

## SEE ALSO

Buffalo; Circumcision; *Dāsara*; Goddesses, Hindu; Gods and Goddesses; Hook-swinging; *Muḥarram*; *Śamī*; Self-sacrifice

**SADHU**

Commonly translated as “holy man” or “ascetic,” the term *sadhu* lumps together men initiated into any one of the myriad Hindu sects dedicated to spiritual pursuits. (The less common female sadhus are called *sadhvis*). A sadhu’s identity is defined by opposition to the householder (*grahastha*). A sadhu is ideally celibate, possessionless, has no blood ties or settled abode, and does not work for wages. Living off alms, by renouncing worldly pleasures and attachments he pursues release from the cycle of death and rebirth. However, departures from these ideals are common, and the degree of accepted variation may differ between sects.

As persons of spiritual power, in folklore sadhus often figure as donors granting boons. They may also be



Sadhu; Karnataka, India, © Mimi Nichter

portrayed as fakes capitalizing on the role. Sadhus help spread folklore by drawing on oral traditions to instruct disciples, and by wandering between regions.

**References**

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## SEE ALSO

*Malang*; *Qalandar*

**SAINTS**

Saints (termed *Šūfi*, *pīr*, or *walī* by Muslims; guru, *sānt*, swami, and *yogī* by Hindus; Buddha and bodhisattva by Buddhists; guru or *sānt* by Sikhs) play a key role in South Asian folk religious practices. Although the terminology, attributes, and contexts of saintship differ among major religious groups, there is much in common.

Saints are popularly thought to possess more spiritual power than ordinary human beings. Among Muslims, for example, this power, or *barkat*, has its source in the human spirit, or *rūḥ*, created by Allah. Among Hindus power, or *Śaktī* (shakti), arises from the particular biomoral nature (*dhātu-dharma*) of the person. In either case this power is thought to be an ethereal force concentrated in the person of the saint; it may be deliberately focused for specific purposes, and it gives the saint the ability to accomplish extraordinary deeds or miracles.

In South Asia saints have generally been male, but there are occasional female saints. People are recognized as saints while alive, but their power often continues beyond their death in their successors, or adheres to objects, relics, and places closely associated with them. Saintship is recognized by followers, who may be formally initiated through rituals that suggest birth and make the saint their spiritual father. Some saints claim only a handful of followers. Others, like Pīr Pagaro in Pakistan, claim millions. Followers generally describe themselves as being touched by the saint’s gaze (*nazar* among Muslims) or bathed in the saint’s sight (*darśan* among Hindus), and they are often given a new name, and sometimes a meditative phrase or formula.

The spiritual power of the saint generally distinguishes him from other good teachers, religious