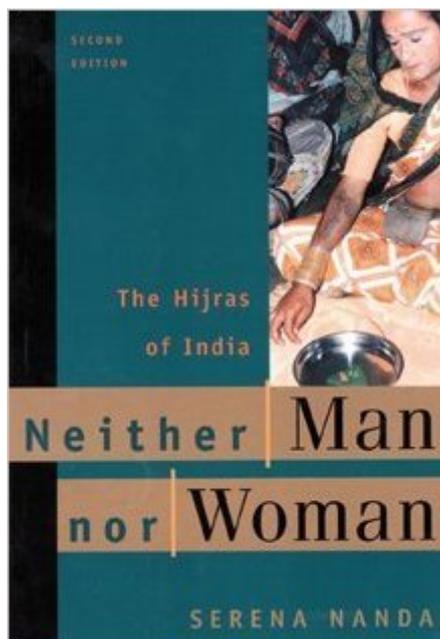


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# Neither Man Nor Woman: The Hijras Of India



## Synopsis

This ethnography is a cultural study of the Hijras of India, a religious community of men who dress and act like women. It focuses on how Hijras can be used in the study of gender categories and human sexual variation.

## Book Information

Paperback: 208 pages

Publisher: Cengage Learning; 2 edition (November 30, 1998)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0534509037

ISBN-13: 978-0534509033

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 0.5 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (21 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #161,151 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #60 in [Books > Gay & Lesbian > Nonfiction > Transgender](#) #271 in [Books > Textbooks > Social Sciences > Gender Studies](#) #328 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Gender Studies > General](#)

## Customer Reviews

While reading Nanda's *Neither Man Nor Woman*, I was struck by the sheer competency and volume of her research. She truly gives a vivid, accurate picture of hijra life, ritual, and social attitude. The hijras are a group of traveling performers/prostitutes who participate in ritualized castration. They are often homosexual, transsexual, or impotent men who are endowed by society with religious authority. They worship the Hindu Goddess Bahuchara Mata and participate in theatrical blessings of male children and newly weds. Nanda documents their rituals and beliefs while also defining their function within mainstream Indian society. My only point of criticism with Nanda's work is her slight failure to fully demystify some of the ambiguities surrounding the hijras. One is never really certain of the actual definition and occupation of the hijras. However, after doing research on the hijras, Nanda's book is truly the most accurate and unbiased research available on hijra life. I would recommend it strongly.

A classic, absolutely fascinating study of the transvestite eunuch hijras of India. Combining objectivity with sympathy and respect, the writer allows us to glimpse the feelings and aspirations of these people, whose lives encompass joy, sadness, degradation, liberation, hope. The reader

comes to know the hijras as real people while gaining an understanding of a very ancient and significant way of life. Nanda's lucid writing and subtle insights are augmented by a marvelous collection of color photographs and vivid case histories, including numerous first person accounts. This book is a model for ethnographic study and will leave an indelible impression on the heart and mind of anyone who reads it.

I found this book to be an intriguing and comprehensive analysis of the lives of the Hijras of India. Nanda through personal interviews and anthropological analysis paints a picture of their lives as both marginal and yet highly spiritual. She describes how in India the hijras play an important role in both the blessings of marriages and childbirth's. It also describes the process of decision making that they go through to become a true spiritual hijra by becoming eunuchs. It is an important study to read because it challenges ideas of sexuality and spirituality. By becoming a eunuch, the Hijras truly become neither man nor woman. With their spiritual connection, they also are able to feel a sense of pride in who they are. Although this does not mean that they are exempt from harassment, it gives them a spiritual capital with which to protect themselves. It is an important book to read as well because it challenges ideas of sexuality and especially homosexuality in the US and other cultures as well.

I found this book very interesting and informative. I had read accounts of this type of goddess worship in ancient records (greek and roman)when I was a teenager but there was little cultural context and no rationale concerning the practices of emasculation. This book answered a lot of questions, why the operation, what the benefit to the devotee, who were these worshippers. I enjoyed finelly getting the answers to decades long questions.

Nanda succeeds in pioneering a new understanding of the previously misunderstood and misrepresented hijra community. Nanda's careful collection of information increases the value of her work to the field of anthropology. She succeeds in transmitting the voices of people living on one side of the world in a way that can be understood without losing the emic perspective. In addition, she raises new questions and presents a unique perspective deserving of further anthropological study. Her representation and care for her subjects is admirable. The dignity of the persons under study should always be preserved in by those wishing to shed light on the universal human condition. *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India* is a valuable ethnography and a worthwhile read.

An absolutely comprehensive, detailed and meticulous study of the hijra community in South Asia. It is ironical that till Nanda (and possibly even after her) no Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi sociologist of any standing has done such a thorough and masterful study. A pioneering work. Five stars all the way. My only slight niggle is that since the hijra community is to be found all over South Asia, in Bangladesh and Pakistan as well, could Dr Nanda have not included some references to those countries as well. And then the book could have been subtitled: the Hijras of South Asia!

Nanda's ethnography includes additional information (role, occupations, rituals, ritual power) to the life of hijras besides their gender identity, that I think is essential to put in context what 3rd genders are.

This book was required for one of my college classes a long time ago and the analysis and perceived social position of the Hijras is very interesting to read about and quite unexpected. Interesting take on gender studies.

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