



## Sadhus India's Mystic Holy Men

*I am a sucker for big colorful portals into other worlds. (See next two items.) One of the strangest, most exotic subcultures on Earth is that of the Sadhus of India. These wandering spiritual hoboos are famous as "fakirs"—strange fellows living naked, sleeping on beds of nails, or standing on one foot for years. Most Sadhus, of course, are not so extreme; they are sort of poor priests without parish or home, but they do have their own widespread culture. Even within India, the Sadhus are considered essential outsiders, and the logic beneath their stoicism and voluntary poverty is relatively misunderstood. (A poverty more extreme than the rural poor, and deliberate.) They seem to me from my own personal encounters with them to be situated directly opposite the dot-com-ers—the fast-forward online culture of the Web. Both clans are essentially nomadic and urban, but each is the inverse of the other. The surprising news is that there are an estimated two million adherents to this subculture, probably more than there are high-tech digerati, and yet they are off the global radar entirely. We are often amazed by radical behavior of cultures past, yet here is one as close as the nearest airport. Even better, the nearest bookstore holds this book, which will give you a far better, more informed (and more colorful!) picture than several months of traveling. I've found no comparable work on the subject.*

—KK

**Sadhus**  
**India's Mystic Holy Men**  
Dolf Hartsuiker  
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Bajrang Das, a disciple of Bhagawan Das, has been standing now for six years. He also wears a metal "chastity belt," and is a "non-speaker" and a "fruit-eater," too. Khreshwaris may walk about, but they usually just hang in their swing in their corner—and stand.



The first stage of the "five-fire-austerity" involves five heaps of smouldering cow dung. In the following stages the number of fires increases to seven, twelve, eighty-four, and "innumerable," until in the final stage a pot with fire balanced on the head. Each stage is performed for three consecutive summers, so the complete cycle takes eighteen years.



Hari Govinda Singh rubs earth on his penis, firmly ties the sling of cloth, stretches his legs and lifts the stones. It is a "miracle" that the penis is not torn off.