HINDU ASCETICISM IN INDIAN NATIONALIST DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

This paper will focus on the aspect of 'Asceticism' and its corroboration in the Indian nationalist movement. The paper will examine the development and deployment of the Hindu warrior ascetic in Indian nationalist struggle. It has been proposed that one of the main and self-determined challenges of Indian nationalist ideologues was to design a normative Indian. This was an action which concerned formalization of a social history of the Indian. By fetching from British and orientalist concepts, the Indian nationalist ideologues were able to produce a history that extended way back into the mythical time. This resulted in the emergence of a "spiritual" domain as one of the primary nodes of Hindu Indian identity.

Key words: Nationalism, Fighting Ascetics, *Sannyasis*, The *Bhagavad Gita*

INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that the colonizing of India by the British was not just done with "the power of superior arms, military organization, political power, or economic wealth – as important as these things were", but it was "sustained and strengthened by cultural technologies of rule" (Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, ix). The British "had to devise novel, and exceptional, theories of governance," (Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* Vol. 3, ix) as they started making space for themselves as the rulers of India. Further, they started to make their power visible through 'officialising' the process of administration. The reconstruction and transformation of cultural forms was performed through the mechanisms of knowledge during the colonial period, which distinguished and created "categories and oppositions between the colonizers and the colonized, European and Asian, modern and traditional, West and East" (Cohn, ix).

The imperial object of knowledge always wanted the Indian to appear in a prescribed manner. However, there were groups that threatened the prescribed sociological order. The practices of these groups never went under the societal orders or mechanisms. "These were people who appeared by their nature to wander beyond the boundaries of settled civil society: sannyasis, sadhus, fakirs, dacoits, goondas, thags, pastoralists, herders, and entertainers" (Cohn 10). The wandering attitude of these groups functioned as a

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reaction that strongly affected the course of events and the nature of things that the British were surveilling. It has been noted that Warren Hastings and his officials were being disturbed by the sannyasis. Hastings writes in one of his letters:

> We have lately been much troubled here with hordes of desperate adventurers called Sannyasis, who have overrun the province in great numbers and committed great depredations. The particulars of these disturbances and of our endeavours to repel them you will find in our general letters and consultations, which will acquit the Government of any degree of blame from such a calamity. At this time we have five battalions of Sepoys in pursuit of them, and I have still hopes of exacting ample vengeance for the mischief they have done us as they have no advantage over us, but in the speed with which they fly from us. A minute relation of these adventures cannot amuse you, nor indeed are they of great moment, for which reason give me leave to drop the subject, and lead you to one in which you cannot but be interested, etc. (Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, *Anandamath* Tr. Sree Aurobindo & Barindra Kumar Ghosh, Appendices, iii, Hastings to Purling – dated, 31st March, 1772 – Gleig's Memoirs of Hastings – Vol. 1)

It evoked the consciousness of fear in them, moreover, questioned the very existence of imperial domination of the state. Even though, these groups wandered beyond the boundaries of the civil society, which might be a common phenomenon describing the groups, they actually had their own individual practices and ideologies. The very presence of these groups caused a feeling of agitation and anxiety among the British officials. Warren Hastings in one of his letters asserts about the sannyasis:

> You will hear of great disturbances committed by the Sannyasis or wandering Fakeers who annually infest the provinces, about this time of the year in pilgrimages to Jaggarnaut, going in bodies of 1,000 and sometimes even 10,000 men. An officer of reputation (Captain Thomas) lost his life in an unequal attack upon a party of these banditti, about 3,000 of them, near Rungpoor with a small party of Purgunnah Sepoys, which has made them more talked of than they deserve. The revenue, however, has felt the effects of their ravages in the northern districts. The new establishment of Sepoys which is now forming on the plan enjoined by the Court of Directors and the distribution of them ordered for the internal protection of the provinces, will, I hope, effectually secure them hereafter from these incursions.(Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, *Anandamath* Tr. Sree Aurobindo & Barindra Kumar Ghosh, Appendices, i, Hastings to Sir George Colebrooke – dated, 2nd February, 1773 – Gleig's Memoirs Vol. 1)

The British could not determine the conditions about to occur due to the unpredictable attitude adhered by these groups. This unpredictable nature of the groups made the British to create new techniques of power to bring them under control, as these groups were considered to be beyond the 'normal' bounds. The British started to investigate "to provide the criteria by which whole groups would be stigmatize as criminal" (Cohn 10).

RE-INVENTING A PAST

The late eighteenth century in India was a period when the quest for a meaning of the past and its relevance to contemporary society was being undertaken by Indian intellectuals. This quest can be said was happening with the 'colonial intervention and concomitantly under the concept of 'progress' as assumed by the British' (K. N. Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony*, 108). The concern of the British was not for just 'knowing', but it was a strategic action undertaken in constructing the past of India. This operation was carried out by a systematic arrangement of reports of the commissions, innumerable histories of India and its regions penned by colonial administrators, the memoirs and travelogues recorded by unofficial Englishmen. The construction of 'the past by the colonial rulers was substantially different from the past that the 'natives' knew of themselves' (K. N. Panikkar, 108-109). It seems as if colonialism was constructing the past to justify and legitimize the present. The colonisers seemed to link the past and present mainly for the sake of administrative actions. The reading of the past helped the British to institutionalize the administrative practices, which were systematized differently each time to suit the changing needs.

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The construction of a Hindu-India can be said was a socio-political process, which took more than a century to be synthesized. The Indian nationalist movement is one of the elements that assisted in determining the best techniques for constructing a Hindu-India. This political process is found to have crystallized the nationalist, socialist ideas and strong Hindu revivalist thoughts together to form a political modern Hindu-India. The term 'Hindoo' is considered as "the Persian variant of the Sanskrit *sindhu*, referring to the Indus river, and as such was used by the Persians to denote the people of that region. Al-Hind, therefore, is a term denoting the people of a particular geographical area" (King, *Orientalism and Religion* 98-99).

The British who were technologically reconfiguring the territories that were under the imperial control, failed to "transcend a model of religion premised on the monotheistic exclusivism of Western Christianity thereby resulted in the imaginative construction of a single religion called 'Hinduism'. Of course, being able to classify Hindus under a single religion rubric also made colonial control and manipulation easier" (King, 105).

The nineteenth century was the period when, 'Hinduism', was being restructured, which comprised the systematization of religious laws and moreover, the organization of the Indian populace into large aggregate categories. This process of fabrication involved the codification of religious laws and the disposal of the Indian people into 'Hindus', 'Buddhists', 'Jains', 'Muslims' and so on. This seems to have taken place due to the needs of the governing system of the British colonial rule. But, it cannot be claimed as a function that was one-sided. The imperialists and the 'native' English educated elites, in particular, the Brahmins, collaborated in concocting a uniform religion. However, the indispensability of considering thoroughly about the depictions lies in the certainty that they have expressed a mismatch between the descriptions of 'Hinduism' on the one hand, and the realities of the Indian culture on the other.

The construction of Hinduism is an aspect which is still considered to be unclear and is further being debated on. The issue is still under discussion on

> *what* has been constructed: a concept, an object, or an experiential entity. Did the Europeans and their informants invent a new concept to describe and classify the religious and social phenomena of India? Or did they actually create a new religion, a real entity in Indian society? Or did they do both? Or does 'Hinduism' merely describe a pattern in the western cultural experience of India? Even though most authors try to defend one of these positions, they continue to vacillate between these very different and incompatible options. (*Rethinking Religion in India*)

A few imperial stratagems and the official enumeration of the population and the collection of demographic information in particular did have impacts on the Indian society. However, these manoeuvres cannot be completely claimed as influences in the restratification of a Hindu religion oriented India.

The religious institutions and practices seem to have played a significant role in the formation of national identities. The very idea of national identity formation seemed to have taken shape with the British denying the colonisers to participate in the activities of the political institutions that were being institutionalised according to the ways of the British. This should have made the Indians to develop an alternative set of institutions jointly political and religious in nature. The British colonial exercising power and exploitation of India had led to "despondency, loss of self-confidence, and even to an inferiority complex in the whole country. To regenerate self-confidence among the people Hinduism was adapted in certain aspects to the requirements of the political-ideological struggle against British rule" (H. Kruger, *Hinduism Reconsidered* 85)

ASCETICISM AND THE EMERGING SUBJECT OF NATIONALIST THOUGHT

It is noted by many a historian that the revolt of 1857 was one of the major incidents that brought a kind of integrity among the Hindu and Muslim rulers and people to oppose the ways of the British in the Indian subcontinent. This in turn is also considered as the base for the emergence of a nationalist thought among the colonized. However, it is worth mentioning that various peasant uprisings and individual revolts in the territories that were under the British have taken place which were very much in common with each other. It

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looks as if incidents in relation to the people associated with religious affairs have played a key role in constructing a nationalist thought in the minds of the people of the Indian subcontinent under the British. It seems that from as early as 1771, religious affairs have involved in the entire process of socialization, of evolving consciousness. The nineteenth century socio-religious reform movements have also played a major role in bringing the people together to oppose the imperial rule in India. However, this can be said was more of a Hindu nationalist consciousness.

The British became the political and military master of India after their victory in the Great Revolt of 1857. It seemed that they lessened interfering with the social life of the country. However, it is found that the "British created elite" took the initiative of bringing a cultural transformation and reform in the country. The nineteenth century witnessed a social and cultural awakening in the country, which "led directly to an awakening of national sentiment" (Heehs, *India's Freedom Struggle*, 32). However, it has been noticed that the "cultural revival also had a negative side. It encouraged a habit of looking backward, to the heroic days of old India, rather than forward, towards its still great feature" (Heehs, 45).

During the nineteenth century, a form of imaginative identification by the "Indian elite" is found being constructed, and constituted as a national identity. This identity is seemed to have been re-produced continually by the formation of systems of cultural representation. The socio- religious movements appear to have designed cultural practices, gave them a new meanings, which have operated as manoeuvres at various social levels. The cultural diversity that existed in the Indian subcontinent appears to have been unified by using the characters – the hyper-male, re-invented and being depicted as an ideal character – from mythological past, which in a sense signified the "consequence of discursive power that covers over difference" (Chris Barker 132).

It is clear that Indians represent divergent cultures and are linguistically divided into different language families, characterising the profound intrinsic gaps and dissimilarities. The reformers, revivalists and the other Indian intelligentsia look as if have tried to 'rebuild' the history and the hoary past by including the mythical characters. The construction through the narration of India as a "nation" by using "stories, images, symbols and rituals" appear to have represented a common related "meanings of nationhood" (Chris Barker 132). This demonstrates that an Indian "national identity" involved an "identification with representations of shared experiences and history as told through stories, literature," (Chris Barker 132) folk culture and the media.

The concept of an Indian nationhood through the re-invention of a past and its adjustment of traditions and continuity of an imagined emerging 'nation' is found to have been done with a "foundational myth of collective origin" (Chris Barker 132) and further through the use of historical narratives. This in turn appeared as if an idea of 'imagined community' was being concretized through the assemblage of "symbols and rituals in relation to territorial and administrative categories. Thus, a national thought was made to intrinsically connect and constitute by the use of a maximum number of ways of communication.

The Vedic period saw an unconventional lifestyle being constructed by the ascetical institutions. These institutions were devising a system that was against the Vedic culture and traditions. They are found to have opposed the consolidated rites and rituals of the Brahmanical traditions. However, it is to be observed that the Brahmanical system performed a religio-political manoeuvre, and established the *asrama* system. This novel institution seems to have contributed in bringing the ascetic lifestyle, and making it a part of the *asrama* system. Although, the "the ascetic life came to be regarded as holy and essential for salvation at certain times and later on found a place as the fourth *asrama* as *samnyasasrama*" (Bhagat 6).

The ascetic who was an exclusion from the cultural society and until then considered as a part of the 'wild', was synthesized into the system. He was identified as the *Sannyasi*, the one who renounces the world. But, his identity in the system was found to have been reframed as "a Brahmin in the fourth *asrama*". The Upanishads are found to have been taken for reconstructing and codifying the identity of the ascetic. He was made a part of the Brahmanical system. The collective aspect of the set of characteristics of the sannyasi were derived and defused, as the ascetic may not retaliate further on the system. The very term that identified the

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ascetic personality "*samnyasa* is derived from *sam + ni + as*, to place or put down, deposit, give up, abandon or quit: *Kamyanam karmanam nyasam samnyasam*. It also means *sam + nyas*, *samyag prakarena*, completely laying aside or down *nyasa*, abandonment of all worldly concerns" (Bhagat, 12).

The ascetic life style is found to have been synthesized into the asrama system with the passing of time by Brahmins and other cults, after the Vedic period. The Asrama system was an assimilation of the scheme of four-fold values. In this scheme, *sannyasa*, was held in the fourth position, whereas, *brahmacharya*, *grihasta* and *vanaprastha* occupied the first three positions. As already mentioned, the ascetic ideals were framed and reframed. With the advent of time, it has been observed that, the ascetic ideals were practiced not only by individuals, but, also by theistic sects of ancient India. There were ascetic groups that have shaped 'a new phase of religious practices and beliefs that arose with heterodox and even foreign elements' (Haripada, 155) in the ancient society. Tantra was one of the new aspects that gave a "new colouring to our old Brahmanism and Buddhism" (Haripada, 155).

The most important and substantial innovation was the establishment of the *asrama* system by the adherents of the Vedic and the Brahmanical system. This system, which regarded itself as the pre-classical prototype, saw the formulation postulating four religious life styles as authentic or *dharmic* choices for the adult males: Student (*bramacarin*), householder (*grhastha*), hermit (*vanaprastha*), and renouncer (*parivarajaka*). The *asramas* are exhibited as a fourfold division of *dharma* and seems to have been organized through the older classification, which existed in terms of *varna*. Similar to the *varnas*, *asramas* are lifelong vocation and not ephemeral stages. The focal difference between the two divisions is that, unlike one's *varna*, one's *asrama* is a matter of individual choice. The individual has an essential role in the determination of his *dharma*.

The later history of the *asrama* system constitutes both a recede from the basic receptiveness and a fuller integration of the system into the framework of the Hindu world and ideology. The personal choice is eliminated and the four *asramas* are transformed from permanent vocations to stages of life communicating to the system of the rites of passage (*samsara*). The *asramas* exemplify the socio-religious roles desirable to various stages of man's life. One presumes these roles via suitable rites of passage. All these institutions, in a unique way of renunciation, are bestowed into the orbit of Dharmasastric prescriptions.

The significance of the *asrama* system within the ideological structure of classical Hinduism is exposed in the cliché *varnasramadhrama*, which has been exercised since at least the commencement of the common era as a shortcut for what we popularly call today Hinduism. *Asrama*, like *varna*, was basically a theological articulation giving a religious foundation for social institutions. A theological evolution which was an act of adjustment to that of the *asrama* system is the classification of dharma into *pravrtti* (active) and *nivrtti* (non-active). The former is the dharma of society and is associated with the *samsaric* process. The latter is the *dharma* of renunciation and is attached with the path to *moksha*. Renunciation is often called *mokshadharma* in Dharmasastric literature. Similarly, the old *trivarga*, the threefold aim of life –*dharma, artha, kama*-becomes a fourfold classification along with *moksha*.

The modern Hinduism, which was codified by the Brahmanical traditions, later on took the above said concept as its base in continuing the *asrama* system. The ascetic was merged into the asrama system so profoundly that a lot of ascetic ideals that were framed and devised by the older institutions of asceticism had lost their conformity. The *sannyasi* seems to have remained confined to the four stages of life for a long time. According to the Hindu worldview, "sannyas is the fourth stage in the fourfold life cycle scheme, ashramadharma: brahmacharya (apprenticeship), garhasthya (householdership), vanaprastha (withdrawal), and sannyas (renunciation)" (Kakar 43).

However, the ascetic or the sannyasi at various junctures is found to have maintained the aspects that were in terms with the past wild culture. He continued to renounce all material possessions and no longer loaded himself with social and ritual obligations. He started searching for divine knowledge as a free individual on his own terms. He continued to maintain an asocial attitude and style of life. He maintained certain methods of the ascetic ideal, like going through life half naked, alone, wandering, maintaining austerity,

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penitence, should be celibate, begging, fasting, and lead a silent living in a (secluded residence) an *ashram* and so on.

The earliest manuscripts of Tantra are to have been dated between 6th and 7th century A.D. The Tantric cuts are found to have been secretive. It has been noted that these tantric practices were an integration of "earlier forms of Sadhana, Karman, Jnana and Bhakti; and so accepted by various sects like the Saivas, Vaisnavas, Saktas etc. and also by the Buddhists" (Haripada 155). An incidental reference about the formation of ascetics into sects was mentioned in 'the Maitri Upanishad, the Atharvasiras Upanishad and in Patanjali's Mahabhasya' (Haripada 155). The Kapalikas and the Pasupata sects are said to have been formed as early as the 2nd Century A.D. However, the rise of the sects is found to have happened only after the 4th and before the 7th century A.D.

The institutions of asceticism in India during the 7th and 8th Century A.D. were mainly constructed by the Buddhists, Jainas, Pasupatas and Kapalikas. This is said to have been mentioned in the Sankara-digvijaya of Madhava, where details of intellectual and spiritual dual between Sankara and his rivals belonging to different schools have been described (Haripada 164). The Kapalikas at Ujjayaini centre are mentioned to have differentiated among themselves as "belonging to two groups, the Brahmanic following the Vedas and the caste-system and the non-Brahmanic disregarding them both" (164).

The non-Brahmanic category of the Kapalikas had one another important centre set up at Sri-Saila has been pointed out by the 'Bhavabhuthi in his Malatimadhavam, (C. 8th Cent. A.D.) mentioning about the Kapalika ascetic Aghoraghanta, acting as the priest of chamunda-devi and also associated with the Saiva temple of Sri-Saila. Frazer further is found to have referred to these Kapalikas as the non-Brahmin priests of Saiva temples of South India in which human sacrifices were offered in earlier days' (Haripada 164). The Saiva ascetics, esp. the Kalamukhas, a sub-sect of Saiva ascetics, are found to have practically implemented the disclosure of opposing the Brahmanical rites, rules and regulations. For instance, it is found that, Anandagiri in his Sankara-vijaya, is found to have described of "one Unmatta-Bhairava, the leader of the extreme section, possibly the Kalamukhas, belonging to the Sudra caste" (Haripada 165). Even though, there was a strong opposition against the Vedic and Brahmanical rites, the "tradition of asceticism as an individual practice became so deep rooted in Indian culture" (Haripada 166).

HINDU WARRIOR ASCETICISM AND INDIAN NATIONALIST DISCOURSE

The *Bhagavad Gita* is one important Hindu text that, according to some interpretations, is found to have mainly focussed on the idea of renunciation. The ascetic has his own importance in the text. However, it has also been interpreted as a text that depicts the ascesis of action. The ascetic self becomes the heart of the discourse. The text focuses on the inwardly nature of the ascetic's self and agency using tradition and community as the base elements. Renunciation is depicted as an internal affair, and a detachment from the fruits of action rather being aloof from the performing part. The *Bhagavad Gita* conceptualises that "true renunciation does not consist in the physical abstention from activity but in the proper mental attitude toward action. Abandonment of desire for the results of one's actions is true renunciation, which the *Gita* sees as an inner virtue rather than an external life style" (Gavin D. Flood 67).

The Hindu life, which acknowledges the authorship of the two major Sanskrit epics of India; the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, are valued for their high literary merit and religious inspiration and are traditionally ascribed to Vyasa and Valmiki considered as sages (ascetics). If we look into these epics, it is found that the king turned sage (ascetic), Visvamitra takes the 'power' of educating Rama and in one sense 'constructs' the future life of Rama. And if we take the *Bhagavad Gita*, which is considered as the single most important religious text of Hinduism, contained within the *Mahabharata* is filled with "technologies" related to asceticism, like self-discipline, devotion, austerity and duty.

The Bhagavad Gita mainly focuses on the issue of fighting for the sake of *Dharma*. It tries to bridge the chasm between ascetic disciplines and the search for emancipation, on the one hand, and the exigencies of daily life, on the other. The issue of asceticism is expressed in a dual nature, like action to performed for the social good and restricting action for a transcendental goal. The *Gita* is found justifying about the notion of

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self-knowledge and internal realization. It further teaches one to cultivate detachment, control and discipline. These religious 'texts' interpreted by some are found to be teaching the 'Hindu' to follow the ways—similar to that of an ascetic life—considered as paths to gain 'spiritual essence'.

The ascetic ideal as a method is found constituting with features like discipline, devotion, duty, self-sacrifice, austerity, penitence, *brahmacharya*, living in (secluded residence) an *ashram* and so on. These ideal features have been used by various nationalist leaders, (religious and political) to stimulate an ideal of nationalism in the minds of the people. The advent of time made some of the nationalists to go ahead in 'experimenting' by using the 'technologies' on their own 'self' to attain "another state of being". Further, this "very power" may be said, "keeps the whole herd of failures, discontents, delinquents, unfortunates, all sorts of people who inherently suffer, focused on existence, because instinctively he goes ahead of them as their herdsman" (Nietzsche 126).

The ascetic ideals have played a major role in the construction of a national identity in the Indian sub-continent. The 'ascetic' is found having an confidant association with the revolutionary changes that were taking place in Indian social, political, cultural and religious spheres. The spiritual dimension that was taking a shape in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century in India coincided and further, significantly merged with the idea of the 'Modern' that prevailed in the West. The notion of ascetic ideal was re-invented in terms of a Hindu Nationalist ideology by the Hindu nationalists.

It is not assumed that the Hindu Ascesis and the ascetic ideals are unitary in form – the focus of this particular study will be on certain forms of asceticism, as practiced and preached, within the Hindu nationalist discourse. As we start exploring the history and literature, related to the question of how Indian nationalists were able to construct a history that stretched way back into the mythological past, we are aroused with questions and processes whereby Hinduism itself may have been re-constructed in a nationalist image and idiom. This might prove as an important and essential contemporary exercise in tackling complicated and complex issues of present day politics.

The idea of spiritualizing masculinity was an attempt by the Indian nationalists to decolonize themselves physically. This practice was speculated would affect the soul as well the body and was disciplined through traditional ways like meditation and yoga. This was conceptualized as an act that would energize the male body. The ascetic principles are found to have generated "gender as well as homosocial bonds through shared bodily performances, drawing attention to the role of the body in constituting relations of power and domination". (M, A, H, Chandrima, 27) These principles had their own unique power as they were out of the societal control. The ascetic ideals which had their own power-centre, were used by the Indian nationalists for carving a national identity. These ideals further have helped the nationalists to reconstruct the mythical characters as "hyper-males", heroes – who would inspire the body politic and generate an anti-colonial ideology.

Bankimchandra Chatterjee is found to have depicted his heroes (Protagonists) – all the main and sub characters – as ascetics in his novel *Anandamath* (1882). The novel depicts the ascetic ideals, which are naturally stern, and implemented by ascetics, becoming canonical for the common man, who is aspiring for freedom. The ascetic ideals are a reconfigured according to the needs of the present time. The ideals are made to serve the need by the author. Mahendra, one of the protagonists of the novel, who is married and having children becomes a part and parcel of the ascetic group. He is made to leave all his family ties temporarily for the sake of the motherland.

Wakankar points that the "Hindu spirituality, reinvested with lofty origins and anchored in the most hallowed descent of the "nation", was juxtaposed to and modified by the requirements of post-Enlightenment rationality." (Wakankar, 47) Physical weakness was started to be proclaimed as a crime and the culture of physical education become a nationalist agenda. The systematization of *anushilan* or self-cultivation was broached among the body politic. *Anushilan* became the site for spiritualising masculinity. The male body we taken up as a bridge

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between culture and power, between an ascetics and a politics, and between what was after all an elitist-Hindu program for national-cultural regeneration and the dispersed Hindu national-popular itself. It involved a reading of the *Gita* that appropriated the threefold ethics of "devotion", "knowledge", and "duty" (or 'action') against the countervailing ethic of renunciation and otherworldliness that coexisted among the heterogeneous themes in that text. *Anushilan* entailed the cultivation of the "innate human faculties," both physical and mental, as part of a quest for the "perfectibility of man"" (Wakankar 49).

The abstinence of an ascetic was represented not to be taken inordently, Gluttony and plundering was to be abstained. The body politic was to synthesize itself with mythological and "scriptural material, by extricating, in effect, the rationally verifiable from what was seen as the detritus of the supernatural, the miraculous, and the vulgar that cultured these texts and invited the opprobrium of Orientalists and missionaries" (Wakankar, 50).

The process of depicting and the presuppositions about the ascetics and particularly the warrior or militant ascetic category, has played a fanciful, political and social role in the hands of authors and political sannyasis of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The reconstruction of the warrior ascetics as "sadhu patriots" and "defenders of faith and country" by the author, Bankimchandra Chatterji, in particular, in his novel, *Anandamath*, has been traced back to the 'Sannyasi Rebellion' that is said to have taken place in the 1770's. Bankim and the other Indian Hindu nationalist ideologues of the nineteenth century, who were merging Hinduism with nationalism, are presumed to have reconstructed the ascetic ideals by investigating the mythical and conclusively settled historical situation to legitimize and delineate a distinct field, which later was used as a bridge.

The *Bhagavad Gita*, which has played a prominent role in giving a concrete spiritual dimension to nationalism, was also used for interpreting and shaping a militant, warrior aspect, by the Indian Hindu nationalists. This militant, warrior element was fused and portrayed as one among the ascetic ideals. The ascetics (*sadhus*, *sannyasis*), were revered by the masses, mainly due to the ideal qualities that were implemented and were part of their lifestyle. The godmanship that was adapted into their lifestyles became crucial for the reverence that they sought among the masses. The existence of the militant, warrior element among the ascetic ideals seems to have existed from the pre-Vedic period itself, and the actual beginnings of it are still unknown. However, the warrior element is not highlighted, and has always been given less credential as an ascetic ideal. It was given a major form during the nineteenth century, but, slowly was disembarked from the nationalist phase with Gandhi emphasizing on the non-violent aspect.

J. N. Farquhar, considered as one of the foremost academician to discuss on the subject of fighting ascetics of India notes that,

> the ascetics of India seem to stand by themselves. We think of them as the supreme penitents of the world. This side of Hinduism is usually thought to be, beyond other forms of religious life, characterised by other-worldliness, by a supreme contempt for the pleasures, comforts and shows of the world. The idea of Hindu monks becoming fighting men seems grotesquely absurd" (Farquhar, *The Fighting Ascetics* 433).

Most of the historical and literary works on Hinduism, in particular, scarcely mention about the "monastic warriors". If mentioned, or taken to construct a fictional work, it was after the Muslim invasion, on the Indian sub-continent. It is found that there are lot of examples that have been cited about the religious institutions being persecuted (before the) in the pre-Muslim- "they demonstrate that such persecution was economic and not religious" (Lorenzen, War Ascetics 48). However, it is very clear from the records, that Sankaracharya (8th-10th C.) had formed the *dasnami* sect, which had the *nagas*, (who were armed) as one of the sect. Primarily, the greatest sects that existed in the early days were formed by the monastic devotees, who either worshipped Siva or Vishnu. The Siva ascetics were popularly known as *yogis* and the Vaishnava ascetics were known as *bairagis*.

The transformation of these two different sect ascetics into fighting or militant or warrior men is considered to have happened due to the commonest impulse of imitating one's God, so the Shaiva ascetics

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also known as "the *yogis*, adored Bhairava", a fierce form of Shiva, and "got themselves up so as to be as like the god as possible. The *yogi* went naked, had his hair in a great matted cone on the top of his head, carried a sword in one hand and a cup of liquor in the other, and, if possible, he also wore a garland of human skulls hanging from his neck" (Farquhar, *The Fighting Ascetics* 436). There is a mention of *yogis* who were militant men, in the Sanskrit works like Bhavabhuti's (C, 700 A.D.) *Malati-Madhava* and Bana's *Harsha-Charita*. Even the chronicles of Rajputana are found to have referred about the existence of warrior, militant elements in the ascetics, who were in one way considered to have been the devotees of Shiva. Farquhar highlights that, "each Rajput chief was glad to gather round him a bodyguard of these men; and many a chief hired large numbers of them, so that they formed a considerable element in his army. They seem to have usually gone naked, thus keeping up their allegiance to the naked god Bhairava" (Farquhar, *The Fighting Ascetics* 437).

The religious conflicts between various institutions of asceticism seem to have existed in India as early as the fifth century. It has been noted that a particular sect called the Naga Sannyasis were identified by the Greeks as "Gymno-sophists, which literally means "naked Philosophers"" (Jadunath 118). The sect identified as the *nagas*, naked ascetics seems to have been existing with a "pretero-historic ancestry. It must have been founded when Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were no more that Swamps." (Jadunath, Foreword, 1)The various religious monasteries look as if have taken the above conflicts as the base for maintaining fighting ascetic sects. It has been observed that there were religious debates and contests between various religious institutions, which would lead to conflicts. However, it can be argued that, the fighting aspect by the ascetics was maintained for self-defense, disciplining the body, and enlightenment. The fighting ascetics who maintained military orders are never found to have been in records. This can be thought has happened due to their nature of maintaining things in strictest secrecy. But, it can be verified from some of the scholarly works that ascetics belonging to particular religious sects always carried with them lancers or sabers.

Shankaracharya (and his disciples) – is, are – said to have combined "the scattered atoms of individual asceticism known in India from the Vedic age or even before, and place them together under regular discipline and the control of a central authority"(Jadunath 51). It has been observed that the *Dasnamis* are segregated into two divisions: "the shastradharis, who specialize in sacred lore, and the astradharis, who specialize in arms…. The fighting wing is organised into *akharas*, and, in the past, played a historic role" (Jadunath, Foreword, 3). The fighting ascetics being identified as the *nagas* were considered to be in relation to the *astradhari* sect of the *Dasnami* system instituted by Shankaracharya known to be "the oldest, the biggest and the most effective of our monastic orders." (Jadunath, Foreword, 1). Further, it has been opined and argued that

> the evidence regarding the founding of the six *akharas* or 'regiments' of Dasnami nagas, so-called for their habit of going about 'naked' (nagna), is uncertain and conflicting. This lack of historical data tends to support our belief that the Dasnami naga *akharas* were created to defend local interests such as the lands and treasures of temples and monasteries, since such defence would be unlikely to attract the interest of Muslim historians in the same way as did the Sikh and Satnami rebellions (Lorenzen, Warrior Ascetics 52).

It becomes evident from the discourse that a power structure overlaps the Indian nationalist movement and at the same time it can also be said that 'Hinduism' as such was institutionalized for the sake of creating a Hindu based ideologue for re-inventing the past and values.

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