



## PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS OF SADHUS

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**ABSTRACT** **Background:** A sadhu is one who is deeply devoted to the path of spirituality. The term sadhu refers to a mendicant, ascetic, or any holy person within Hinduism who has repudiated all earthly, physical and materialistic attachments with the unfaltering intention of spiritual connection to the Divine. So that this study was carried out for psychosocial aspects of people becoming sadhus. **Aim:** This study aimed to assess psychosocial aspects of sadhus and substance abuse in sadhus. **Methods:** Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were applied in the process of obtaining information and analysis. Information on sadhu was gathered by means of structured Interview Schedule having. A sample of 100 sadhus was selected through purposive sampling procedure. The interviews were conducted in the months from May 2021 to July 2021. Data was verified manually at various stages, tabulated and analysed in the form of tables, bar diagrams, histograms, charts, etc. **Results:** In this study, the sample distribution by age shows that the maximum numbers of sadhus, about 52% are between 51-60 years of age. Most of the sadhus are coming from rural background which is 80% of total sample. Most of the sadhus are uneducated i.e. 70% of total sample. 60% of sadhu are never married. Of which 20% are widowed and another 20% left their family in pursuit of inner peace. most (about 90%) of the people become sadhu at 20-40 yrs of age. Most (about 50%) of the people become sadhu to attain salvation and 20% were influenced by other sadhus. In this about 10% become sadhu to avoid work and rest 10% are running away from their responsibilities to their families. **Conclusions:** There is need to understand the psychology of people opting for sadhuism as their way of life.

**KEYWORDS :** Sadhu -Psychosocial -Addiction

**INTRODUCTION:**

Who is Sadhu ? A sadhu is one who is deeply devoted to the path of spirituality. The term comes from the Sanskrit root "sadh", which infers "make straight," or "reach one's goal," the term sadhu refers to a mendicant, ascetic, or any holy person within Hinduism who has repudiated all earthly, physical and materialistic attachments with the unfaltering intention of spiritual connection to the Divine. As the reaching of any lofty goal requires one to be disciplined and focused, a sadhu can literally be defined as one who has committed their entire life to the practice of a sadhana, or path of spiritual discipline. While the customs and practices of these disciplines may vary according to sect or tradition, thus resulting in a wide range of habit and dress, the aim of every genuine sadhu — to remain firmly fixed on the path of spirituality—is ultimately the same.

Sadhu have been around for at least 2000 years . They were called "the silent ones" or the "the long haired ones" in ancient Vedic verses. In ancient times sadhuism was regarded as the highest form of religious life and the power of sadhu penance was such, it was said, that the gods unsuccessfully set down cosmic beauties to try to seduce them and generals laid down their arms rather than wage war against a city protects by a sadhus. Originally only Brahmins were allowed to become sadhus. Now members of any caste can become one.

The ultimate aim of life, according to Hindu texts, is to let go of worldly attachments, transcend the material ego, and reconnect with the Divine (our spiritual source) — in other words, take the path of a sadhu. But because letting go of such attachments is very difficult, the Vedas divide life into four ashrams, or progressive stages, through which every person can learn to slowly give up their selfish desires so that they can eventually attain liberation.

In India of the 1990s, several hundred thousand Hindu and Jain sadhus and a few thousand holy women (Sadhvi) live an ascetic life. They have chosen to wear ochre robes, or perhaps no clothing at all, to daub their skin with holy ash, to pray and meditate, and to wander from place to place, depending on the charity of others. Most have given up affiliation with their caste and kin and have undergone a funeral ceremony for themselves, followed by a ritual rebirth into their new ascetic life. They come from all walks of life, and range from illiterate villagers to well-educated professionals. In their new lives as renunciants, they are devoted to spiritual concerns, yet each is affiliated with an ascetic order or subsect demanding strict adherence to rule of dress, itinerancy, diet, worship, and ritual pollution.

Sadhu are identified in the following types on basis of their dress & practices –

Guru — Translated as "the remover of darkness," the term guru refers to a person who can dispel the darkness of one's ignorance with the torch of spiritual knowledge;

Rishi — Meaning "to move" or "to flow," a rishi is someone who, after attaining high levels of Divine realization through profound periods of meditation, would become inspired to share and express such realization by composing hymns and poems;

Swami — Translated as "master," swami is a title bestowed on one who is considered a master of the senses, and thus able to pursue the path of spirituality unaffected by worldly desires;

Pandit — Meaning "wise," "learned," or "educated," the term pandit is used to honour one who has specialized knowledge in a particular subject of spirituality;

Acharya — Considered a specifically potent and formidable religious and sacred guru or preceptor, an acharya is one who is known for teaching and leading by example.

Sadhus generally recognize to which sector they belong to by colour of clothing, specific symbols on particular parts of their body and possessions such as a rosary, water pot or staff. Some wear only a loin cloth and a gold chain or a gold bracelet. Some wear nothing at all. Nagas are known about for roaming around entirely bare and naked.

Many sadhus follow custom in which they are allowed to grow hair in five areas: their head, their upper jaw, their chin, their armpits and their pubic areas. Some sadhus shave their entire bodies. Some sadhus cover themselves with the ash of cremated bodies. Some tikas are made from the ash of incense.

Sadhus generally are not part of any distinct community. They either live in monasteries, math, ashram, akhara or wander/ stay in jungles. The sadhu lifestyle places a premium on austerity, discipline and self-control. A sadhu's daily routine includes exercise intended to purify the physical body and elevate the mind, reading sacred verses, and attempting to reach levels of ecstasy through prayer. Generally, the only possessions owned by holy men are an aluminium begging pot, a wooden staff, and a cloth bag wrapped around the neck with a few

possessions, such as maybe a spoon, some sacred texts and idols, statues and images of God.

Holy men are supposed to beg only for food, discarding items given to them, saying "I never touch money. It buys only trouble. Sadhus are almost totally dependent on the generosity of others for their subsistence. Some supplement what they receive in alms from begging by serving as spiritual mentors, manufacturing amulets, tickling people with feather dusters, fortune telling, performing exorcisms, singing, juggling, selling medicinal herbs, tattooing, interpreting dreams, reading palms, casting spells and making potions.

Some sadhus have never been married whereas many remain married while functioning as sadhus.

Numerous of them abandon their dear ones and families. It has been observed that unhappy family lives and marital collapse is the ultimate cause that many men decide to become sadhus. Some are foundlings and orphans or fugitive who were embraced and adopted by a sadhu order. These generally receive some kind of training that can last months or years before they begin wandering the countryside. Many of them got converted and inclined to become sadhus by pursuing the Vedic progression of stages of life. They often go through an initiation process and change their names when they become sadhus. Many sadhus light sacred fires when they camp in the monasteries and pilgrimage shrines they stay in. Before sadhus are initiated into a higher level they are symbolically cleansed by clay oil lamps.

Some sadhus spend their entire lives on pilgrimages or even a single pilgrimage. Indra, the god of travellers, once said: "All his sins are destroyed by his fatigues and wanderings."

Others sit in the lotus position on a pair of stacked stones in a cave.

The most remarkable facet of the Sadhu community is their sometimes excessive and non-restrained use of drugs like 'charas' (cannabis). Sadhus claim that use of hallucinatory drugs brings them closer to God, and thus closer to salvation. Drinking of 'bhang' (a drink made out of cannabis) is considered highly auspicious by these Sadhus as it is said to unite the disciple with the deity and open a way to achieve salvation and get rid of the miseries of life and death. It is said that cannabis is one of the favourite plants of the deity and is thus respected and held reverently by his followers. Such service also helps a person to better cultivate the humility required to receive and assimilate said instructions. One remains committed, sincere, and humble, a true sadhu, who always feels concerned and responsible for the spiritual welfare of society, will be naturally impelled to give guidance. It is through such guidance that people can eventually transform into sadhus themselves.

Becoming a sadhu begins, first and foremost, with a sincere desire to pursue the path of spirituality. If such a desire strongly manifests in a person, that person is encouraged to seek a genuine guru who can provide the guidance and training needed for success. One should humbly approach a guru by attempting to perform some sort of seva or service, which, if executed sincerely, can invoke a guru's natural compassion and subsequent willingness to offer instructions on spiritual matters.

**AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:**

Psychosocial aspect & substance abuse in sadhus

**MATERIAL & METHODS:**

The research focused on In-depth interviews of sadhu. Information on sadhu was gathered by means of structured Interview Schedule having (open and close-ended questions). A sample of 100 sadhus was selected through purposive sampling procedure. The interviews were conducted in the months from May 2021 to July 2021. Data was verified manually at various stages, tabulated and analysed in the form of tables, bar diagrams, histograms, charts, etc.

**Observations:**

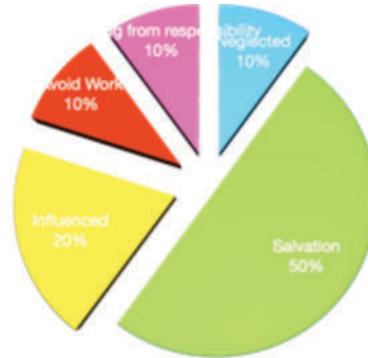
The sample distribution by age shows that the maximum numbers of sadhus, about 52% are between 51-60 years of age. Nearly 26% are between 41-50 years of age, and another 16% are above 61 years.

Study shows most of the sadhus are coming from rural background which is 80% of total sample. Most of the sadhus are uneducated i.e. 70% of total sample, 20% have education upto primary level and 2%

has graduation level educated. 60% of sadhu are never married, rest 40% were married. Of which 20% are widowed and another 20% left there family in pursuit of inner peace.

In our study, we have seen that most (about 90%) of the people become sadhu at 20-40 yrs of age. This parameter is important because it will help us in understanding why the younger people are adopting sadhutva.

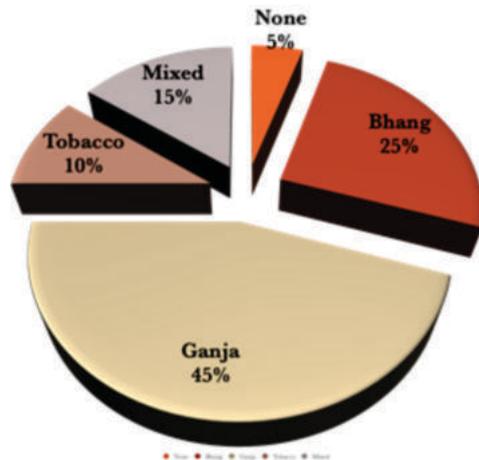
In our study, we have seen that most (about 50%) of the people become sadhu to attain salvation and 20% were influenced by other sadhus. In this about 10% become sadhu to avoid work and rest 10% are running away from their responsibilities to their families (Figure-1). We find that most sadhus like to live with their fellow sadhus as this help them in learning religious rituals to attain moksha.



● Neglected  
● Influenced  
● Running from responsibility  
● Salvation  
● Avoid Work

**Figure-1 – Reasons for becoming sadhu**

Most of the sadhus in our study were found to use ganja (45%), Bhang (25%) Tobacco (10%) daily (Figure-2).



**Figure-7- Distribution of substance use in sadhus**

**CONCLUSION:**

In the study carried out in Indore, in the central part of India, we found out that –

- most of sadhus were from rural background, unmarried and no formal education.
- Most of them become sadhu in the age of 20-40 years and left there family and started living with other sadhu fellows.
- Most of they were living in the akhada, monastery or ashram.

Mostly they become sadhu in search of salvation. About 70% were abusing cannabis (marijuana). Most of them observed that after cannabis intake in high amount, they feels liberation from self and connected with almighty.

A person may become Sadhu by choice or by initiation. The initiation is usually done a teacher or an adept Sadhu who is already initiated and who has reached the state of perfection.

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