

Holy Faces of India



Sectarian Markings

Swami B. B. Vishnu and Swami B. V. Giri





Holy Faces of India

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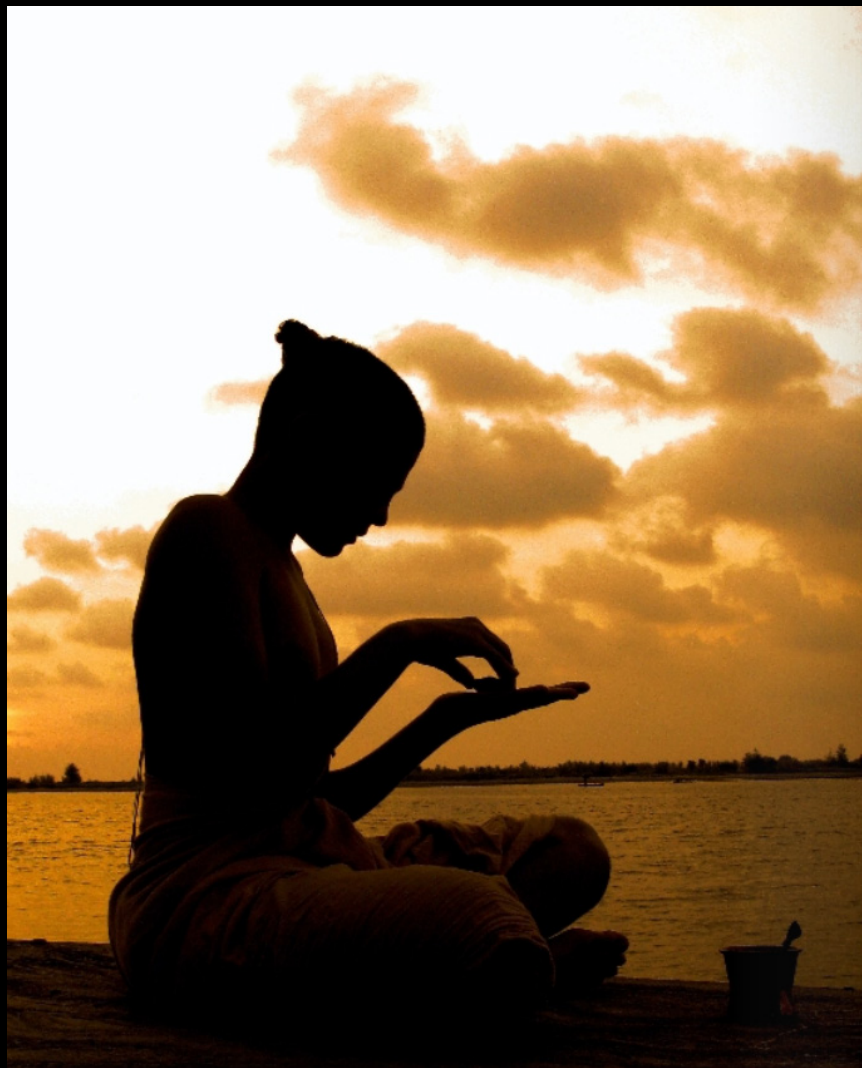
Holy Faces of India



Sri Jagannatha Sat Kona

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Sri Gaudiya Matha Logo

INTRODUCTION

Whenever one visits a temple in India, it is common to see the foreheads of devotees and priests adorned with markings that are commonly known as *tilaka*. When the British first arrived in the subcontinent they unwittingly assumed these signs to be 'caste marks' or signs that indicated the wearers particular social status. Actually *tilaka* is a sectarian mark worn by a devotee of a particular deity and denotes ones devotion to that deity. *Tilaka*, or *pundra* as it is also called, can be classified in three divisions – *urdhva* (vertical), *tiryak* (horizontal) and *vartula* (circular).

URHDVA-PUNDRA

Urdhva-pundra is worn by Vaishnavas (worshippers of Vishnu or Krishna) and represents the feet of Lord Vishnu. Wearing the feet of Vishnu upon one's head indicates that one is a servant of Vishnu. It has also been explained in the Vedic scriptures that the two lines indicate Brahma and Shiva, and the space between is the the abode of Vishnu. Some Vaishnava sects also add a line (*sri-churnam*) in the middle of the *urdhva-pundra* representing Goddess Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu.

Many Vedic texts extol the importance and glories of wearing *urdhva-pundra*. For example, the *Vasudeva Upanishad* specifically explains the significance of wearing *urdhva-pundra* and states that one who wears *urdhva-pundra* is granted salvation. The *Atharvana Upanishad* says that by wearing the mark of Lord Vishnu one becomes dear to the Supersoul. *Padma Purana* explains that those devotees that mark their bodies with *urdhva-pundra* never see hell.

The Vedic scriptures also explain which materials should be used for making *tilaka*. The most popular materials are *gopi-chandana* (a yellow clay found near Dwarka in Gujarat), sandalwood paste, or *kum-kum* (vermillion powder). Some Vaishnava sects use white clay found in holy places such as Sri Rangam and Venkatadri. It is also permitted to use earth from the base of the sacred Tulasi plant and clay from the banks of a sacred river.



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Each particular school has its own rules for the application of *tilaka*. In the Vaishnava sects the holy names of Vishnu are recited while applying *tilaka* on twelve places on the body.

Amongst the most prominent Vaishnava schools of thought are the Gaudiyas, Sri Vaishnavas, Madhvas and the Nimbarkis. Sometimes even within these main schools of Vaishnavism there are sub-sects with their own style of *tilaka*.

TRIPUNDRA

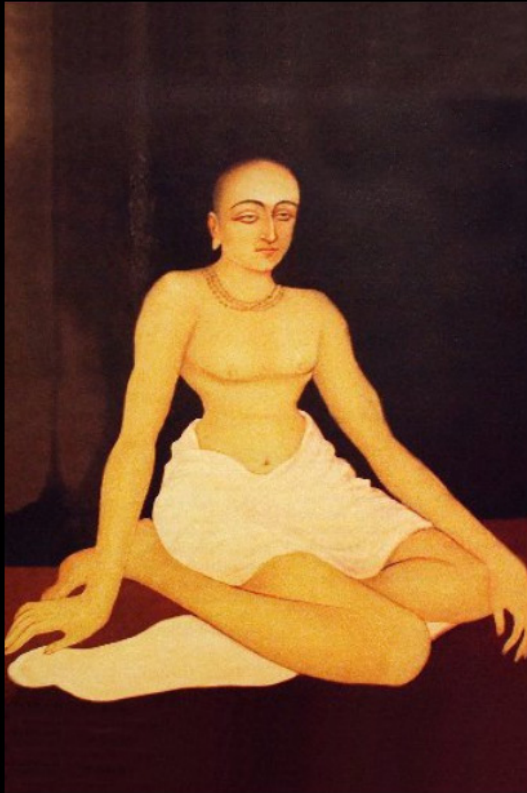
Horizontal *tilaka* is known as *tripundra* and is worn as three lines across the forehead by the Shaivites (worshippers of Shiva) the demigod in charge of universal annihilation. These three lines are said to represent the three states of material nature (goodness, passion and ignorance), the three levels of the temporal world – the earth, the nether-regions and the heavens (*bhu*, *bhuvah* and *svah*), or the main three *Vedas* (*Rig*, *Yajur* and *Sama*).

BINDU

The *bindu* (circle) is worn by Shaktas, those who exclusively worship Goddess Durga, the consort of Shiva. It is worn between the eyebrows since, according to the Tantrika texts, this is where the *ajna-chakra* or third eye of knowledge is situated.

The photographs in this book illustrate the many varieties of *tilaka* that can be found in the holy places of India today.





Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

Gaudiyas

Gaudiya Vaishnavas are worshippers of Krishna and his eternal consort Radharani. They follow the teachings of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1533) whom they regard as being the combined incarnation of Radha and Krishna. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu taught that the living entity is one in substance with Krishna, but different in quantity and thus can never become God himself. This philosophy is known as *Achintya-bhedabheda*.

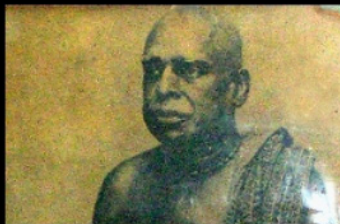
Gaudiya Vaishnavism in India can be found mostly in Vrindavana, Jagannatha Puri and Mayapur. However, due to the preaching movement of Sri Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur [begun in 1918] and his illustrious disciples such as A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Swami B.R. Sridhara Deva Goswami, Sri Bhakti Pramoda Puri Maharaja and others, the Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophy has now spread throughout the world.

Different *tilakas* can be seen in the Gaudiya sect according to which *parivara* (preceptorial lineage) one belongs to. Most Gaudiyas use *gopi-chandana* as *tilaka* although it is not uncommon to see them use clay from the banks of Radha-kunda, a sacred lake found in Vrindavana. Gaudiyas apply *tilaka* to the twelve parts of the body. They also sometimes apply the names of Krishna, Radha and Sri Chaitanya to their bodies with wooden or metal stamps dipped in *gopi-chandana*.

The *tilaka* that Gaudiyas wear represents the feet of Krishna. Generally, at the base of the *tilaka* is a mark in the shape of a tulasi leaf. This type of *tilaka* is most common amongst the Gaudiya Vaishnavas who follow Rupa Goswami and the Bhaktivinoda *parivara*. However in some *parivaras*, other leaves are drawn such as a neem leaf or a banyan leaf. Some *parivaras*, such as the Syamananda *parivara*, wear a leafless *tilaka*. Unlike most Vaishnava schools, females followers of the Gaudiya sect are permitted to wear *tilaka*.

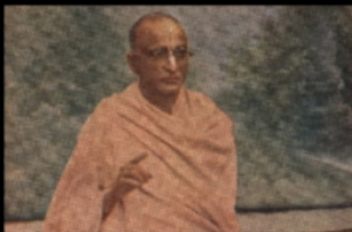
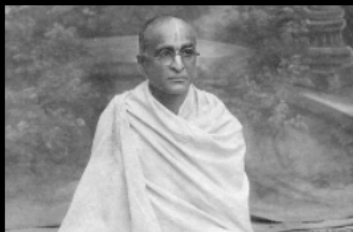
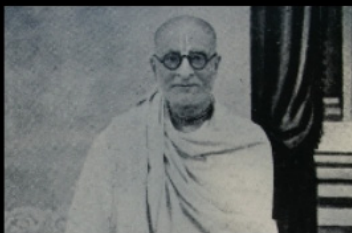
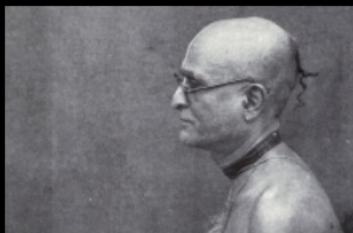
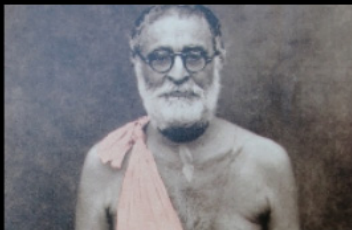


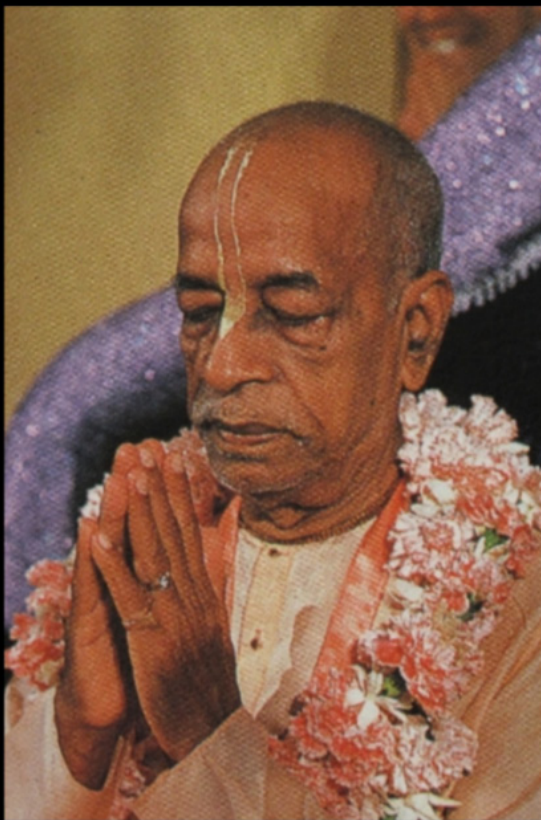
Thakur Bhaktivinoda





Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati



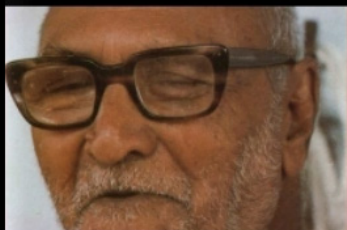


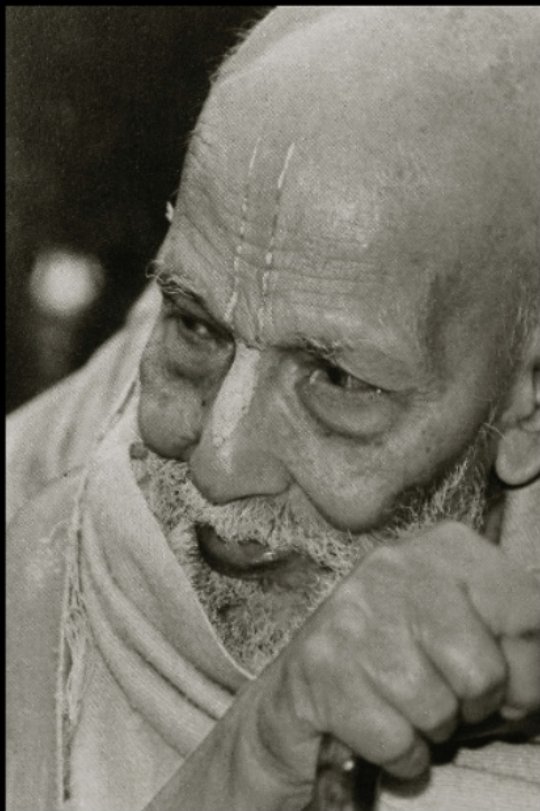
A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada



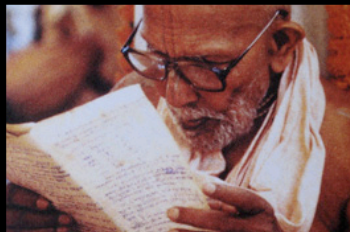


Swami B.R. Sridhara Deva Goswami





Swami B.P. Puri Goswami

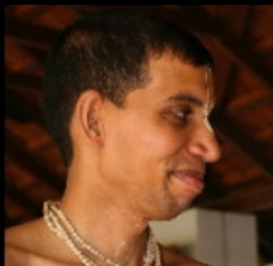




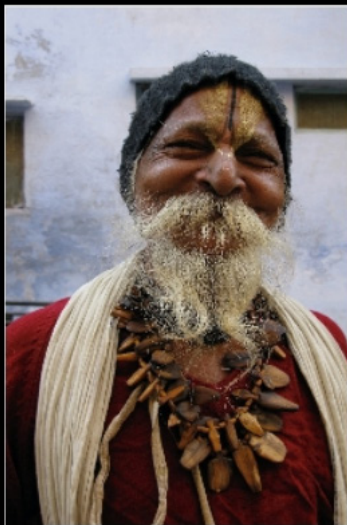
Sri Sri Radhika Madhava Sundar







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Gaura Mudra



Maha Mantra Mudra



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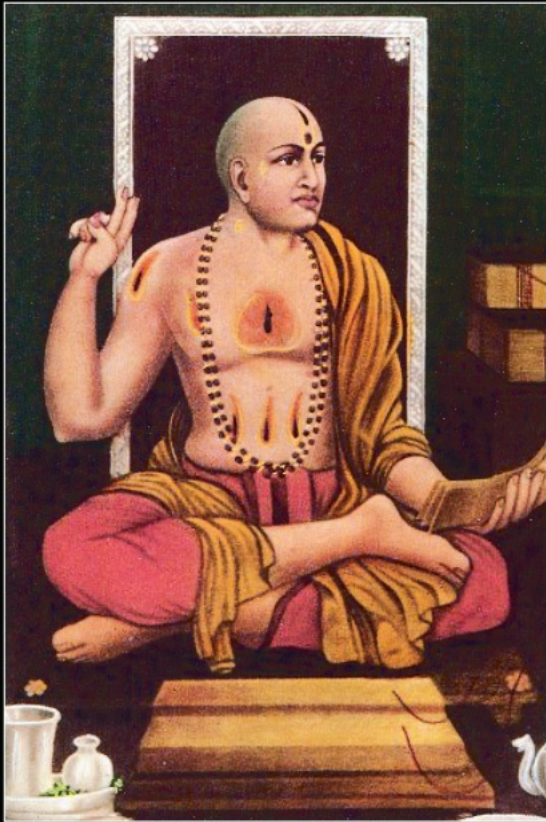
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Madhvacharya

Madhvas

The Tattvavadi Vaishnavas are followers of Madhva (1238-1317 CE) and are generally known by the name of their founder (ie. Madhvas). They are most commonly found in Karnataka, South India. Madhva preached the doctrine of *Dvaita Vedanta*, or dualism. In Madhva's philosophy the living entity and the Supreme Lord Narayana are always distinct from one another. This belief is in direct contrast to the monistic Advaita philosophy expounded by Adi Sankara.

For their *tilaka*, the Tattvavadis use *gopi-chandana*. The application of *tilaka* in the Madhva sect differs slightly to other Vaishnava schools. They apply *tilaka* in fifteen places on the body and the *tilaka* applied on the chest is in the shape of a large banyan leaf and either side of this are two long streaks of *gopi-chandana*.

In the middle of the forehead Tattvavadis place a black line called *angara*, the soot from a lamp offered to the Deity. Under this black line they add a dot known as *akshata* which is made from the paste of tumeric root and the ash of a plantain flower.

Tattvavadis also apply *pancha-mudra* (five stamps) to their bodies with *gopi-chandana* in thirty-two places. The five signs are the emblems of Narayana – the conchshell, the disc weapon, the mace and the lotus. The fifth sign is the holy name of Narayana. Once a year the Madhvas brand these insignia on their bodies with hot stamps. This is believed to be a sign of allegiance and devotion to Narayana.

Female adherents of this school may wear *gopi-chandana* but do not apply *angara* or *akshata*.









Chakra Mudra



Shankha Mudra



Gada Mudra



Padma Mudra



Nama Mudra















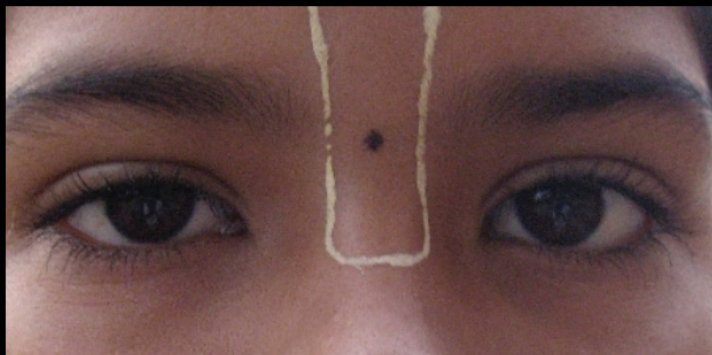
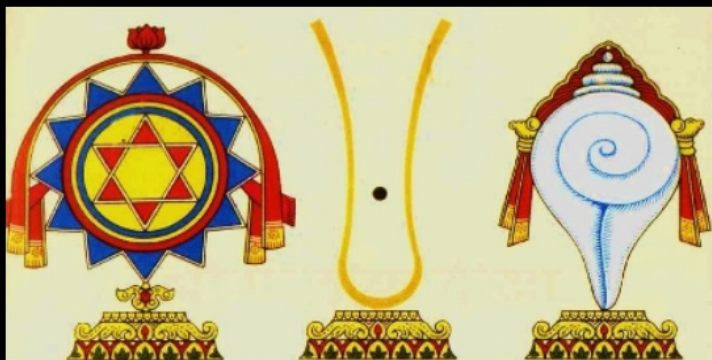
Nimbarakacharya

Nimbarkis

Nimbarkis follow the *Dvaitadvaita siddhanta* (the philosophy of oneness and difference) of Nimbarka. Since they are exclusively worshippers of Radha and Krishna, they are mostly found in the holy town of Vrindavana, although they also have centers in Bengal and Nepal. The Nimbarka school of thought became most prominent in the 16th Century during the time of Kesava Mishra of Kashmir, a notable teacher who began a revival in the Nimbarka school.

The headquarters of the Nimbarkis can be found in Parashurampur, near Jaipur, Rajasthan. This is the seat of their head-priest who is known as the Shriji Maharaja. The Nimbarka school includes both celibate renunciants (*vairagis*) and married householders (*grihasthas*). The renunciants tend to wear a much larger, ostentatious variation of the *tilaka* and sometimes smear either side of their *tilaka* with yellow sandalwood pulp.

Nimbarka *tilaka* is drawn with *gopi-chandana* or sandal-paste and consists of two fine lines that flair out at the top of the forehead, becoming narrower as they reach the bridge of the nose. Generally a black dot (*bindu*) is placed in the middle of the *tilaka*.











Ramanujacharya

Sri Vaishnavas

Sri Vaishnavas are the followers of the philosopher and saint Ramanuja (1017-1137 CE) who established the philosophy of *Viśiṣṭhadvaita Vedānta* (qualified monism). Ramanuja propagated the worship of Lakshmi-Narayana and established many centers of learning, temples and communities throughout Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

After the passing away of Ramanuja, his followers broke off into two divisions – the Vadagalai and the Tenagalai. The Vadagalai can be recognised by their round shaped *tilaka*, whereas the Tenegalai *tilaka* tends to be squarer with an *asana* (base) on the nose.

The white clay that Sri Vaishnavas use to apply *tilaka* is known as *tiruman* and is collected from Melkote in Karnataka and other holy places. All Sri Vaishnavas generally wear *tilaka* on all twelve parts of the body. However, it is common to see Sri Vaishnavas wearing *tilaka* only on the forehead. Some prefer to wear full body *tilaka* only on special festivals and other such occasions. In daily life Sri Vaishnavas may abbreviate the facial *tilaka* by only applying the single red line in the middle of the forehead. This single vertical line is made from red vermillion but some Sri Vaishnavas use yellow tumeric. Female Sri Vaishnavas do not apply full *tilaka*, rather they apply the single red line to their foreheads with a small white crescent below.

The Vaikhanasa sect of Vaishnavas also wear the same style of *tilaka* as the Tenagalai Sri Vaishnavas. The Vaikhanasa sect are most prevalent in Tirupati and are a very ancient community of temple priests.





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Shiva

Shaivites

Followers of Shiva are known as Shaivites and are distinct from Vaishnavas by their horizontal *tilaka* known as *tripundra*. *Tripundra* is usually made up of sacred ash (*bhashma*) taken from a sacrificial fire. Some of the more heretodox followers of Shiva will use ashes from a cremation ground to wear as *tripundra*. It is not uncommon for Shaivites to also wear vertical *tilaka* representing the trident of Shiva.

Orthodox Shaivites apply *tripundra* on thirty-two places on the body. It can also be applied on sixteen, eight or five places. While applying the ash, the various names of Shiva are chanted.

There are not as many sects and sub-sects in Shaivism as there are in Vaishnavism, therefore there is not much difference in the styles of *tilaka* used by the worshippers of Shiva. Some Shaivites also apply a red dot along with the *tripundram* representing Shiva and his consort Parvati.

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Nagas

Nagas

The Nagas are militant ascetics whose history dates back to the 8th Century when the famous philosopher Shankara (788-820 CE) established the seven main divisions (*akharas*) of Nagas – the Mahanirvani, Niranjani, Juna, Atal, Avahana, Agni and Ananda Akharas. Shankara recruited the Nagas and organised them into militant armed bands to defend the Hindus against the onslaught of the invading Muslims.

The Nagas are divided into three groups - the Shaivite Akhara (worshippers of Shiva), the Vairagi Vaishnava Akhara (worshippers of Vishnu) and the Kalpavasis Akhara (worshippers of Brahma)

The word Naga is derived from the Sanskrit word *nagna*, meaning naked. Most Nagas are generally naked while others may simply wear a loincloth (*kaupina*). It is also not unusual to see Nagas brandishing swords, tridents, spears and whips.

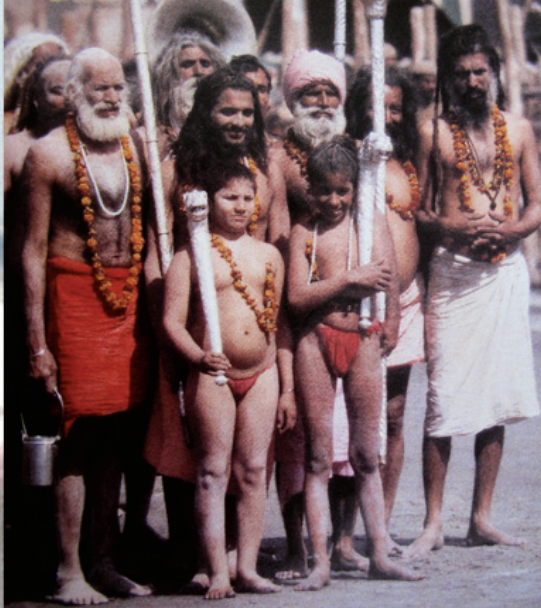
Nagas are the most prominent group of *sadhus* to be found at the Kumbha Mela. Throughout history there has been violent clashes at the Mela between the Vaishnava Nagas and the Shaivite Nagas over who takes precedence during the sacred bath. Nowadays there is a truce between the two groups, though both parties are kept well away from each other at the Kumbha Mela.

The outstanding trait of all Nagas is that they smear their bodies with ashes. The Vairagi Nagas who worship Vishnu also wear *urdhva-pundra tilaka*.











Shaktas

Shaktas

Shaktas are worshippers of the Mother Goddess who is known as Parvati in her benign aspect, and as Kali in her ferocious form. Shaktas can be divided into two groups: *daksina-marga* (orthodox) and *vama-marga* (heterodox). The orthodox Shaktas worship the goddess through the methods explained in the *Vedas* and *Puranas* while heterodox Shaktas worship her by means of *Tantra* and black magic.

Shaktas can be found throughout India but are most common in Bengal and Assam where the goddess is especially revered and *Tantra* is commonly followed.

Shaktas wear a simple red dot between the eyebrows symbolizing the *ajna-chakra*, or third eye of knowledge. The dot is made of red vermillion powder and differs in size according to the degree of enthusiasm the devotee feels while applying it! Unlike Vaishnavas and Shaivites, Shaktas only wear *tilaka* on the foreheads rather than on other parts of the body. Many Shaktas apply the same *tilaka* as the Shavites, namely the *tripundra*.

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Ramanandis

Ramanandis

The Ramanandis are an order of mendicants who follow the teachings of Swami Ramananda (1400-1470), a devotee of Sita-Rama. They are most prominent in North India and their main communities are found in Ayodhya, Chitrakuta, Galta and Vrindavana. Although the Ramanandis are an off-shoot of the Sri Vaishnava *sampradaya*, they differ in many ways – in particular in how they lay emphasis on the worship of Sita-Rama

Ramanandis refer to their *tilaka* as *triphala*, or 'three fruit,' referring to the three vertical lines that they wear. Ramanandis use a variety of different materials to make *tilaka*. Most commonly they use white clay from Chitrakuta, as well as a darker clay that they call *ramaraja*. Sometimes they also use *gopi-chandana*. Some Ramanandis also mix different colored clays together.

There are variations in *tilaka* according to the various sub-sects (*dvaras*) of Ramanandis. Some of the sub-sects are the Lashkaris, Chaturbhujis, Tiladvaras, Gomatis, Ruparasas, Shilamanis, Bindudharis, to name but a few.

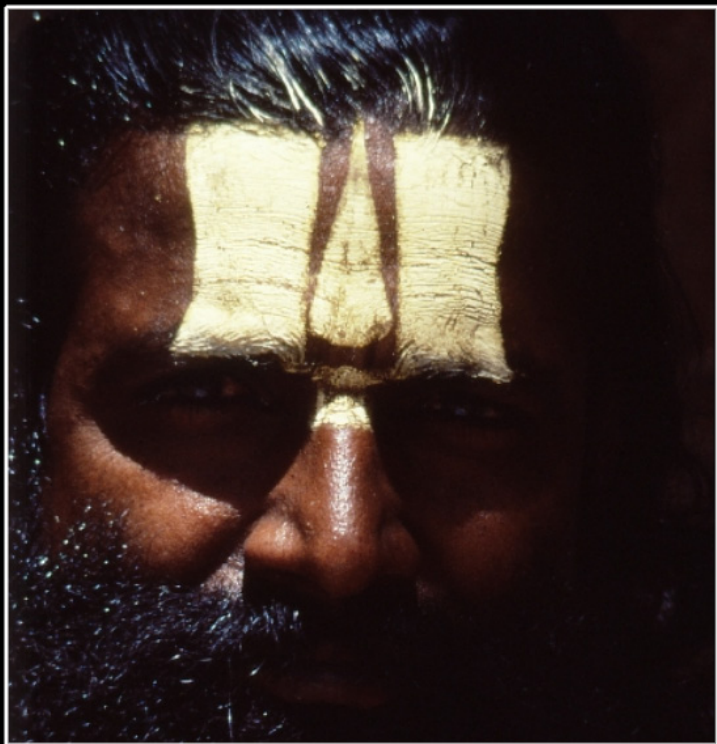














Miscellaneous Sadhus







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Swami B. B. Vishnu graduated in 1970 from Clarkson College of Technology with a Master of Science degree in Physics. In 1975 he came a disciple of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

Swami Vishnu has published a number of books and articles on Indian culture and Vedic science documenting the sacred places, temples and activities of India as well as the many contributions of India's ancient Vedic culture to science and world culture.

Swami Vishnu currently resides at the Sri Narasingha Chaitanya Ashram situated on the banks of the sacred Kaveri River in South India.



Swami B.V. Giri is a student of Sanskrit, Bengali, and is proficient in the philosophy and rituals of the Gaudiya Vaishnava Sampradaya.

Swami Giri has written a number of articles on Vaishnavism, ancient Indian history and culture.

Swami Giri is well acquainted with all the various sects of holymen in India and as such his contribution to the present publication has been invaluable.

*“Know for certain that the body that is marked with
sacred tilaka is a sanctified temple of the Lord.”*

(Padma Purana)

