



Hindu Myths: A Sourcebook

Anonymous , Wendy Doniger (Contributor)

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Recorded in sacred Sanskrit texts, including the Rig Veda and the Mahabharata, Hindu Myths are thought to date back as far as the tenth century BCE. Here in these seventy-five seminal myths are the many incarnations of Vishnu, who saves mankind from destruction, and the mischievous child Krishna, alongside stories of the minor gods, demons, rivers and animals including boars, buffalo, serpents and monkeys. Immensely varied and bursting with colour and life, they demonstrate the Hindu belief in the limitless possibilities of the world - from the teeming miracles of creation to the origins of the incarnation of Death who eventually touches them all.

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From Reader Review Hindu Myths: A Sourcebook for online ebook

David Mcdowell says

I feel much more learned about Hindu culture which was the aim of the exercise. The author is certainly very thorough and very scholarly.

These myths are not told in a fairy story kind of way but are instead academic translations of the original source material - hence they are flowery and twisting , with idiosyncratic naming and heavy subtext. I feel that despite this it provides a good insight into the Hindu religion.

The appendix / glossary is something that was continuously useful and I will definitely be dipping back into this to find that elusive name - oh right, so its a fifth different name for Siva, silly me!

Curious Reader says

This wasn't something expected.

Jesse says

Hinduism's central epiphany seems to be the role the imagination plays in personal vision, and the way human beings are fulfilled only by creative work. This important understanding of human consciousness has led to the most enthralling and immersive myths of any pantheon. Like most mythologies, Gods turn into other gods who turn into people, animals, plants, geography, elements... and butter. Lots of butter. And semen. And they have sex. Have you seen Max Fleischer cartoons? Now, have you seen other imaginative cartoons? You know how you say to yourself, it lacks that freedom of movement that the MGM studios cartoons had in the '30s? Other mythologies compare to Hinduism's like that. Truly, flowing fantasy at its finest, get to know the infinity of Atman today!

Zachariah Sullivan says

Possibly too content-heavy to be a 'beginners' mythology book. Read more like a textbook than prose. Interesting, albeit confusing. I feel I have a slightly better understanding of Hindu myths, but would not recommend the book.

Jo says

This took quite a bit of reading! The stories were totally gripping and imaginative, but the book is so packed with names and cultural ideas that are new to me, that I needed pauses to reflect, recover, connect things together, and look things up!! It has inspired me to start a short course in Hindu scriptures. The more I learn, the more respect I have for this collection, for what a task it must have been to make this selection, amid so many layers of possibility. I feel richer for it, so thank you. :-)

Oneal Isaac says

Very good translation - easy to read and understand

Nikhil says

2.5/5. This book has problems with it:

1) This book is actually a translation of Sanskrit texts about Hindu myths authored by Brahmins. It is not a description of the beliefs and myths of people who would have identified as can be identified as Hindus. This is clear by the fact that many of the myths concern Brahmins attempting to explain or coopt competing religious beliefs (e.g. Mother Goddess worship, fertility gods/goddesses worship, Buddhism, etc.) that challenged their material power. By only focusing on these texts, this work reifies Brahmin's (problematic) claims as being stewards of Hinduism.

2) The book needs far more explanatory notes/context. I am broadly familiar with the Hindu pantheon and the corpus of Hindu myths yet I struggled in many places to follow along. In particular, most of the Vedic myths were indecipherable. At other points the author refers to religious practices that existed alongside Brahmanism (e.g. Mother Goddess worship, tantra, etc.) but provides little information about them.

3) The translations are a problem. The translator favored precision in translation over meter and rhyme, making the texts unwieldy and difficult to enjoy. Moreover, in many of the myths the translations choose words in English, that while precise, have a medical context. For example, many myths refer to embryos. I doubt that people in ancient times had a concept of an embryo independent of that of an unborn child. However, by choosing to use the word embryo the translator makes reading the myths more difficult -- the reader is forced to accept that these ancient authors had simultaneously precise but erroneous ideas of human reproduction.

4) The book needed more myths. The myth cycles of Rama and Krishna, while well known, were very sparse. Between 2 and 3 of the avatars of Vishnu had no myths at all. The myths of the Devi were few. Myths from more heterodox traditions (e.g. Tantra, Shakti, etc.) were excluded. All of these would have added to a richer exploration of Hindu myths and beliefs (and may even have forced attention away from the monopoly Brahmins held on Sanskrit texts).

Overall, a disappointment.

Miriam says

Surprisingly more cum and less creativity. Whilst there is some beautiful imagery and new philosophical concepts within many of these stories, there is equally a great deal of misogyny. The mythology is also quite hard to follow, this is not necessarily a flaw, but the intense amount of new names and concepts were hard to grasp for someone new to Hinduism. The introduction and notes provide a good insight into understanding and contextualising some of the complexities (including some of the Sanskrit puns which is cool) but there really is a lot to take in and on reflection I probably would have rather read an abridged version.

Charlie says

There's one story in here that I like, in which a lady is told that her son Krishna has consumed some dirt; she asks Krishna if this is true, and he denies it, saying that she can look inside his mouth for proof. The mother looks in her son's mouth and discovers that everything in the universe is in there. No, really.

"She saw in his mouth the whole eternal universe, and heaven, and the regions of the sky, and the orb of the earth with its mountains, islands, and oceans; she saw the wind, and lightning, and the moon and stars, and the zodiac; and water and fire and air and space itself; she saw the vacillating senses, the mind, the elements, and the three strands of matter. She saw within the body of her son, in his gaping mouth, the whole universe in all its variety, with all the forms of life and time and nature and action and hopes, and her own village, and herself".

Unfortunately, this is really the only good part in here. I wasn't expecting it at all, but it seems that (if this collection of myths is anything to go off of) Hinduism has its roots deep in sexual violence and misogyny. Even their creation myth starts with an act of sexual violence, and similar events occur throughout the stories compiled here, so that nearly all of the sexual contact mentioned in the stories is nonconsensual. It is really disturbing. Also disturbing is the way that the myths seem to excuse this behaviour. The Mahabharata, for instance, talks of the creation of women "in order to delude mankind"; and how, once they were created, "those wanton women, lusting for sensual pleasures, began to stir men up." It's like they're suggesting that the actions of sexually violent men and gods are okay because of how clearly these women wanted sex.

Basically, there's a lot of self-entitlement and patriarchy, and it's creepy. I wouldn't recommend it to anyone.

Vishakh Thomas says

Good as a reference to the general evolution of certain popular myths. Certainly not an in-depth exploration.

Emily Andrews says

i wasn't too impressed with this collection of Hindu myths. i found the format hard to follow and i found the notes and explanations actually hindered my understanding because it either referenced other versions of the myth that were not in the book or read much earlier.

Hanskrishna says

Another very excellent book on Hindu mythology. The contents would be somewhat confusing and contradictory to those unfamiliar with Hindu mythology but a rich collection of lore to those who know.

Ayushi Nayak says

Wendy Doniger is a fine author and the research she has input to this book is humongous but the worst part more of a realization on my part; growing up in India, a country with such vivid mythology which I have always maintained has a base in science, I never had any idea about all those Upanishad and Pur?n that she has mentioned.

She has got my interest in mythology back and after this book, I definitely am going to shout out to anyone that it has always been mythology through and through when they ask me what genre of books I love reading.

A letter of appreciation therefore is in order & here it goes!

Dear Hindu mythology,

You are best!

Amazed,

?yush? N?yak

Paschalia says

the first myths about creation and the gods of rig veda were a bit confusing to me. the rest, beginning with shiva's mythology, I understood better and also enjoyed more. I guess the older themyth the more distanced from our culture and harder to grasp.
