his translator having omitted to stroke his third "t"!

Maratha incursions introduced great numbers of armed Sannyāsīs into Rajputana, and many finally took service with Rajput rulers. In 1779 a large company of Gosains from Karauli, who had espoused the cause of a pretender to the Udaipur throne,

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 96, 106, 148.

<sup>2</sup> *History of the Mahrattas*, vol. i, p. 514.

<sup>3</sup> *Decisive Battles of India*, pp. 201-202 (2nd edn.).

<sup>4</sup> In a letter quoted by Compton in *European Military Adventurers of Hindustan*, pp. 51-54. The letter was probably written in French and translated into English for the *Calcutta Gazette*.

and later transferred their allegiance to the legitimate ruler, entered the service of Raja Bijay Singh of Jodhpur. The same year a body of Bishanswamis (Vishnusvāmīs) also entered the Jodhpur service. Thus we find Sannyāsīs and Bairāgīs, once sworn enemies, fighting cheerfully side by side, and often winning high distinction, in the armies of Bijay Singh and his successors. Rana Bhim Singh of Udaipur employed considerable numbers of Sannyāsīs in his last struggle with Holkar and Sindhia, till the State passed under British protection in 1817.

From Tod's *Annals of Rajasthan*<sup>1</sup> we learn that, in the days of Jaswant Rao Holkar's incursions into Mewar (Udaipur), Damodra, then high-priest of the famous Vallabhāchārya shrine at Nathdwara, "made the tour of his diocese at the head of four hundred horse, two standards of foot, and two field-pieces. . . . He rode the best mares in the country, and was summoned to matins by the kettledrum instead of the bell and cymbal." The force mentioned appears to have been placed at his service by the Rana of Udaipur. But there would seem to be no record of the votaries of Nathji having taken to arms in any considerable numbers.<sup>2</sup>

As regards the Yogis, the present writer has been told by modern representatives of the order that the Yogi, in later times at least, seldom chose to serve as a professional soldier, not from lack of courage, but through fear of injury to his *mudras* or earrings, the loss of which was looked upon as an irreparable disaster. He preferred diplomacy and intrigue to open warfare. Be this as it may, the Yogis of Eklingjī in Udaipur State, and of Mahāmandir in Jodhpur, were always ready to put up a stout resistance to any assailant, Muslim or Hindu. Some distinguished themselves as leaders of considerable bodies of armed men, both hired mercenaries, and ascetic warriors of their own or other persuasions. Of the spiritual head of Mahāmandir, the famous Nath fortress on the outskirts of Jodhpur, at the beginning of last century, Colonel Tod wrote :<sup>3</sup> "The high-priest of Jalandranath used to appear at the head of a cavalcade more

<sup>1</sup> Vol. i, p. 476.

<sup>2</sup> The reputed fighting ascetics associated with Nathdwara were probably Vishnusvāmīs, who visited this shrine.

<sup>3</sup> *Annals of Rajasthan*, vol. i, pp. 477, 445.

numerous than any feudal lord of Marwar." "In Mewar (Udaipur)," he says, "they can always muster many hundreds of the Kanfera (Kanphata) Jogis, or 'split-eared' ascetics." Many of the surviving Yogi temples and monasteries throughout Rajputana more closely resemble miniature fortresses than places of worship and meditation.

In Jaipur, the Śrī Sampradāya of the Rāmānandīs<sup>1</sup> maintained its ascendancy to the last. The Nīmbārkas, their only serious rivals, established themselves at Salīmābād, in Kishangarh State, on the borders of Jaipur and Ajmer. The Rāmānandīs never entered the service of the State, and seem to have fought mostly for their own hand. They acquired much valuable land, which their successors still hold, and from which the Balanand temple derives a very large revenue.

As, with the advance of British power in the opening decades of last century, the sphere of their operations became more circumscribed, both the Rāmānandīs and the Nīmbārkas showed a growing disposition to withdraw from the struggle, and leave the field in possession of lesser bodies which had more recently taken to arms. It is not necessary to burden our narrative with an account of these, whose members were for the most part merely professional soldiers in the service of the State. The Rādhāvalabhīs, for example, joined the ranks of the Nīmbārkas; the followers of Chaitanya (called "Gauriya") fought under the standard of the Madhvas. The Dādūpanthīs, disciples of the sixteenth-century reformer Dadu, at first fought along with the Rāmānandīs. Later, when they were powerful enough to maintain their own establishment, they set up their independent *aḵharas* after the Bairagi model. Some 7000 Dādūpanthīs were kept almost constantly employed by Maharaja Pratāp Singh of Jaipur and his successor, in suppressing revolt, and collecting revenue. Their wealth rapidly grew, and they began to do a

<sup>1</sup> In North India the Śrī Sampradāya is much confounded with the older Śrī Vaishṇava Sampradāya of the South, probably on account of so many temples of the latter being now in possession of the Rāmānandīs. The Śrī Sampradāya worships only Sita and Rama, with their attendants; the Śrī Vaishṇava Sampradāya acknowledges all the incarnations of Viṣṇu, with their consorts. Some famous old Śrī Vaishṇava temples, like that at Pushkar, near Ajmer, repudiate any connexion with the Śrī Sampradāya.

large business as tax-farmers and money-lenders, and were able to pay down very large sums in cash to meet the demands of an ever-exhausted State Treasury.

Among the fighting ascetics mentioned by Tod as taking part in the Rajputana wars in the beginning of last century were Sikhs, Nānakpanthīs (a variety of Sikh, distinct from the Akali), and also a class of Muslim ascetics called Aligols, who are thus described by Broughton : <sup>1</sup>

“The Aleegols are bodies of irregular foot, armed according to the fancy of each individual, and without any sort of discipline. They consist principally (*sic*) of Mussalmans, and have acquired the name from their habit of charging the enemy in a *gol* or mass, and invoking the aid of Alee in their onset. Their pay is trifling, but they are allowed to plunder at discretion.”

The generic name for this whole class of ascetic warriors was “Nāgā”,<sup>2</sup> from the Sanskrit word *nagna*, meaning “naked”. The Nagas were so called from their custom of going into battle naked, or with only a strip of cloth bound round the loins. They wore their beards parted in the middle and brushed up over the cheeks, to add to the fierceness of their appearance. Their bodies were smeared with ashes, and their foreheads and limbs painted with their respective sect-marks. Their weapons were the bow and arrow (later replaced by the matchlock), the shield, the spear, and the murderous “discus”—the last worn, one above the other, like a ruff round the neck. Other weapons were a short sword or dagger; the “rocket”, a kind of glorified jumping cracker composed of a strong metal cylinder to which knives were attached; and the “umbrella”, consisting of a circle of iron balls suspended from a central rod, like a maypole, which when skilfully handled was said to be as impenetrable as a coat of mail, in addition to being a deadly weapon of offence. When the Naga was clothed, it was in the customary yellow robe of the religious mendicant, fastened skirt-wise about the waist, with the free end passing over the chest and shoulders in such a way as to leave the fighting arm entirely free.

The Nagas, as already indicated, made free use of bhang,

<sup>1</sup> *Letters from a Marhatta Camp*, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> To be distinguished from the Naga tribes of the hill country of Assam, though the origin of the name is the same. See *The Naked Nagas*, Dr. Christoph von Fürer-Hamendorf (Methuen).

opium, and intoxicating liquors. When going into action their progress was less of a march than a kind of whirling dance, during which they became wrought up to a pitch of uncontrollable excitement. Then, with ear-piercing yells, they rushed upon the enemy. Their frightsome appearance, and the superstitious terror with which they were regarded, contributed not a little to the success of their arms. In addition to being excellent swordsmen the Nagas were also skilled wrestlers, always eager to get to hand-to-hand grips with their antagonists. Their bodies were kept hard by severe physical exercises.

With the establishment of the Pax Britannica in the beginning of last century, the fighting bands gradually melted away. But for many years, especially in the Maratha country, roving companies of ascetic warriors might still be seen travelling from place to place extorting supplies in the name of charity. Gosains were frequently employed as spies, and as secret assassins.<sup>1</sup>

The last of the professional Nagas to disappear were those who had found permanent employment in the Indian States, and who in some instances were too strong to be summarily dismissed. Sannyāsīs and Vishnusvāmīs continued in the service of Jodhpur State for close upon a century, when they were finally disbanded by Maharaja Jaswant Singh in 1875. Many tributes were paid to their faithfulness, and to their fine fighting qualities. Until a few years ago Jaipur maintained an establishment of (nominally) 5500 Nagas, mostly Dādūpanthīs. The remainder were Nīmāwats (Nimbarka) and Rādhāvallabhīs. The Dādūpanthīs rendered good service in the Mutiny. Colonel Eden, then Political Agent at Jaipur, speaks <sup>2</sup> in the highest terms of

<sup>1</sup> "Under a weak or unsettled government," says Grant Duff, writing in 1826, "The Gosaeens and Byragees have both been guilty of dreadful outrages on the persons and properties of the inoffensive part of the community; but the former are more notorious in this respect than the latter. They used to travel in armed parties, and under pretence of seeking charity, levied contributions on the country. Where unsuccessfully resisted, they frequently plundered, murdered, and committed the most brutal enormities" (*History of the Marhattas*, vol. i, p. 17). Cf. Sir Bartle Frere's picture of the Gossein-wara at Poona (Introduction to *Pandurang Hari*, p. ix), and Sleeman's *Rambles and Recollections*, p. 592 (note). Also the writings of Meadows Taylor.

<sup>2</sup> In an unpublished letter in possession of the Udaipur (Shaikhawati) Clan of Dādūpanthīs, of which the writer has a copy.

the staunch loyalty of a body of Dādūpanthīs who formed part of the field force sent with him towards Delhi in 1857. In later years, the Dādūpanthī Nagas assisted in the work of tax-collecting, but have now been disbanded.

Until a quarter of a century ago, armed ascetics—Sannyāsīs, Dādūpanthīs and Vishnusvāmīs—were still employed in Kotah and Bundi States. Descendants of the old fighting Sannyāsīs still guard the palace gate at Udaipur.

But these picturesque relics of a bygone age represent but an infinitesimal fraction of the vast army of fighting ascetics. What became of the others? Some without family ties no doubt found it possible to pass the remainder of their days in the peaceful sanctuary of some Naga *āshram* or monastery. Others found employment as temple priests and attendants. But for the great majority the two-fold problem of caste and livelihood remained. Under Hindu caste law, not to speak of the rules of his order, the return of the disbanded Naga to his original caste was, on the face of it, out of the question. By what subtle alchemy was this vast horde of nominal devotees so completely re-integrated into the Hindu social structure that, to the superficial observer, hardly a trace of them survives to-day?

In the light of modern analogies it may be said with some confidence that, in many instances, the apparently impossible thing was precisely what happened. There is a saying current in Marwar that "the man who smears his body with ashes can wash it clean again, but the man who has his ears pierced (that is, becomes a Yogi) is a Yogi all his days". Evidently the thing had been done, and could be done again. The pilgrim or adventurer of whom all trace had been lost returned to his town or village, and quietly resumed his life in the caste-community to which he originally belonged.

On the other hand it has to be recognised that for multitudes born and bred within the Naga community, as for multitudes born within the mendicant classes to-day, there was literally no "caste" to which they could return. They were Nagas by birth, as well as by profession. And in any case, whatever might be the fate of individuals, the wholesale reinstatement of tens of thousands of sometime Naga warriors in their respective castes



was a sheer impossibility. For the ordinary Naga, this way of escape was firmly closed.

Long before the close of the fighting period the caste and marriage problem had indeed begun to solve itself. Around the various Naga encampments began to spring up groups of "Sannyāsī" and "Bairāgī" families who had as yet no place in the Hindu caste-community.<sup>1</sup> In course of time the main fighting orders were numerically strong enough to form matrimonial alliances among themselves, and sufficiently influential to invite the Brahmanical blessing on marriages that would normally have been regarded as a grave breach of caste-law. Towards the end of the wars many of the military leaders had in fact already married and settled down as agriculturalists, merchants, and money-lenders, on the lands they had seized, or had received as a reward for their services. Some of these, especially in the Rajput States, rose to high positions of trust and honour, and founded families of good social standing.

Of the rank and file, large numbers followed the example of their chiefs, settled down as "householders", and took to trading and agriculture. In this way there gradually came into being a whole group of new caste-communities, each bearing as its family name the designation of the religious sect or order from which it sprang. Thus, for example, over a large part of northern and central India will be found clans of Giris, Puris, Bharatis, etc., belonging to the "Sannyāsī", "Swami", or "Gosain" caste, whose patronymic declares their descent from the old fighting Sannyāsīs. The "born" Sannyāsī is described in Rajputana as "*bind*", in contradistinction to the "*nad*", or initiate. The former have to-day, like other Hindu castes, their own rigid laws of consanguinity in marriage. For instance, a member of the Giri clan may marry a Bharati or a Puri, but not another Giri.

There is also a numerous "Bairāgī", or "Vaishnava" caste, with various ramifications which it is unnecessary here to trace.

<sup>1</sup> Their celibate vows rested very lightly on the shoulders of the great bulk of the warrior ascetics. Some were already married men, with families, when they enrolled themselves.

Exactly as in the case of the Sannyāsīs, marriage alliances were formed between members of the several Vishṇu-worshipping sects. The "Bishanswamis" intermarried with "Rāmāwats" and "Nīmāwats" (descendants of the Rāmānandī and Nīmbaraka fighting ascetics), but not within their own clan.<sup>1</sup> The non-combatant lay members of these sects had of course no share in such marriages, and continued to observe the rules of their respective castes.

Similarly, there is now a distinct "Yogi" caste. On coming of age the male members of the community are still often invested with the sacred *mudra*, or ear-rings, though some prefer to dispense with this painful ceremony. The present head of the Naths, or Yogis, of Marwar, known as the "Aishji", still enjoys some of the privileges conferred in perpetuity on his illustrious ancestor Deonath by Maharaja Man Singh over a century ago. But the Yogi community as a whole is in rather a reduced state. Many support themselves by begging, while others work as day labourers.

The well-to-do landowners, merchants, traders, bankers, lawyers, doctors, and public servants who claim descent from Naga leaders of standing and repute may be regarded as the aristocracy of the movement, and hold an honourable place in the life of the Hindu community to-day. Another stratum is represented by those who, in one form or another, have endeavoured to preserve their character of religious devotees. The mendicant Rāmānandī, for example, clad in a brilliant red costume, with his begging sacks swung like a pair of large scales from a stout bamboo pole laid across his shoulders, may still be seen marching, to the accompaniment of jangling bells, through the streets of Jaipur and other Rajput capitals. The well-to-do Yogi of the mendicant class specialises in the treatment of certain ailments, chiefly of women and children, by means of drugs, charms, and incantations. In many villages is to be found a resident Yogi who, in addition to the daily dole, receives from each cultivator at harvest time a fixed quota of

<sup>1</sup> The Vishnusvāmīs have almost ceased to exist as a separate community, but have left a numerous posterity. The Jodhpur census for 1921 showed 10,634 "Bishanswamis" in the State, of whom 5479 were males, and 5155 females.

grain as a retaining fee. Others have a circle of villages which they visit once a year, drawing large crowds by their dramatic performances, and sometimes reducing their whole audience to tears by their moving recital of the experiences of an ancient king of Ujjain who forsook throne and family to become a Yogi. At Kotah the writer recently saw an encampment of several hundred Gosains, in commodious modern tents, well provided with horses and camels and other means of transport. At intervals, they marched out in procession, headed by their naked and ash-smeared leader mounted on an elephant, in a manner strongly reminiscent of the old fighting days as described by contemporary writers. Several months of each year are thus spent on pilgrimage to Hardwar, Benares, and other holy places, the expenses of the journey being defrayed by the offerings of pious votaries. These prosperous "pilgrims" are generally attached to one of the larger Naga monasteries scattered over Central and North-Western India.

But while, in the manner described, many of the Naga warriors and their descendants found their way back to the fold of caste-Hinduism, and while others, adhering to their traditional rôle of religious mendicants, secured for themselves a position that enabled them to maintain themselves in comparative comfort and respectability, there were many more who, irrevocably cut off from their caste-environment, and with no training or aptitude for a life of social usefulness, remained permanently stranded, a standing menace to social order and progress. For these, the only career that lay open was that of professional beggars of the least reputable type. If this was true of the first generation of unemployed and unemployable Nagas, it was still more sadly true of their often numerous progeny. For generations there has been growing up, as a late aftermath of the eighteenth-century wars, a vast and almost illiterate community of professional beggars, bound by no social ties, restrained by no social sanctions, enthralled by birth and environment to a life of idleness, fraud, and often shameless immorality. These form by far the greater proportion of the wandering mendicants to be seen all over North India to-day, travelling without tickets or at the expense of their fellow-passengers on its railways, haunting its places of pilgrimage,

and begging from door to door, with blessings and imprecations, through its cities and villages.

The modern representative of the fighting Naga no longer goes naked, as a rule, except on the occasion of the great religious fairs like the Kumbh Mela, when he marches in procession with other members of his order. Apart from a knife sometimes concealed in the folds of his yellow robe he is seldom armed, but a glance at the implements of his trade is not without interest: the hefty club or bamboo pole—a relic of the *bhālā* or lance of former days—and the sword-like pair of tongs, frequently weighted, obviously suited for other purposes than the gentle stirring of ashes at the time of the frugal meal. The Muslim faqir, it may be remarked in passing, with his calabash slung at his side, and in his hand a battle-axe, often of excellent workmanship, is still a common sight at Ajmer, at the time of the Khwaja Sahib's fair. But even among Gosains, the bamboo shaft with a polished steel head is not uncommon.

Ask one of these roving mendicants to what class he belongs, and he will proudly describe himself as a Puri, a Giri, or a Bharati Sannyāsī; or his conspicuous sect-mark will declare that he claims connexion with one of the great historic Sampradāyas of the Vishṇu cult. Of initiation into these venerable orders he knows nothing, beyond having served his apprenticeship with some "Baba" or father, who has instructed him in the rudiments of his profession. Born within the begging community, he leads a gipsy life, wandering from place to place in company with one or two of his kind—not unfrequently members of his own family—soliciting alms.

Into this polluted stream of professional mendicancy has continued to pour fresh contamination from a variety of sources. For the corruption of the best is the worst, and it is a notorious fact that the yellow robe of the ascetic has ever been a favourite refuge of the fugitive from justice. Social effort, slowly awakening to the needs of the depressed classes in India, has as yet barely touched this dark underworld of ignorance, misery, and crime.