

Akharas

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In news- Recently, Mahant Ravindra Puri was elected as the new president of the Akhil Bharatiya Akhara Parishad, the highest governing body of Hindu saints and seers in the country.

History of Akharas

- The **word 'akhara' literally means a wrestling arena**, and the akhara system is **believed to have been started by Adi Shankaracharya in the 8th century AD** to prepare a warrior class that could **fight for Hinduism against foreign invaders**.
- The reason behind creating a force of monks and seers was that they would not have a family of their own, and hence would not be weakened by materialistic desires.
- Initially, **there were four akharas, but their numbers increased with time**.
- Currently, **there are officially 13 akharas** divided by their belief systems.
- **The Sanyasi sampradaya has seven akharas** – Juna Akhara, Avahan Akhara, Agni Akhara, Niranjani Akhara, Anand Akhara, Nirvani Akhara and Atal Akhara.
- **The Vaishnava sampradaya has three akharas**, namely Nirmohi Akhara, Digambar Akhara and Nirvani Ani Akhara.
- **There are three akharas which worship Guru Nanak Dev** – Bada Udasin Akhara, Naya Udasin Akhara and Nirmal Akhara.

About Akhil Bharatiya Akhara Parishad (ABAP)-

- It was established in 1954 with the main aim of organising and managing the Kumbh Mela.
- Being the highest body of Hindu saints and seers, the ABAP and individual akharas have influence in the society, and are generally vocal about day-to-day social

issues.

- The ABAP is an independent body with its own set of rules.
- The akharas have the responsibility of **leading religious and intellectual battles** without using any weapon, and guiding the society.
- Another duty of the ABAP is to **promote coordination between different akharas and settle disputes between them.**
- All the akharas have a system of electing their president based on merit.
- For different akharas, **the tenure of the president ranges from three to six years.**
- The akharas do not have a minimum or maximum age limit, and there have been instances where children have been appointed mahant based on their merit.
- **Election of the Akhara Parishad president, on the other hand, takes place by voting among all the 13 akharas.**

Adi Shankaracharya-

- He was an Indian philosopher and theologian whose works had a strong impact on the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta.
- Shankara was born in Kaladi, Kerala.
- His works in Sanskrit discuss the unity of the Atman and Nirguna Brahman "**brahman without attributes**".
- His works elaborate on ideas found in the Upanishads.
- Shankara's publications criticised the ritually-oriented Mimamsa school of Hinduism.
- Shankara's Advaita shows similarities with Mahayana Buddhism, despite his critiques and Hindu Vaishnavist opponents have even accused Shankara of being a "crypto-Buddhist".
- He is also believed to be the organiser of the Dashanami monastic order and unified the Shanmata tradition of worship.

- He founded four mathas, which are believed to have helped in the historical development, revival and propagation of Advaita Vedanta.