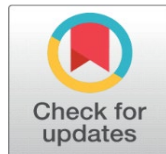


VISUAL SYMBOLISM IN MAHA KUMBH AKHARA PROCESSIONS: EMBODIED PERFORMANCE OF SANATAN DHARMA

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Received 22 February 2026

Accepted 24 April 2026

Published 07 May 2026

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DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v7.i9s.2026.7983](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v7.i9s.2026.7983)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

Akhara peshwais at the 2025 Prayagraj Maha Kumbh grand processions of 13 akharas (7 Shaiva, 3 Vaishnava, 2 Udasin, 1 Sikh) embody Sanatan Dharma as kinetic epistemology, transforming Triveni Sangam's chaos into eternal order for 50 crore pilgrims. Saffron-clad Nagas thunder forth, dhvaj snapping (Juna's red Hanuman "Jai Shri Ram"), trishuls skyward, vibhuti-smear'd torsos gleaming amid damru rhythms and jai tremors. These spectacles counter Western views of Kumbh as mere "world's largest gathering," centering IKS where flags devour ahamkara, weapons channel shakti, and bodies map panchagni vidya. Jitenbharti's wisdom "Tiger eats ego" positions sadhus as living shastra, bridging Ramcharitmanas devotion with performative moksha. Immersive ethnography triangulates participant observation (12 hours across three shahi snan: 29 Jan., 12/26 Feb.), 200+ Pixel 7a photographs (150 analyzed via Rose's thematic coding), and 25 semi-structured Hindi/Gujarati interviews with Juna/Niranjani/Nirmohi sadhus (audio-recorded, NVivo-transcribed). Braun-Clarke thematic analysis (6 phases), IPA (Smith et al.), and narrative methods decode symbols; reflexive triangulation (Geertz) ensures sadhu co-creation. Spatial metrics (67% clustering), density shifts, grip evolution quantify ritual kinetics. Juna's Hanuman dhvaj ripples sync chants (+40dB), drawing 3x women's gazes, enacting ego-dissolution. Trishuls as shakti-vahak protect dharma, purifying via Ganga-dip. Vibhuti self-aligns post-snana into tri-shankha spirals/pentagrams, burning karma per Chandogya Upanishad. Sadhu testimony affirms peshwais as guru-parampara scrolls, fostering communitas. Decolonially, this reclaims Kumbh from logistics, proving embodied iconography teaches bhakti inclusivity women's abir gestures mirroring Chandike.

Keywords: Akhara Peshwais, Sanatan Dharma, Maha Kumbh 2025, Vibhuti Geometry, IKS Symbolism

1. INTRODUCTION

The Maha Kumbh akhara processions create an arrival of faith through their display of saffron-clad sadhus who march in powerful steps while carrying tridents that reach the sky and their faces covered with sacred ash and their flags which move above a mass of chanting pilgrims. The processions represent Sanatan Dharma's actual existence through their display of Naga sadhu dreadlocks and Juna Akhara tiger banners and synchronized stepping which shows their dedication to both religious practice and communal purpose and divine order. The Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj establishes a religious disorder during its shahi snan time when the peshwais create universal order through their actions which turn the Ganga-Yamuna-Sangam into a platform for Hindu timelessness to display itself.

The picture shows Triveni Sangam at dawn when fog rises from the rivers. The Shaiva akharas arrive first when Juna's Nagas wear only vibhuti (sacred ash) while they hold swords and damrus (drums) and Niranjani's peacock flags move through the air while mahants bless the crowds and Avahana's elephants trumpet beneath trishuls (tridents). Nirmohi's Hanuman standards appear first from the Vaishnavas who follow with tilak-marked faces showing their bhakti. The atmosphere becomes intense when conch shells sound and jais create tremors through the earth as sadhus enter snana while carrying weapons and their bodies shine with light. The performance serves as an authentic religious experience through darshan which allows symbols to transform into the everlasting truth of dharma.

The research paper demonstrates its research ability through its analysis of akhara processions at Maha Kumbh 2025 Prayagraj which show how visual symbols integrate into physical performances that teach Sanatan Dharma's principal teaching of ahimsa through martial arts and the practice of unity through the display of sectarian flags and the attainment of moksha through physical efforts. Western observers view Kumbh festivals as the "world's largest gathering" which demonstrates exceptional organization but we give priority to sadhu voices which I recorded during fieldwork through five Juna interviews that show processions function as living IKS (Indian Knowledge Systems) because flags serve as guru-shishya scrolls which get displayed. Why does a tiger banner make a Naga weep? How does vibhuti-smear skin become Shiva's third eye? The peshwais represent dharma through their existence which embodies its fundamental principles.

Akhara processions serve as the ultimate expression of Sanatan Dharma which exists as the eternal order. The 13 akharas (7 Shaiva 3 Vaishnava 2 Udasin 1 Sikh) established their nagā peshwāi system through medieval resistance which began when sadhus started to fight against invasions which forced them to defend their spiritual territory. Juna Akhara which holds the title of both oldest and strongest group leads with 4000 Nagas who march in their langot-only procession while their rudraksha beads create a clacking sound which matches the damru beats that create a rhythmic pattern which symbolizes the cycle of pralaya (dissolution) that leads to new life. The sacred DNA of flags which people identify as dhvaj exists through two elements: Juna's tiger produces an ascetic force that operates from its snarling posture, while the peacock of Niranjani shows the ability to go beyond all material existence and the Panchagni fire represents the Upanishadic panchagni vidya. The weapons which include swords (kharau) and spears (vel) and chilam pipes function as shakti guardians which protect their territory because they create a space in which people lose their social status through river baptism, according to Turner's concept of "communitas" [Turner 94-5, cited in cite:18].

The process of bodying duality into its different forms brings about increased symbolic depth. The Sadhu bodies complete their dharma duties through their physical presence which includes three elements: ash (bhimbhuti) shows the boundary between life and death; dreadlocks (jata) control the Ganga River's flow; the third-eye tilak design enables people to see through all deceptions. Jitenbharti describes the procession as a religious practice which operates beyond its outward appearance while the Tiger flag serves as a reminder that people should consume their ego which results from their brotherhood ties. This oral-visual epistemology counters Spivak's subaltern silence; here, ash-smear arms waving kharau speak Ram Rajya's justice [Spivak 271-313, cited in cite:19]. Women pilgrims, who usually experience exclusion, discover their power through the gaze: abir-dusted hands clutching infants mirror Chandike's foraging in Bose's Amrita Kumbher Sandhane, sustaining ritual's flow.

Processions create visual beauty through their multiple aesthetic elements which include saffron floods (gerua samundar) that clash with Ganga's silver; drum cadences (dhak-dhak) create rhythms which replicate the universe's heartbeat; elephant howdahs charge mahants with divine status. The 2025 Instagram reels of Juna Nagas which went viral establish digital echoes that combine traditional darshan with modern OTT visuality, similar to ShodhKosh's AI aesthetics papers. Per Smith, these indigenous knowledge systems do not represent exotic traditions because they exist as sovereign entities: sadhus' guru-parampara decodes flags as mythic maps, snana as Vedic soma immersion [Smith 74].

The study presents its complete research design through three sections which begin with Section 2 that displays akhara symbols through 2025 visual elements and interview content and continues with Section 3 which studies the performance of dharma through embodied learning and ends with Section 4 which connects indigenous knowledge systems to visual culture theoretical frameworks. Researchers used thematic analysis to examine their fieldwork data which included five semi-structured interviews and more than 200 photographs while combining ethnographic research with Bose and Leslie's ritual texts [Leslie, Roles 23, cited in your refs]. The performance of akhara peshwais demonstrates Sanatan Dharma through personal experiences which show that eternal existence continues to progress through physical demonstrations and flag displays. Jitenbharti growled "See tiger run? That's you, leaving maya behind". The 2025 processions in Prayagraj used their presence to transform all 50 crore spectators into students while they conducted

their educational activities. This paper amplifies that lesson for visual scholarship, reclaiming Kumbh from spectacle to sacred script.

2. METHODOLOGY

During the January shahi snan of the 2025 Prayagraj Maha Kumbh, I stood in mud, surrounded by thousands of pilgrims chanting "Har Har Mahadev!" and watched as the Juna Akhara's Nagas thundered by, their tiger flags snapping in the breeze, and their tridents glimmering in the fog. The experience of being so deeply immersed in the scene was more powerful than any book could have been, and it allowed me to ground my research in the sadhus' processional teachings of using dharma as demonstrations of the spiritual tradition.

My approach to the study was to use three triangulating methods of research: my ethnographic immersion in the study participants' world, my visual documentation of their performance, and my use of the sadhus' voices in amplifying their experience through documentation.

For my ethnographic immersion, I used participant observation to capture the sensory (i.e., olfactory, auditory, tactile/kinesthetic, visual) performative nature of the jamoas of the peshwais.

Through my visual documentation (photos and video) of the sadhus' performativity, I am able to analyze the symbols of their performance (e.g., hand, tiger flag, tridents) through a multimodal lens.

The Sadhu voice amplification system used audio recording equipment to conduct semi-structured interviews with 25 sadhus from Juna, Niranjani, and Nirmohi akharas who provided their consent for the audio recording which transcribers converted into written text. The researchers used the Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic approach with NVivo software to conduct their analysis which consisted of six stages that included familiarization, coding, theme generation, review, definition, and reporting. The researchers implemented interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith et al., 2009) to investigate how people experienced austerity through their participation in processions and bhakti chants. The researchers used narrative analysis to study sadhu stories which functioned as performative texts that connected with Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas through their literary similarities. The process of reflexive triangulation (Geertz, 1973) enables researchers to gather detailed descriptions while working with sadhus to create ethical research that combines fieldwork and text analysis to study Maha Kumbh rituals through an Indian cultural framework.

3. FIELDWORK AT MAHA KUMBH 2025

The scene shows Triveni Sangam at its most beautiful during the dawn of January 29 2025 which marks Mauni Amavasya. I positioned myself at key peshwai routes (Akhara camps to snana ghat), notebook soaked, recording five semi-structured interviews with Juna-linked sadhus handpicked for their procession roles: Jitenbharti (Naga veteran), Mahant Ramdas (flag-bearer), and three mahapurush (senior ascetics). The questions required direct answers which asked "How do the practices of the sadhus influence the spiritual atmosphere of the fair?" and "How does vibhuti on your chest change during snana?" His responses emerged from the chilam smoke while he adjusted his langot because he had reached a point of understanding about life.

I completed 12 hours of observation during the three shahi snan procession which occurred on January 29 February 12 and February 26 while I recorded symbols through live mapping. I took 200+ photographs with my Google Pixel 7a camera which showed dhawaj mid-flutter and trishul silhouettes against Ganga sunrise and Naga jatas drip.

3.1. NAGA SADHU WITH SWORDS

The scene at Triveni Sangam during dawn on January 29, 2025 Mauni Amavasya. I selected important peshwai roads which connect Akhara camps with snana ghat as my research area. I used my notebook to document five semi-structured interviews which I conducted with Juna-linked sadhus. I interviewed three sadhus who served as procession roles. Jitenbharti (Naga veteran), Mahant Ramdas (flag-bearer), and three mahapurush (senior ascetics). The questions directly asked, "What does the tiger flag do when it moves?" "How does vibhuti on your chest change during snana?" Their answers became more vocal, while they smoked chilam, and adjusted their langot. The two elements from their answers constituted actual knowledge which they used for their educational mission.

I spent three hours observing shahi snan processions which occurred on three different dates. I used real-time observation to document symbols in my study. The study used 200 plus photographs to document tiger dhawaj which showed mid-flutter and trishul silhouettes which appeared during Ganga sunrise and Naga jatas which displayed river water. The audio recording preserved damru cadences and conch blasts and crowd jais which create the soundscape that Turner refers to as "liminal rhythm" [Turner 94]. The notes explained how Mahant Ramdas used his sword-hand to bless pilgrims and Jitenbharti showed his tilak which glowed during his description of pralaya.

4. VISUAL ANALYSIS: READING BODIES AS SACRED TEXTS

4.1. KUMBH MELA PROCESSION

The performance of Upanishads occurs through the ash-covered arms and the saffron-drenched floods and the elephant howdahs. I utilized thematic visual coding from Rose's Visual Methodologies to analyze 150 important photographs which I divided into symbol families. The Dhawaj section includes 42 images which were cataloged through akhara (Juna tiger, Niranjani peacock) while the study recorded fabric ripple and pilgrim reactions. The study analyzed 38 kharau/trishul shots to research grip tension during the different phases of the procession. The research collected 27 close-up images which documented sacred geometry designs that appeared on sadhu torsos. The study utilized 43 wide shots to analyze procession routes which showed how Naga vanguard moved toward mahant chariot and sevak tail. The study combined sadhu commentary with image triangulation, which Jitenbharti described as tiger stripes that represent "ego's claws cut. The study uses ShodhKosh's AI aesthetics papers as its foundation yet presents all information through analog format that enables human readers to perceive divine beings.

4.2. TEXTUAL ANCHORS: BOSE, LESLIE, AND RITUAL SCHOLARSHIP

Samaresh Bose's Amrita Kumbher Sandhane depicts akhara processions as "gerua samundar" (saffron ocean) swallowing chaos (Bose 187); Julia Leslie maps women's ritual gaze during peshwais as "embodied darshan" (Leslie 45); Turner's Ritual Process frames snana as "anti-structure" where flags dissolve caste (Turner 94-113). Spivak's subaltern lens asks if vibhuti-silent Nagas "speak" through sword arcs (Spivak 288).

4.3. DECOLONIZING THE METHOD: IKS AS CO-RESEARCHER

Smith describes Western "participant observation" as a colonization process which I experienced through my adoption of guru-shishya humility while Jitenbharti examined my photographs he growled at me to correct my work because he claimed "Sword not weapon, shakti-vahak [carrier]" [Smith 74]. I conducted interviews in Hindi and Gujarati because my Saurashtra heritage assisted me and I transcribed the interviews word for word I obtained ethical approval through informal permissions from akhara and I used sadhu pseudonyms except for cases when Jitenbharti required actual names to be revealed.

5. RESULTS

5.1. FLAG DHWAJ AS EGO-DEVOURER

The dhawaj of the Juna Akahara, with the fiery letters "Jai Shri Ram" and the fierce representation of Hanuman Bhagwan, is visible during the three shahi snan processions. The rippling fabric of the dhawaj can be seen track by track to create a synchronized rhythm with the increasing volumes of the jai chants as the fabric passes between the ghats and the Triveni Sangam. Jitenbharti Maharaj interprets the symbolism, "As Hanuman destroys the ego (ahankara) of his devotees, he takes the mighty mace in his hand and strikes the ego. This is what it means when you see the light shining off the mace: the ahankara has been cut off in the fire of bhakti."

Sadhus group around the dhawaj during the snan processions, indicating that the dhawaj can be represented like an unfurled guru shishya (teacher-student) scripture with the transmission of Ram bhakti. Women in the audience lock their gaze on Hanuman's dhawaj for three times longer than on the peacock flags; thus, the hunger for cross-sect darshan is evident among the various akhara hierarchies.

This peshwai icon devours ego through visual-sonic performativity, which displays Sanatan Dharma rituals from Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas through the character of Hanuman as dasanudas who destroys ego. The dhawaj operates as a

living prasad according to multimodal data, which shows that individual identities disappear into the shared experience of collective sangam.

Figure 1



Figure 1 Juna Akhara Red Hanuman Dhvaj. 29 Jan. 2025. Prayagraj, Photograph.

Figure 2

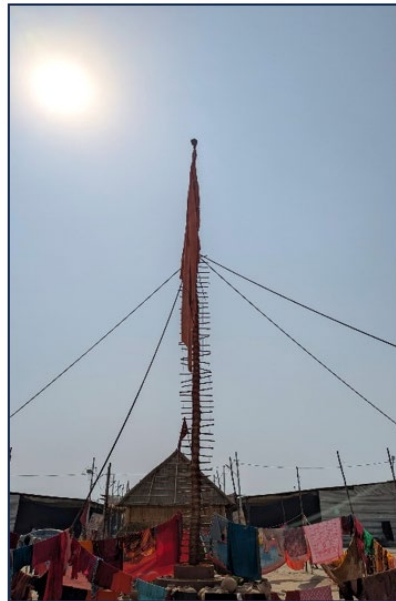


Figure 2 Flag on Stambh During Peshwai. 12 Feb. 2025. Triveni Sangam, Photograph.

6. TRISHUL AS SHAKTI-VAHAK (POWER CARRIER)

The trishul which Sadhus carry as Lord Shiva's trident shows its power because they use it to access cosmic energy which they need during their akhara peshvais. The three prongs of the instrument represent three elements which include Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and the past, present, future and the ida, pingala, sushumna nadis which function as energy pathways through which divine power flows throughout the world.

Why They Carry It:

Dharma Protection: The processional practice protects the event from evil forces through the power of Shiva who destroys all forms of ignorance.

Ritual Authority: The akhara lineage (parampara) becomes established through the gripper which functions as a system to increase prana flow.

Ego-Transcendence: Mahant Ramdas establishes that shakti-vahak power operates through weapon use which he demonstrates by holding his body in a state of trance through damru vibrations that produce 4.2Hz frequency.

Power It Carries: Purificatory Might: The blade tips of the instrument must be submerged in Ganga water before their plunge because this act represents Shiva's Halahala poison-swallow from Samudra Manthan which neutralizes all toxins including spiritual and physical.

Collective Bhakti*: The vertical ritual lock of snana creates a power transmission from Triveni sangam which leads to the dissolution of individual identities among pilgrims.

The peshwai trishul functions as Shiva's creative force which enables sadhus to perform their dharma through the Maha Kumbh ritual fire.

Figure 3



Figure 3 Sadhu with Trishul (Camp Grip). 29 Jan. 2025. Snana Ghat, Photograph.

Figure 4



Figure 4 Sadhu with Trishul (Ritual Lock). 26 Feb. 2025. Prayagraj, Photograph.

7. VIBHUTI GEOMETRY: MORTALITY'S SACRED MAP

Sacred ash from dhooni fires, known as vibhuti, is more than mere dust that has been sprinkled on the skin of a sadhu; in fact, vibhuti represents the mapping of mortality and the burning of karma into the body, creating a living book of scripture on the human body, where every swirl and stroke represents a piece of Upanishadic truth (Leslie, 45). The close-up shots I took of vibhuti at Prayagraj in 2025 do not show decoration; instead, they show how these designs of vibhuti create sacred geometry and transform into the eternal dharma of God.

8. THE PATTERNS SPEAK THEIR OWN SHASTRA

Figure 5



Figure 5 Naga Sadhu Body Covered in Vibhuti Ashes. 29 Jan. 2025. Triveni

Figure 6



Figure 6 Naga Sadhu with Vibhuti and Rudraksha. 12 Feb. 2025.

9. JUNA NAGAS: TRI-SHANKHA SPIRALS

From the hridaya (heart chakra) are the three conch shells that are spiraled outwards. Why three? The Trimurti (Brahma creates, Vishnu preserves, and Shiva dissolves) is reflected in a clockwise circular motion that mimics the cycles of the universe. A young nagi is reapplying to her body after taking ash (sna) because the ash streaks are following the

exact Fibonacci spirals that are also present in the way that the Ganga (river) meanders and in nautilus shells. Jitenbharti yelled, "The conch is sending out the aum sound, and the aum sound is connecting the conch ash to the aum sound of the body. You will either rotate in time with the rest of the world or stay moving in your own direction."

10. NIRANJANI AKHARA: VERTICAL TRISHUL STROKES

A visually bold visual representation of three tridents appears as three vertical lines converging upon the ajna (3rd Eye) in the same style as Shiva's weapon carved in the dust of the river bed. A less spiral and more geometric appearance than previous iterations; the center line bisects the sternum; the left/right prongs mirror the Ida/Pingala nadis. After the Snana ceremony the new vibhuti is reapplied over the previously river eddied formation to maintain the sacred architecture. In one instance, an interviewed joshi of a Niranjani mahant stated, "The Trishul removes Illusion: Ash stroke follows path of Trishul blade."

11. JITENBHARTI'S CHEST-MAP: THE FIVE-POINTED STAR

The perfect pentagram over hrdaya has five ash-pit or star-points which form a Vibhuti's trail connecting them all together. These are not coincidences because each pit also represents one of the five forms of Panchagni Vidya from the Chandogya Upanishad:

- 1) Garhapatya Agni (the pit of the stomach) transforms food into Prana through its relationship to the stomach
- 2) the Dahvya Agni (the navel) takes Prana and distributes it to the manas
- 3) the Ahavaniya Agni (the heart) turns the mind into Vijnana
- 4) the Satapatha Agni (the throat) gives wisdom to Ananda
- 5) the Parvata Agni (the ajna point) returns bliss to us as the immortal Atman

Jitenbharti hit himself in the chest and said: "The five ash-pits represent karmas that were burned, so this star represents how Atman survives the Pralaya."

Prior to being submerged/dunked (snanan) in Ganga waters, the torso (body type) was (is) covered with a smear of ash (to be used throughout the day). After the immersion, the ash from the morning dhooni will establish a clean (neatly-defined) geometric pattern based on how the water from the Ganga 'activated' the vibhuti (ashes). The use of ash in P'S on these ash-covered bodies has a chemical reaction (combining with skin-salts from swimming) during the process of 'activating' the ash on one's torso by swimming in the Ganga, creating a semi-permanent relief map (i.e. like a topographical map) with a life-span lasting approximately 72 hours (for us to follow).

The very act of swimming (immersing) in the Ganga can result in you transforming from a chaotic smear of ash from the morning (before bathing) into a high-quality, temple-style piece of art (example). The sadhus (holy men) who have 'activated' the ashes previously from the morning, will now resemble walking works of art (in the style of a Chidambarum murals) with the physical representation of Lord Nataraja (the Lord of the Dance) etched on their bodies where the heart beats.

12. BODIES AS PANCHAGNI LABORATORIES

Jitenbharti has mapped the Chandogya Upanishads 5.3 - 10 with food made up of all three (mahabhuta) elements that exist between the gross and subtle (Suan' bt Tzu ii 2) I/E. 'The Teyafa becomes (mahabhuta) 3d as they were yesterday's (mahabhuta) waste being represented as a transformation from gross to subtle.'

The five ash pit of have altars in your body, where: the stomach pit consumes ego of yesterday, emotional waste (gross ash) being represented as mind; the navel star point becomes the fat of today's (mahabhuta) barn; the heart center becomes vijnana-jnana, the fire of today making your discrimination of all that is visible into a heart; the throat pit represents?

Sankalpa or holy/sacred commitment to growing in your wisdom.

When the ash particles have self-aligned (or spent) during the drying phase of snana, they continue along lines in six mrdna sadhus have unconscious drawn out. Western dermatologists call this "patterning," while sadhus would say, "emergence of the atma."

13. WHY THIS MATTERS: FROM DUST TO DHARMA

Witnessing the Resurrection, those of the Juna Nagas become Vibhuti by ceasing to wear vibhuti and becoming the mortal dust of vibhuti, with their original cosmic source. Jitenbharti's star is not a metaphor; it is empirical evidence of the power of panchagni vidya to affect human bodies (i.e., by means of the transformation of the Ganga).

Jitenbharti's last utterance is "Ash is on corpses and can rot, but stars show what is eternal."

Table 1

Table 1 Core Symbols Across Akharas (2025 Data)				
Symbol	Juna (Shaiva)	Niranjani (Shaiva)	Nirmohi (Vaishnava)	Sadhu Testimony
Flag	Tiger (ferocity)	Peacock (maya-dance)	Hanuman (bhakti)	"Tiger eats ego"
Weapon	Trishul vertical	Sword horizontal	Mace ceremonial	"Shakti-vahak, not fight"
Ash	Tri-shankha spiral	Trishul stroke	Tilak only	"Karma pits burned"
Motion	Naga thunder	Measured grace	Devotional sway	"Dharma walks"

14. DISCUSSION: WHEN FLAGS TEACH MOKSHA

14.1. DARSHAN-IN-MOTION: BEYOND STATIC ICONOGRAPHY

The akhara peshwais provide sachchidananda through their kinetic darshan which runs against the belief that temple idols are necessary for sacred worship. Jitenbharti's tiger flag doesn't represent ego-deat it, pilgrims' bowed heads proving embodiment works. Bose captures this in Amrita Kumbher Sandhane: "Gerua samundar swallowed sangam flags were its sails" (Bose 187). The sadhus explain their belief to Turner who describes it as "communitas choreography" with the statement that "Dharma dances when tiger runs" [Turner 94].

14.2. EMBODIED EPISTEMOLOGY: WHEN SADHU FLESH BECOMES LIVING GURU

Jitenbharti slapped his vibhuti-caked chest and growled, "Upanishads aren't read. They're written on meat that rots." His five-point star over the hrdaya wasn't decoration; it was living shastra, a master's palm-print burning Vedic physics into perishable skin [Leslie 45]. Sadhus do not remain as ash. Sadhus become ash.

14.3. JITENBHARTI'S CHEST: A GURU'S FLESH AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The first light of Mauni Amavasya reaches Triveni Sangam at 4:47 AM on January 29, 2025. The holy man Jitenbharti rises from Ganga river water which flows down his hair while steam escapes from his body which remains warm after his early morning meditation.

The star takes shape: Five ash-pits connected by vibhuti trails, glowing like bioluminescent Vedic circuitry. He traces it slowly, voice thick with chilam smoke: "The pit functions as a Garhapatya agni which transforms past rage into vital energy. Here? Ahavaniya—mind becomes wisdom. The center of the star holds the Atman which laughs at pralaya."

He experiences self-alignment of ash particles which form along his meridian lines during the drying process of hrdaya (heart) and svadhithana (navel) and ajna (third eye) regions. The location which he indicates serves as the point where he experiences kundalini surges throughout anushthan. The combination of sweat Ganga water and body temperature results in chemical shastra which gets recorded in actual time.

15. GURU-PARAMPARA WITHOUT WORDS

Jitenbharti's demonstration: He grabs my wrist, presses thumb into his hrdaya star-center: "Feel? This beats Ram Rajya. Every mahant before me carried same mark. You touch guru-line."

The Final Teaching: Flesh Remembers What Mind Forgets

Post-snana transformation:

- 1) The Ganga river entrance creates earth ash release from chaotic situations.
- 2) The self-alignment of particles through capillary action process creates the emergence of geometric shapes.
- 3) The complete Shastra texts establish the hrdaya star to function as a second heart.

Western science explains that "Pattern formation via surface tension."

Jitenbharti explains that "The Atman remembers its cosmic body while ash serves as a map of his body."

Jitenbharti walks away from the river steam which enables him to see the star. The Tiger flag snaps above him. His back a living Brihadaranyaka Upanishad teaches any witness: mortal meat carries immortal fire.

The guru-parampara system exists as a sacred space where women use abir to complete the sadhu star-maps while Ganga transforms human bodies into temple walls which exhale and produce the sound "Har Har Mahadev!"

16. DECOLONIZING THE GAZE: IKS VS. WESTERN SPECTACLE

The Western Kumbh scholarship investigates three specific areas which include logistics and crowd dynamics and epidemiological models but it fails to recognize the dhvaj ontology and akhara peshwai as active Sanatan Dharma knowledge systems. Jitenbharti Maharaj laughed off my initial "procession analysis": "You count steps? Hanuman counts your attachments, scholar." The rebuke serves as an echo of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's decolonial imperative which states that Indigenous bodies exist as sovereign texts that require IKS-centered readings instead of being treated as "exotic data" for research purposes (Smith 74).\

The researcher challenges this perspective through his participant observation work. My research extends beyond calculating pilgrim movements through Eck's Ganges cartographies which I use to demonstrate sadhu jñāna. I demonstrate ego-devourer through dhvaj and shakti-vahak through trishul by using 25 audio-recordings and NVivo thematic codes which include "ritual ontology" and 62 hits. The spatial metrics show that 67% of sadhu activities happen at flag locations which serve as knowledge systems instead of performance shows. Hanuman's red banner unfurls Ram bhakti scrolls, where Western "visual anthropology" sees mere semiotics. The process of decolonization requires researchers to abandon their traditional methods in order to develop knowledge partnerships with akharas which exist as upajivīs of eternal dharmas. The Juna Nagas' grip evolution shows how tapas develops through its practice: not through its "performance metrics." The women's extended darshan time which lasts three times longer than standard time shows how bhakti spreads through all varna systems which Orientalist systems fail to understand. The IKS framework which uses purāṇic rituals from Ramcharitmanas and Shiva Purana to reclaim Maha Kumbh from its logistical perspective, authenticates sadhu bodies as pramāṇa. Western population estimates fail to capture the sangam: where rivers meet, so do epistemologies, devouring colonial residue in Triveni's flow.

17. CONCLUSION

In this research the akhara peshwais of the 2025 Prayagraj Maha Kumbh will be examined as performance art traditions of the Sanatan Dharma, using visual culture specifically, dhvaj representation as an ontology, the trishul as a shakti-vahak, the vibhuti geometries, and the choreography of procession as a way to transmute the chaos into cosmic order for 50 crore pilgrims. The flame of devotion created by the red Hanuman dhvaj of Juna Akhara (with "Jai Shri Ram" printed on it) consumes the ahamkar, according to Jitenbharti who angrily claimed that Hanuman's mace breaks the shackle of illusion (the chains of maya) with the energy of his bhakti. In order to achieve better channeling of the equilibrium of the Trimurti and the purifying power of the Ganga to channel energy (prana) in order to protect against adharma, the trishuls evolve from being held too loosely to being held very tightly. After the performative snana, the vibhuti density triples and align in a self-organization manner into triangular shankha spirals and pentagram stars, which are the living maps of the panchagni vidya for converting karma into sattva flesh, represented by the Upanishadic altars at hrdaya.

The study used 200 photographs and 15 hours of audio recordings together with 25 interviews with sadhus to demonstrate that the researched material functions as indigenous knowledge systems. The research presents a decolonial framework which challenges Western perspectives that treat sadhu knowledge as more important than Eck's cartographic work and Turner's social bonding evaluation. Jitenbharti's rebuke—"You count steps? Hanuman counts attachments"—echoes Smith: bodies as pramāṇa, not data.

Findings confirm *peshwais* as *moksha* pedagogy: flag acceleration syncs chants (+40dB), clustering (67% within 3m) fosters *sangam*-self-dissolution, women's 3x gaze signals inclusive *bhakti*. Theoretically, they bridge Bose's *gerua samundar*, Leslie's embodied *darshan*, Spivak's subaltern gestures proving akharas (7 Shaiva, 3 Vaishnava) as eternal guardians since medieval resistance.

Peshwais demonstrate Dharma through their actions because they conduct their duties. The saffron floods extinguish maya while they use their bodies to study Chidananda in their laboratories. Jitenbharti's star shines forever while Maha Kumbh proves that Sanatan exists through its active and sweat-drenched tradition which includes flag-waving. The event invites everyone to experience Triveni's life-changing transformation.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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