



Real Sadhus Sing to God: Gender, Asceticism, and Vernacular Religion in Rajasthan (AAR Religion, Culture, and History)

By Antoinette Elizabeth DeNapoli

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Drawing on ethnographic research spanning ten years, Antoinette Elizabeth DeNapoli offers a new perspective on the practice of asceticism in India today. Her work brings to light the little known and often marginalized lives of female Hindu ascetics (sadhus) in the North Indian state of Rajasthan. Examining the everyday religious worlds and practices of the mostly unlettered female sadhus, who come from a number of castes, *Real Sadhus Sing to God* illustrates that these women experience asceticism in relational and celebratory ways. They construct their lives as paths of singing to God, which, the author suggests, serves as the female way of being an ascetic. Examining the relationship between asceticism (sannyas) and devotion (bhakti) in contemporary contexts, the book brings together two disparate fields of study-yoga/asceticism and bhakti-using the singing of bhajans (devotional songs) as an orienting metaphor.

This is the first book-length study to explore the ways in which female sadhus perform and thus create gendered views of asceticism through their singing, storytelling, and sacred text practices, which DeNapoli characterizes as their "rhetoric of renunciation."

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Review

"DeNapoli's engaging and spirited ethnography offers original insights into complex intersections of gender with social hierarchies, world-renunciation, and the poetics of devotional experience. Vivid and memorable portraits of strong female characters reveal how deep religious convictions may equally provide unflinching critiques of everyday constraints on women's embodied lives. Delightfully readable and teachable!" --Ann Grodzins Gold, Thomas J. Watson Professor of Religion and Professor of Anthropology, Syracuse University

About the Author

Antoinette Elizabeth DeNapoli is an Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Wyoming.

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