



The Rig Veda

Anonymous , Ralph T.H. Griffith (Translator)

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Considered one the four canonical texts of the Hindu religion, known collectively as "The Vedas", "The Rig Veda" is one of the most important works of Hindu scripture. The work is a collection of poems, sayings, prayers and origin myths. Written sometime between 1700-1100 BCE, "The Rig Veda" is one of the oldest works of the Indo-European languages. The hymns included in the collection are dedicated to various deities in Hindu mythology, including Vishnu, Rudra, Indra, Soma, and Surya. Many Hindu priests and philosophers have revived and re-interpreted the poems contained in "The Rig Veda" for use in their modern religious practices. This text is an excellent introduction for English-speakers into the Hindu mythology and religion. Amongst the tales readers will find moral allegory and ethical guidelines common to Western religion and philosophy. "The Rig Veda" is a must read for anyone interested in Eastern history, religion, and mythology.

The Rig Veda Details

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Riku Sayuj says

Doniger captures only about 10% (108/1028 hymns) of the Rig Veda here and the verses deemed more "interesting" are given a bit too much spotlight to be able to call this a representative selection. This makes this anthology a very personal selection that reflects the interests and obsessions of the author more than that of the seers of the original Vedic hymns. The only good thing about these obsessions is that they invoke the most amusing sort of vitriol from certain cliques! From a scholarly perspective, they only diminish the book.

That being said, Doniger's work is a valuable counter point against most of the spiritual works that are commonly available when you go hunting for the Vedas. For me the high-point of these is Aurobindo's commentary - these works look at the Vedic Hymns in the light of the Upanishads, but the Upanishads are almost certainly a later stage of evolution for the Vedic civilization. Doniger avoids this outlook and courageously looks at the hymns as and in themselves - giving free play to their focus on ritual, material well-being, and naturalism and showing that the verses are less spiritual and symbolic in nature than normally asserted. Doniger does not deny spiritual overtones (especially when she allows the commentaries of Sayana to be directly put forth), but instead shows that such aspects work nicely with the ritualistic and material aspects of the hymns to set up delicious riddling structures inside the hymns. Now, the problem with Doniger's clearly biased selection is that the reader cannot be sure if this feature that comes to light is due to the sample itself or because this is in fact one of the important ways to understand the Vedas. Seems like there is no avoiding a 3000 page tome when it comes to the Vedas, which is what any realistic attempt which tries to incorporate the commentaries would come to.

All in all, this work if read in conjunction with Aurobindo will work as two nicely contrasting introductions to the reading of the Vedas. In that way it is valuable. Also, the barrage of 1 star reviews by fake accounts should also be an incentive for you to check out the book. But it is no Penguin "classic". That should be reserved for more comprehensive and complete works.

Adam J. MacRae says

Reading this book was by no means an easy undertaking. That being said, the reward for your dutiful and arduous perseverance is substantial. Wendy Doniger is a remarkable translator and her insight was the most enjoyable part of the Rig Veda.

One passage that impacted me in particular was an introduction by her for the "Realla" section:

"The Rig Veda is a sacred book, but it is a very worldly sacred book. Nowhere can it be found the tiniest suspicion of a wish to renounce the material world in favour of some spiritual quest; religion is the handmaiden of the worldly life... This is not to say that there is anything superficial about Vedic religious concerns, but merely that these meditations stem from a life-affirming, hours celebration of human existence."

Jesse says

The Old Testament, without the hatred, of the Hindu faith, these are the words of human beings at the dawn of consciousness and history. The Hindu pantheon, in small and accessible form, is born, and the material world is dwelt upon at length... for instance, fire is discovered (thank you Agni), and butter is found to be delicious. Butter is also found to be, strangely, the same as semen. Therefore, semen is delicious. Well, if Indra says so, for he might smite me if I doubt, like Jehovah. So if the anger of the gods and the guilt of sin is here, how does this differ from the Old Testament? Consider the following passage: "The gods are later than its beginning: who knows therefore whence comes this creation?" See? The West didn't figure this out till Kant.

Heron says

Obviously, I can't judge the quality of writing in a 3000 year-old sacred text, but this translation was nice. I felt taken care of while I read and the introduction was really quite funny. The Rig Veda itself was very heavy on footnotes, some of which I felt were less instructive than trivial. But it was fascinating reading these ancient hymns while simultaneously watching this translator work through their ancient and modern significances.

Stephen says

I give five stars a lot don't I? Well I usually read what I like - and if I really dislike it - I feel well - I'll leave it blank - Lin Yutang wrote about the pleasure of reading - and reading foisted upon you etc. This particular edition I read years ago - now reading an older book which is almost falling apart. I like the Veda about secular matters!

Wendy says

The Rig Veda is a must read book for anyone who is researching the origins of religion, or the origins of man. For people who read things in their simplest form, I do not recommend this, or any religious text, as it will be pointless, and you will derive nothing from it. For those who can explore a book it's most literal, descriptive, metaphoric way . . . I recommend this book, and all religious texts as a path to the past, but not as a guide for the future or present time.

Joseph says

Great first book well documented and footnoted.

Adrian Rose says

This is a collection of hymns in the Hindu tradition, hymns sung by the priests of the religion as they go through the sacred rites. Some of the hymns in this book are very beautiful, some are funny, and others are a little confusing if the reader is not familiar with the tenets of Hinduism. For instance, the Soma that is mentioned numerous times in the various hymns is a drink that was made by squeezing the juice out of what scholars believe was a type of hallucinogenic mushroom. The cows and horses that are used in the verses to imply wealth and fertility refer to the myths in Indian culture where the different gods and goddesses appeared in these forms. And the butter referred to many times is actually a substance called "ghee," a type of clarified butter that is used in cooking, as well as to fuel lamps that burn during sacrificial ceremonies. None of these things are ever explained in the book, the author apparently just assuming that the reader already knows these references. For this reason, it is probably not a good idea to use this book as an introduction to a study of Hindu mythology. However, many of the hymns are noteworthy. The "Creation Hymn" is especially beautiful. "The Gods Coax Agni Out of the Water" is paradoxical, since Agni is the god of fire. And the descriptions of the various gods and goddesses to whom the hymns are dedicated are lyrical and amazing. Even if you do not know much about Hindu beliefs or philosophy, this book can still be an immensely entertaining source of symbolic poetry.

Marko Bojkovský says

Najteže ?itanje mog života.
U novoj godini želim da nau?im sanskrit.

David Withun says

The *Rig Veda* is one of the great classics of world religious thought. A collection of disparate hymns to various deities, foremost among whom are Indra, Agni, and Soma, it has come a long way from its roots in the syncretism of Aryan and pre-Aryan Indian religious systems. While the culture it reflects is a semi-nomadic warrior society that has recently conquered and subdued a settled agrarian (and ostensibly peaceful) culture of the Indus Valley, by the Upanishadic era (beginning in earnest circa 500 BCE) the hymns it contains were being reinterpreted along more mystical, spiritual, and even incipiently monotheistic lines.

Doniger does a fair job in capturing all of this in her selections and commentary in this book. The sample size is fair, as this contains about 10% of the actual *Rig Veda*. It is, alas, not always entirely representative of the source material, however. This is due to an unfortunate disposition toward those minute and stupid things modern academics are interested in. The table of contents, for example, in which the various hymns featured in this sampling are listed by theme, reveals an interesting predilection toward the obsessions of liberal academics. Indra, the primary god of the Aryan religious system, has 21 pages total of this book, for example, and Soma, both a god and a hallucinogenic plant whose use was widespread in the Vedic religious system, has 18 pages of hymns dedicated to him. The theme of "women," however, which, outside of natural sexual desire and the need to perpetuate society and species through procreation, was not an especially intense concern of the Vedic authors, receive a whopping 32 pages, more pages than any other subject! The result is that, rather than presenting a sample representative of the content of the *Rig Veda* and the concerns of the society from which it emerged, Doniger instead provides a sample that entirely reflects the concerns of her academic colleagues.

All of this is unfortunate, but it does not make the book entirely worthless, as such academic idiocies so often do. The positive aspect of this concern with academic fetishes over all else is that Doniger does not, as Eknath Easwaran and other translators of and commentators upon Indian religious texts so often do, allow the superstitions and predispositions of modern Hinduism to determine the content or commentary. Modern Hindus, under the influence of the Upanishads and the *Bhagavad Gita*, among other later works, read back their monism and its accompanying mysticism into the Vedic texts and many academics, in their grovelling before foreignness, one symptom of the rampant Western self-hatred of the academic, are all too happy to oblige them in this ahistorical outlook. This is, of course, entirely unhelpful for the honest interested party who really seeks to understand a text within its historical and cultural origins rather than within the mythology and ex post facto justifications that have grown up around it.

To summarize, I applaud Doniger for her willingness to be honest about the polytheistic warrior culture of the *Rig Veda*. I only wish she were as honest about her own atheistic sex-fetish culture in academia. If she were, this sample translation of the foremost Veda would have been of more value. As it is, I recommend it as a decent introduction insofar as the reader is aware of the biases of Doniger and her compatriots.

Ravi Warrier says

This summary of one of the oldest Indian scriptures was a good attempt at introducing readers to it. However, it is not a complete unabridged translation or explanation of the same and hence misses the mark. Moreover, though Dongier might have tried to address multiple sources, it does not seem that most of those were anyone who might know the scriptures first hand, but people who were or are just good with Sanskrit translations. Hence, the veracity or the accuracy of the *Rig Veda* may be questionable. Nonetheless, as mentioned at the start, it is a good piece to start with the knowledge of what is written in the *veda*.

Arun says

An incredible work of vedic philosophy.

This one is quite thoughtful as all the others but I think it's worth quoting. As this throws a new direction on the origin of the Universe.

10.129 Creation Hymn (Nasadiya)

6. "Who really knows? Who will here proclaim it? Whence was it produced? Whence is this creation? The gods came afterwards, with the creation of this universe. Who then knows whence it has risen?"

Gavin White says

An excellent anthology of hymns from one of the oldest holy books. I've had this copy for years now and I still find the notes and introductions to be exceedingly useful. These sections give a little background to each hymn and more importantly they discuss many of the metaphors used in the verses. Many of these metaphors like the various manifestations of heavenly cattle, the central role of the sun in many cosmological myths,

and the idea of sacrifice are also keys to other archaic traditions.

bookreader says

Who verily knows and who can here declare it, whence it was born and whence comes this creation?
The Gods are later than this world's production. Who knows then whence it first came into being?
He, the first origin of this creation, whether he formed it all or did not form it,
Whose eye controls this world in highest heaven, he verily knows it, or perhaps he knows not.

Warren says

Not as incomprehensible as The Book of the Dead, but still a difficult read. In this case, the obscurity is deliberate as a single line of a hymn can be interpreted in 3 or 4 or even 5 different ways. Thankfully the editor prefaces most hymns with an explanation which generally gave me the gist of the meaning. Other confusing patterns include different hymns praising different gods for the same acts (such as separating the heaven and earth), Gods known by different names, switching back and forth between cause and effect, etc. All of the hymns are seeking material gain of some sort in the current life – there is no mention of the Afterlife or spiritual redemption and everlasting life. It is all about immediate gain – very materialistic for our modern idea of a sacred text. And since the caste system is already in place in Indian civilization at the time of the hymns' writing, they are no doubt written and to be sung by the higher educated classes. Some of the mythological hymns reflect similar tales from European stories. One I noticed that the editor didn't comment on was the God Indra killing the dragon Vrtra and its mother Danu – shades of Beowulf! This was book #4 in my journey to read all the classics of world literature. You can join me at my blog : www.chronolit.com
