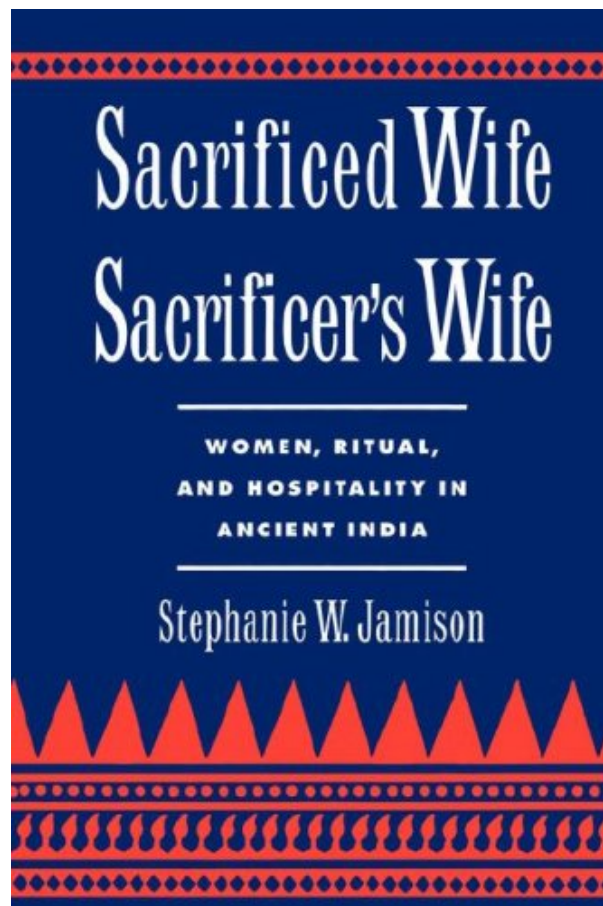
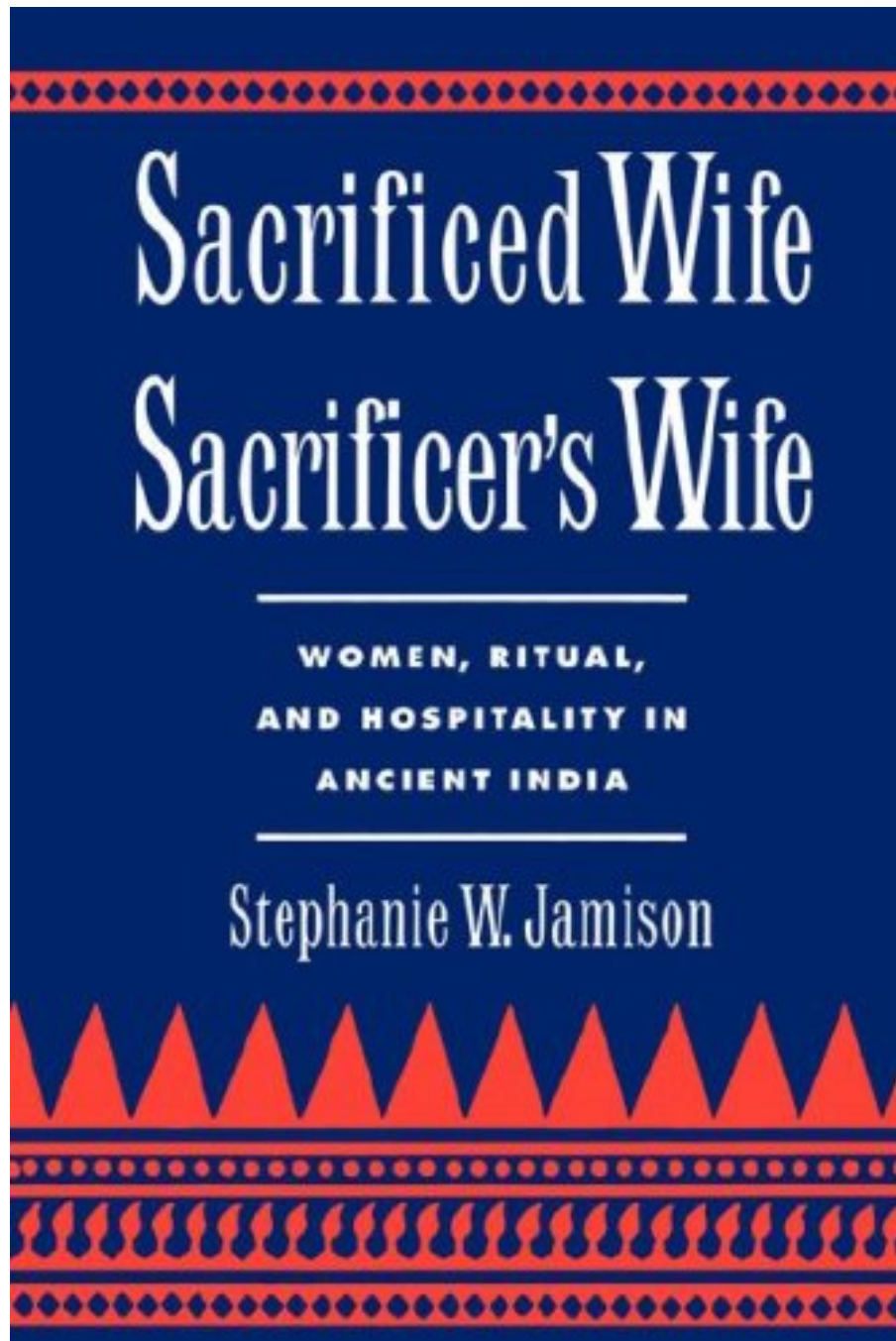


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Review

"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

About the Author

Stephanie W. Jamison is at Harvard University.

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This book concerns the conceptual position of women in early India, specifically in the Vedic and early epic periods (c.1500-200 BCE), and it seeks to make contributions both to Indology and to gender studies. By focusing on a single female role--the activities of the "Sacrificer's Wife" in solemn ritual--and by extracting the rich materials on her role from the voluminous technical ritual manuals, the author isolates a set of conceptual functions the wife fills in ritual practice. These functions can then be observed in other cultural institutions in which women participate--particularly the system of hospitality and gift exchange that regulated the relations between mutually obligated strangers in ancient India and the system of marital exchange.

Besides filling a large gap in our understanding of ancient India, this work makes a general contribution to the study of women and gender, not merely by supplying information about a place and time poorly represented in these studies, but also by suggesting some methodologies involving sensitivity to language and linguistic analysis to employ in approaching women and gender in other ancient cultures.

- Sales Rank: #2244133 in Books
- Published on: 1996-01-04
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.13" h x .93" w x 6.06" l, 1.26 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 360 pages

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About the Author

Stephanie W. Jamison is at Harvard University.

Most helpful customer reviews

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Women's Role in Hospitality and Ritual in Ancient India

By Linda Blanchard

I 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 Asvamedha. 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 interesting in gaining a deeper understanding of the Upanisads and is looking for an in depth analysis of the many rituals embedded in the text.

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