

# Sacrificed Wife/Sacrificer's Wife: Women, Ritual, and Hospitality in Ancient India

*Stephanie W. Jamison*

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#9151900 in Books 1996-01-04Original language:English 9.50 x 1.13 x 6.38l, #File Name: 0195096622360 pages | File size: 43.Mb

**Stephanie W. Jamison : Sacrificed Wife/Sacrificer's Wife: Women, Ritual, and Hospitality in Ancient India**  
before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Sacrificed Wife/Sacrificer's Wife: Women, Ritual, and Hospitality in Ancient India:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Women's Role in Hospitality and Ritual in Ancient IndiaBy Linda BlanchardI can't review this book from a scholarly perspective because I'm not a professor, nor am I a student of any school but I do have a deep interest in ancient India and in women's roles, so when I went searching for books on Vedic ritual, I was quite glad to find this one. Ms. Jamison's book follows the scholarly formats with ample footnoting and citing of references and even includes the Sanskrit texts along with her translations of them when she's giving examples, but the prose in between is far more pleasant to read than most of the theses I've been reading lately: the author seems to prefer to use ordinary English words rather than the usual professorial method of burdening them with so much terminology that regular folk spend more time in dictionaries than reading the work. In fact, she not only uses primarily our common words, she applies a sense of humor to it which made the book a joy.Ms. Jamison walks us through an overview of methods, a bit of background, and then digs into the relevant bits of a variety of rituals to bring to light the importance of women's roles in Vedic society as binders between men and gods, and men and men, and she provides evidence that women's sexual energy was harnessed to bring power to ritual. In addition, she demonstrates

the ways in which hospitality is used in ritual -- along with the risks and rewards. Anyone interested in women's studies, ritual, and ancient Vedic society would benefit from reading this book.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A detailed scholarly analysis of the intricate role of Women in the Upanisads. By still looking I really enjoyed reading Jamison's account to woman's role in the middle to early Vedic period. She describes in detail the role of a woman, which is never independent from the image of a man. Women are described as symbols of fertility and sexuality in the Upanisads. Jamison also explains the complex idea of rebirth and immortality. A woman is an integral figure in the ritual circle as she is able to help her husband to fulfill debts. Additionally, men can only live a fully complete life if he gets married, as the procreation of a son is the only way he can attain immortality. The role of women in the Upanisads is described as either a daughter, wife, or a widow as her image is always connected to the authority of a male figure. The most interesting account in the book is Jamison's analysis of the Dead Horse and the Queen sacrifice about sexuality and fertility in the Ashvamedha. Jamison provides an almost line by line analysis of the ritual, the symbolism of the dead horse, the role of the queen and the larger implication and the meaning of power acquisition and restoration for the king. Jamison even goes deeper to analyze the vulgar words being used by the other wives to yell at the queen during the ritual as well as the extreme public showcasing of sexuality of the entire ritual as an attempt to capture sexual power to enhance ritual effect and to promote fertility. This is a great work to read if you are interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the Upanisads and is looking for an in depth analysis of the many rituals embedded in the text.

0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The role of women in Vedic India. By Rama Rao. In this book entitled *Sacrificed Wife and Sacrificer's Wife*, UCLA Professor Stephanie Jamieson examines the role of women in Vedic India by focusing mainly on sacrificial hymns of Rig Veda and Rig-Veda Brahmanas. She observes that the Vedic woman was the bearer of all paradox, as both sacrificer and sacrificed; giver and given in a ritual, both subject and object. In short, Vedic women were unfairly treated in a male dominated society. Stephanie Jamieson's analysis of ancient India that goes back to as early as 1600 BCE questions her objectivity and understanding of a different culture. She has interpreted a few selected verses from sacrificial literature to support her preconceived ideas. Jamieson is an American woman of 21st century and selecting few verses from Vedic literature out of the context diminishes its significance and leads to erroneous conclusions. Her views about women in Vedic rituals is not coherent with other ancient Indian literature or other historical evidences. The ethnographic and cultural information indicate that women were strong and significant actors within their families and in their communities. This book does not consider other Vedic texts where women had the same rights as men. The cultural norms, strong family values and adherence to moral conduct supports the dominant role of women as matriarchs of the family. For example, in Rig-Veda women were worshipped as goddesses which includes Sarasvati, Ushas, Aditi, Saranya, Aranyi, Nirrti, and Ila. There were several Vedic poets like Lopamudra, the symbol of beauty and brains. She first appears in Rigveda (Rig-Veda 1:179), and later in the Mahabharata and Giridhara Ramayana. She is described as extraordinarily beautiful as well as intelligent. She was known to be a philosopher on par with other women of ancient India like Gargi, Maitreyi and Ghosha. Urvashi, a celestial Apsara and the wife of Pururava is perennially youthful, infinitely charming and a source as much of delight. Mystical elements are associated with sacrificial performance of Vedic culture. This ritual was believed to please the Vedic gods and bless the performer with strength. Thus sacrifice is deemed as a wheel for generating the power, and everything connected to a sacrifice has a symbolic meaning. Behind the external ceremony, there is an inner sanctum in which the sacrificer offers his material possessions to the higher powers with full devotion and dedication. It is a self-consecration with Agni who witnesses this journey to the inner sanctum. In her introduction, the author exhibits pessimism about focusing only on texts and no other evidence. She notes that other specialists in the field did not share her enthusiasm in interpreting few sacrificial hymns out of context to conclude about Vedic women's status. This book is written mainly from a modern feminist perspective with very little regard for the culture that existed in Vedic period. Men were dominant not only in India, but also in Israel, Greece and Rome. All these cultures were male dominated and most religious and non-religious materials were written by men. For example, women did not participate in ancient Jewish traditions and their roles were limited where all the scribes and interpreters of Hebrew literature were men. In the book *Women in Ancient Greece*, author Susan Blundell observes that women were excluded from any public role in a male dominated Greek society. In *Woman at the Window: Biblical Tales of Oppression and Escape*, UConn Professor Nehama Aschkenasy, after studying the lives of concubine, Dinah, Michal, Abigail, and Tamar during Biblical times, makes a similar conclusion that the early Hebrew culture denied women's rights with social and legal limitations. In part II and III, the author examines a wife's participation in ritual during the middle Vedic period, and the woman's relationship with her husband and the Vedic deity of the ritual. Their functional roles in Vedic ceremony, the construction of forces, gods and divine powers described in Vedic literature. There is extensive discussion of the ceremonial practices of Ashvamedha, Soma, and Rajasuya sacrifices. In the final two parts, she explores the practices of hospitality and gift exchange (part IV) and marriage (part V) relevant to the performance of the sacrifice.

Jamison examines the conceptual position of women in the culture of early India, specifically the Vedic and early epic periods (c. 1500-200 BC). Jamison begins by focusing on a single, apparently marginal female role, the activities of

the "Sacrificer's Wife" in solemn ritual, and isolating the set of conceptual functions filled by the wife in that context. She then turns to a brief but emblematic myth from the middle Vedic period, "Manu's cups", in which a woman barely escapes being sacrificed with the consent of her husband. This story, Jamison shows, raises questions about women's ritual role and about hospitality obligations that the rest of the book sets out to answer. The central portion of the book is then given over to an extended consideration of women's roles in solemn Vedic ritual. Drawing on the vast corpus of textual material on solemn ritual, Jamison is able to delineate a sharply focused picture of women and their functional roles in this realm where abstract rituals are enacted and encoded. She goes on to apply these concepts to the "messy sprawl in everyday life", primarily as depicted in epic narrative (especially the Mahabharata) and regulated in the legal literature. Particular attention is given to the role of women in the areas of hospitality, gift exchange and marriage. Jamison's analysis not only illuminates ancient Indian attitudes toward women and gender, but forces a radical reassessment of the institutions under review.

"The scholarship is extremely fine. Jamison has investigated thoroughly all major literature on the subject....Her writing is very clear and lively. She shows the ways in which these rituals address very human problems and situations. Jamison's discussions represent a significant advance in the methods of ritual analysis, and will enable the Vedic material to be brought into larger discussions of women in India."--Joel P. Brereton, University of Missouri  
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