

## Chapter: # 5 of Wendy Doniger's "The Hindus, an Alternative History"

### Chapter Title: "Humans, Animals, and Gods in the Rig Veda"

#### General Comments on the Chapter

In another chapter, Doniger states that the main actors of her books are women, low castes, horses and dogs (p. 199). Of the four Vedas, it is the Atharva Veda that is often termed as the 'Veda of the Masses'. Unfortunately, Doniger practically ignores this Veda in her chapter, focusing almost wholly on the Rig Veda, which is itself often termed as the Veda of Sages who were associated with the rulers of Vedic peoples. Doniger also ignores the Yajurveda, whose Samhitas provide very valuable information on the daily life of the Vedic peoples. As a result, her sketch of the Vedic society is very deficient and clichéd. The only novelty in her chapter is the abundant use of witticisms and cute phrases. Otherwise, there is really no 'alternative' history in her chapter.

Early in her book, Doniger says (p. 4, ".....I hope this book will inspire some readers to go back to the sources and decide for themselves whether or not they agree with me. The relevant materials can be found in the bibliography as well as in the notes for each chapter, which will also provide browsing material for those readers (I confess that I am one of them) who go straight to the back and look at the notes and bibliography first....to see where the author has been grazing...". When we check Doniger's sources for this chapter, the results are very disappointing. For example, she relies excessively on her own idiosyncratic anthology of Rigvedic hymns mis-translated into English. But worse, she uses the works of Stephanie Jamison as her primary sources for the role of women in Vedic rituals and in the Vedic society in general. The problem with this is that Jamison always gives the most negative or the worst possible interpretation to Vedic texts conveying the impression that Hindu/Vedic males are/were horrible oppressors of women. Mahatma Gandhi would have called her writings as '*Gutter Inspector's Report*' (as he did to '*Mother India*' by Katherine Mayo). As a result of relying excessively on these scholars pretending to bear the 'White Woman's Burden', Doniger has painted a very negative picture of women in ancient India.

The second problem with her bibliography is her excessive reliance on the works of India's Communist/Marxists historians such as Romila Thapar and D N Jha, who are often driven by a political agenda in what they write, and who cannot read the ancient Hindu scriptures in their original languages. Doniger appears to point the reader selectively in the direction of authors who just regurgitate old colonial interpretations of the Vedic period. The same flaws therefore end up being transferred to her narrative. Not surprisingly, Doniger ignores all Indian Vedic scholars – traditional as well as modern Vedicists (in the true sense of the word), while writing her chapters.

The disrespect that Doniger shows towards Hindus in this chapter (as in several others) is astounding. She compares the Vedic worshipper to an unfaithful, philandering boyfriend and refers to Vedic hymns as 'poems'. And finally, the chapter has several errors of fact. There is practically nothing that the chapter adds to our knowledge about the period. In fact, it seems to be largely a collection of excerpts from non-state-of-the-art works on the Vedic period and merely perpetuates colonial paradigms about the Vedic peoples.

The review below gives a **few** examples of all these flaws, and does not discuss the mistranslations by her:

#	Page #	Paragraph # on the page	Erroneous Statement in the book	Comments
1	103	1	"c. 1700 – 1500 Nomads in the Punjab region compose the <i>Rig Veda</i> . C. 1200 – 900 The Vedic people compose the <i>Yajur Veda</i> , <i>Sama Veda</i> , and <i>Atharva Veda</i> ."	<i>Comment:</i> What were the Vedic peoples doing then from 1500 – 1200 BCE ?
2	104	3	"The Vedic people ...had to borrow the word for "mortar"."	<i>Comment:</i> Doniger relies on the coffee table book by John Keay (' <i>A History of India</i> ', p. 24), who does not give the actual source of his claim.
3	104-105	-	"The verses [of the Rigveda] were arranged.....with additional prose passages for ritual use as the Yajur Veda..."	Inaccurate statement. The Yajurveda texts have 100s of verses that are not found in the Rigveda, and not just additional prose passages.
4	105		"Unbelievers and infidels, as well as Pariahs and women, were forbidden to learn the Vedas, because they might defile or injure the power of the words, pollute it..."	As the chapter deals with the Vedic period, it is unclear why Doniger does not mention that these restrictions were not present in that period, and came into effect much later. It appears that Doniger is re-living her own life in making this spurious claim that women were debarred from Vedic studies. <sup>1</sup>  The Vedic reality is much more diverse, variegated and nuanced, contrary to the monochromatic claim of Doniger. We may give a few counter-examples to this completely negative characterization

<sup>1</sup> In her autobiography (p. 40), she confesses that her father taught her brother to read the Bible in Hebrew but did not teach her because, as he said, "*You're a girl*". See Wendy Doniger, "From the Great Neck to Swift Hall: Confessions of a Reluctant Historian of Religions", pp. 36-57 in *The Craft of Religious Studies*, ed. by Jon R Stone, St. Martin Press, New York (1998).

				<p>by Doniger –</p> <p>The intimate connection of women with Vedic rituals is seen from the fact that several sacred mantras from the Vedas<sup>2</sup> are specifically meant for recitation by women, as is clarified by Shrautasutras<sup>3</sup> – manuals of Vedic rites. Since the wife is indeed the pivot of the house, she was entitled to perform the sandhyaa, or the morning and evening rituals with the sacred altar and Vedic texts.<sup>4</sup> In the Ramayana, Queen Kausalya performs<sup>5</sup> the daily fire sacrifice (agnihotra) with Vedic mantras as do Tara and Sita<sup>6</sup> etc. In the Mahabharata also, ladies such as Savitri and Amba likewise perform Vedic rituals with the recitation of Vedic texts. Some Vedic texts actually cite women as authorities on minutiae of Vedic rituals.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, though women were debarred from reciting Vedic texts or from performing Vedic rituals in later times<sup>8</sup>, their right to do so in ancient times is quite well established from the extant ancient Hindu literature. In fact, a lost Vedic text named Saulabha Brahmana is attributed to Sulabha, a woman. This text could have belonged to an extinct school of Rigveda which she must have founded. The Mahabhashya of Patanjali seems to indicate that there were women scholars who studied the Katha Shakha of Yajurveda and the Bahvricha Shakha</p>
--	--	--	--	--

<sup>2</sup> e.g., Madhyandina Yajurveda 5.17; 3.44-45 etc.

<sup>3</sup> e.g., Katyayana Shrautasuta 5.5.10 etc.

<sup>4</sup> Gobhila Grhyasutra 1.3.15; Khadira Grhyasutra 1.5.17-18 etc.

<sup>5</sup> Ramayana 2.20.14

<sup>6</sup> Ramayana 5.14.49

<sup>7</sup> e.g., Aitareya Brahmana 2.9 cites the opinion of Kumari Gandharva-grihita on the Agnihotra ritual.

<sup>8</sup> Manusmriti 2.67 says that the wedding rite is the only Vedic rite of women, and domestic work is like performance of *agnihotra* rite for women. Interestingly, as late as the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the commentator Kullukabhatta noted several additional verses in manuscripts of Manusmriti found in his times. Right after 2.67, he noticed an additional verse (excluded in vulgate text) according to which wives were actually responsible for performing the daily *agnihotra*, clearly contradicting the preceding verse but consistent with numerous old texts such as Gobhila Grhyasutra 1.3.15; Ashvalayana Grhyasutra 1.9

				<p>of Rigveda.</p> <p>Although no sacred-thread ceremony has been performed for women in recent centuries, ancient texts affirm that women did undergo this ceremony in the past, or wore the sacred thread during various rituals. For instance, a text<sup>9</sup> says that the bride should wear the sacred thread during her wedding. The Harita Dharmasutra, perhaps belonging to Maitrayaniya school of Yajurveda, has been cited in some later texts (e.g., Hindu law manuals like Nirnayasinghu) to the effect that women are of two types – Brahmapaadini (devoted to the Vedas and to the Supreme Being) and Sadhyavadhu (those who marry and settle down as housewives). Concerning the former, the Dharmasutra says<sup>10</sup> that they undergo the thread ceremony, perform agnihotra, study the Vedas, and live by begging alms from their family members (just as male students, although boys have to leave home to live with their teachers). Later texts also cite the opinion of Yama<sup>11</sup> to the effect that in ancient times, women also underwent the thread ceremony, studied the Vedas and recited the Gayatri and other Vedic mantras. However, these later texts somehow try to explain these old traditions away because they were perceived as anachronistic in later times.</p> <p>On the eligibility of the 'Pariahs' for Vedic learning, 'alternative' views can be stated again (obviously Doniger omits these 'alternative views')-</p> <p>The fact of Sudras performing Vedic sacrifices is actually recorded</p>
--	--	--	--	---

<sup>9</sup> Gobhila Grhyasutra 2.1.9

<sup>10</sup> 'dvividhaa striyah. Brahmavaadinyah sadyovadhascha. tatra brahmavaadiniinaamupanayanamagniindhanam svagrhe bhiksacharyeti.'

<sup>11</sup> Puraakalpeshu naariinaam maunjiibandhanishyatey. Adhyaapanam cha vedaanaam saavitrivaachanam tathaa.

				<p>in several Srautra sutras. Manava Srautasutra 11.1.2 states that if the giver of the sacrificial fees (daksina) is a Sudra, then the priest should go to his house, touch water and then go over the sacrificial formula mentally. In the Apastambha Srautasutra 5.11-18, Sudras are listed as one of them from whose homes, a sacrificer desirous of prosperity must procure fire. According to some teachers (Apastamba Srautasutra 1.19-23), some teachers allowed Sudras to perform Vedic sacrifices, while others (Apastamba 24.1) deprived him of this right. Bharadvaja Srautasutra 5.2.9 also records that according to some teachers, the Sudras also have the right to establish the sacrificial fires.</p> <p>Yajurveda (Madhyandina) 26.2 is sometimes taken as a proof that Shudras are also entitled to listen to the Vedas.</p> <p>In short, Doniger has done exactly the reverse of what she claims to be her purpose in writing the book – <i>“It tells a story that incorporates the narratives of and about alternative people – people who, from the standpoint of most high-caste Hindu males, are alternative in the sense of otherness, people of other religions or cultures, or castes, or species (animals), or genders (women). Part of my agenda in writing an alternative history is to show how much the groups that conventional wisdom says were oppressed and silenced and played no part in the development of the tradition – women, Pariahs (oppressed castes, sometimes called Untouchables)-did actually contribute to Hinduism.”</i> (p. 1)</p>
5	107	3	<p>“All the poems of the <i>Rig Veda</i> are ritual hymns in some sense. Since all were sung as part of the Vedic ceremony.”</p>	<p>False statement. In fact, a considerable portion of the Rig Veda is NOT employed in ritual. See – Jan Gonda, 1978, <i>Hymns of the Rgveda Not Employed in the Solemn Ritual</i>. (Amsterdam)</p>

6	111	5	<p>“The Vedic people....resembled the cowboys of the nineteenth-century American West, riding over other people’s land and stealing their cattle.”</p>	<p>The analogy with the Wild West shows the unscholarly and cavalier manner in which ethnocentric Indologists like Wendy Doniger interpret India’s past. The author tries to put the Vedic people’s feet across the saddle but gets her own foot in the mouth instead!</p> <p>There is no firm evidence that Rigvedic peoples did horse-riding, and the meaning of the few verses (out of the 10552 mantras of the text) where it is supposedly mentioned is disputed.<sup>12</sup> The other alternative- that of the Vedic peoples riding horse driven chariots to herd cattle (!) does not look very plausible either.</p> <p>The characterization of Vedic people as stealing others' land and cattle as their favorite and predominant pastime is largely unsubstantiated. Since this work claims to be an <i>alternative history</i>, rather than <i>historical fiction</i>, the author's lack of scholarly rigor in making such sweeping claims should be noted.</p>
7	112	1	<p>“They did have, however, a policy or riding over other people’s land and of keeping the cattle that they stole from those people. That the word <i>gavisthi</i> (“searching for cows”) came to mean “fighting” says it all.</p>	<p>Doniger’s understanding of the word ‘gavisthi’ reflects her antiquated acquaintance with the technical literature on this subject. For a contrary opinion, she may consult specialist literature.<sup>13</sup></p> <p>Fighting is just a secondary meaning of this word, and there are dozens of words used in the Rigveda for war.</p>
8	112	2	<p>“...but another [verse] says that a cow must be slaughtered on the occasion of</p>	<p>The correct meaning of Rigveda 10.85.13 is not that the “cows are slaughtered”, but that the “cows are driven along”.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the</p>

<sup>12</sup> Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. 1942. “Horse-Riding in the Rgveda and Atharvaveda.” *JAOS*, vol. 62, No. 2, pp. 139-140

<sup>13</sup> Sadashiv Ambadas Dange, 1967, ‘Go-Ishti and Mehana from the Rgveda’, in *Nagpur University Journal*, pp. 78-108

<sup>14</sup> “A Review of ‘Beef Eating in Ancient India’, published by Geeta Press, Gorakhpur (1971), pp. 185-195

			marriage (10.85.13), and another lists among animals to be sacrificed a cow that has been bred but has not calved (10.91.14)...”	words vashanna and ukshanna in 10.91.14 can be explained differently from what Doniger interprets. <sup>15</sup>
9	112	2	“The usual meal of milk.....wheat, and barley would be supplemented by the .....[in the Rigvedic period]”	The mention of wheat is anachronistic. Wheat is not mentioned in the Rigveda and first appears in Yajurvedic texts such as the Maitrayani Samhita.
10	116	1	“Perhaps the horse was not eaten because of the close relationship that the Vedic people, like most Indo-Europeans, had with their horses....”	This is a very simplistic statement. Many peoples in Central Asia and Mongolia who practice nomadism and have a close relationship with horses do eat horse meat. Likewise, in pre-Christian Europe, Germans and Scandinavians ate horse meat during Pagan rites despite the fact that they too were Indo-Europeans.  Doniger has grossly exaggerated the role of the Ashvamedha rite in the Rigveda although it occurs in two <i>late</i> hymns of the text. It stands to reason that if the Vedic Aryans had inherited this rite from their Indo-European heritage, then it should have been prominent in early parts of the Rigveda, and not in the later parts when they were already getting ‘Indianized’.
11	116	3	“The Vedic people at first distinguished just two classes (varnas), their own (which they called Arya) and that of the people they conquered, whom they called Dasas (or Dasyus, or, sometimes, Panis).”	Doniger seems to subscribe to the racist and white-supremacist Aryan invasion theory, which led to horrors like Nazism in the 20 <sup>th</sup> century. There is no evidence in the Vedas that the Dasas or Dasyus were original inhabitants of India who were conquered by invading Aryans.  It is also debatable whether the native Indians conquered by the invading Aryans were the Panis. The narratives concerning Panis find parallels in Teutonic and Greek mythology and therefore, these narratives either stem from a common Indo-European root,

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pp. 168-179

				or they pre-suppose an Indo-European immigration from India, or both. <sup>16</sup>
12	119	3-4	“One Vedic poem that may incorporate a critique of Brahmins is a tour de force that applies simultaneously, throughout, to frogs croaking at the start of the rainy season and to Brahmin priests who begin to chant at the beginning of the rains.	There is nothing of the sort of critique in Rigveda 7.103 that Doniger imagines. Current scholarship sees a fairly serious rain-charm here. <sup>17</sup> In fact, no derision of Veda reciting Brahmins is implied in this hymn at all. <sup>18</sup>
13	123	2	“The gambler’s wife is one of a more general company of long-suffering wives, devoted but often deserted, who people ancient Hindu literature and the society that this literature reflects.”	Doniger gives a falsely negative judgment on the role of women in ancient Hindu literature and in the ancient Hindu society. This claim is more a reflection of the ‘White Woman’s Burden’ syndrome that afflicts her, rather than any social reality.  <b>This negative characterization of the Vedic society represents the ancient Hindu scriptures and society less, and Doniger’s own life more.</b> <sup>19</sup>
14	123	2	“In the Rig Veda, a text dominated by men in a world dominated by men, women appear throughout the poems as	This an obsessively negative statement contradicted by the Rig Veda itself. The close connection of women with the Vedas, the texts regarded as Divine Revelation (or ‘Divine Exhalation’) in

<sup>16</sup> Shrikant Talageri, 2000, *The Rigveda a Historical Analysis*, Aditya Prakashan (New Delhi), pp. 477-495

<sup>17</sup> See pg. 208 of MAURER, Walter H. 1986. *Pinnacles of India’s Past – Selections from the Rgveda*. University of Pennsylvania Studies on South Asia, vol. 2. John Benjamin’s Publishing Company: Amsterdam/Philadephia.

<sup>18</sup> See the extensive discussion on the purport of this hymn in H. D. VELANKAR’s *Rgveda Mandala VII*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan: Bombay (1963).

<sup>19</sup> In her autobiographical account [Wendy Doniger, “From the Great Neck to Swift Hall: Confessions of a Reluctant Historian of Religions”, pp. 36-57 in *The Craft of Religious Studies*, ed. by Jon R Stone, St. Martin Press, New York (1998)], she describes (page 44) how her husband dumped her although she had earlier made sacrifices for him – “In 1975 I gave up tenure in London and followed my husband to Berkeley.....Berkeley, like most Sanskrit departments at that time, divided the world into two groups: white men, who taught courses about Ideas and were tenured, and women of color, sometimes married to the white men in the first group and informally referred to as ‘pillow dictionaries’, who taught Languages and were untenured. As a white woman with Ideas, I was....dirt...

*I went to Chicago, accepting an invitation that Joseph Kitagawa, Dean of the Divinity School, had been extending to me, on and off,.....So I went, kicking and screaming, simply because I was broke and my marriage, to a man who had dug his toes into the sands of California and refused to leave, was broken and I needed a job.”*

			objects.”	<p>Hindu Dharma may be judged from the fact that of the 407 Sages associated with the revelation of Rigveda, twenty-one<sup>20</sup> are women. Many of these mantras are quite significant, for instance the hymn on the glorification of the Divine Speech.<sup>21</sup> The very invocatory mantra of the Atharvaveda<sup>22</sup> addresses divinity as a ‘Devi’ – the Goddess, who while present in waters, fulfills all our desires and hopes. In the Atharvaveda, the entire 14<sup>th</sup> book dealing with marriage, domestic issues etc., is attributed to a woman sage. Portions<sup>23</sup> of other 19 books are also attributed to women sages<sup>24</sup>.</p> <p>Both male and female deities are extolled in the hymns of all revealed texts of Hindus and in the family prayers<sup>25</sup> of all the 10 lineages of Vedic Sages. Numerous schools of Vedic tradition customarily offer homage to women sages during their daily prayers<sup>26</sup>. The superlative epithets used uniformly to denote female deities like Ushas, Sarasvati etc., in the Vedas describe them as sweetly-smiling, the first or foremost of deities to whom worship is offered, the shining ones, splendid and beautiful, possessors of wisdom, teachers of mankind and as powers capable of fulfilling the desires of human beings. The Gayatri Mantra, the holiest prayer of Hindus in the Vedas, is often represented symbolically as a Devi in classical Hinduism. She is thus a female</p>
--	--	--	-----------	---

<sup>20</sup> According to another count, the actual number is 28. But this inflated list includes feminine speakers such as ‘rivers’ and so on. See Brihaddevata 11.84 for this list.

<sup>21</sup> Rigveda 10.125, the inspiration of Vac, the daughter of Ambhrina

<sup>22</sup> ‘*Om shanno devirbhishtiye aapo bhavantu....*’. The traditional recitation of Atharvaveda is commenced with this verse. The Paippalada version of Atharvaveda starts with this mantra. It occurs as mantra 1.6.1 in the Shaunaka version of Atharvaveda but even the recitation of this text is often commenced with the invocation to Devi.

<sup>23</sup> These portions are specifically termed as ‘*striikarmaani*’ or acts pertaining to women.

<sup>24</sup> Women Sages are termed as ‘*Rishika*’ while male Sages are termed as ‘*Rishi*’.

<sup>25</sup> These family hymns are called ‘*Apri Suktas*’, and all these hymns have invocations to women deities such as Ila, Bharati, Sarasvati etc.

<sup>26</sup> The ritual texts of the Vedas list women Sages to whom homage must be offered while studying the divine texts. See for instance Ashvalayana Grhyasutra 3.4.4; Shankhayana Grhyasutra 4.10 which enumerate women teachers such as Sulabha Maitreyi, Vadavaa Praathitheyi etc.

				<p>deity, who is also often termed as the ‘Mother of all Vedas’, and giver of boons<sup>27</sup>.</p> <p>It is common to read in scriptures of mankind God is like the husband of all human beings and of all churches. In the Vedas however, we even read that God is like a dear wife whom ‘His’ worshipper loves like a doting husband<sup>28</sup>. The ‘Divine Word<sup>29</sup>’ itself is likened to a beautiful maiden who manifests her beauty to the husband<sup>30</sup>. As goddesses (<i>devis</i>), they are worshipped as mothers of even the most powerful male deities (<i>devatas</i>). Devi Aditi is thus the mother of all prominent <i>devatas</i> such as Varuna, Mitra, Aryaman, Rudras, Indra, of kings and many other excellent sons. She is invoked as the mistress of the Cosmic Order, omnipotent, every youthful, protector, mother of the devout worshipper and a wise guide of all humans.<sup>31</sup> The Vedas hardly ever conceive of <i>devatas</i> without corresponding <i>devis</i>. Almost as a rule, the Sage, the worshipper and the ritualist invoke the <i>devatas</i> to manifest along with <i>devis</i> and partake of the sacred oblations poured into the sacred fire altar.</p> <p>To quote some Rigvedic verses on the glory of a bride –</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“Profound thought was the pillow of her couch, Vision was the unguent for her eyes.</i></p>
--	--	--	--	--

<sup>27</sup> Atharvaveda 19.71.1

<sup>28</sup> ‘*anavadyaa patijushteva naarii*’ – Rigveda 1.73.3

<sup>29</sup> ‘Vak’, the Sanskrit word denoting Divine Speech, is considered feminine according to grammatical rules.

<sup>30</sup> Rigveda 10.71.4

<sup>31</sup> Atharvaveda 7.6.2; Madhyandina Yajurveda 21.5

				<p><i>Her wealth was the earth and Heaven, When Surya (the sun-like resplendent bride) went to meet her husband.<sup>32</sup></i></p> <p><i>Her mind was the bridal chariot, And sky was the canopy of that chariot. Orbs of light were the two steers that pulled the chariot When Surya proceeded to her husband's home!"<sup>33</sup></i></p>
15	123	2	<p>A man needed a wife to be present when he performed any Vedic sacrifice, though she had to stay behind a screen.<sup>49</sup> <sup>49</sup> Jamison, <i>Sacrificed Wife</i>, p. 256</p>	<p>To state that women are or were required to sit behind a screen during Vedic ceremonies displays Doniger's supreme ignorance of Vedic rituals! The reference cited by her (p. 256 of Jamison's book) does not make any such claim either.</p>
16	124	2	<p>"More substantial is the early evidence in this poem of a form of rape that came to be regarded as a bad, but legitimate, form of marriage: having sex with a sleeping or drugged woman."</p>	<p>Doniger just loves rape throughout the book, and screams the word 'rape' at the drop of a pin, even if the pin is not from a lady's dress. There is no hint in this hymn of rape.</p> <p>Rigveda 10.162.5 that Doniger refers to here talks of an evil spirit assuming the form of her husband, brother or assuming the form of her lover to come close to a pregnant woman to destroy her fetus. There is no hint in the mantra of sex with a sleeping or drugged woman. The woman in the mantra is already pregnant and the entire hymn contains imprecations against evil spirits who can cause her abortion.</p>
17	124	2	<p>"It appears that a woman's brother too is someone she might expect to find in her bed, though the Rig Veda severely condemns sibling incest..."</p>	<p>Again, Doniger makes these remarks in the context of Rigveda 10.162 and really climaxes in her pervert thinking that the hymn suggests that the woman can find her own brother in her bed.</p> <p>As in her other books, Doniger's sexually fertile imagination does not fail us here too, and she cannot resist the sensation of</p>

<sup>32</sup> Rigveda 10.85.7

<sup>33</sup> Rigveda 10.85.10

				<p>inserting titillating sentences like these here and there. Her perverse imagination apart, the Rigveda has no hint that a pregnant woman might find her brother sleeping with her. In fact, as Doniger states herself, Rigveda 10.10 severely rejects incest between brother and sister.</p> <p>It is very apt that a Vedicist says of her –  <i>“O’Flaherty seems to see only one function, the third one of fertility and sexuality, copulation, defloration, castration and the like: even bhakti ‘devotion’ is described in stark erotic terms including incest and homosexuality.... Surely, erotic terms could be metaphors for spiritual or mystical experiences as is evidence in so much literature?”</i><sup>34</sup></p>
18	126	2	<p>“One long poem (10.85) celebrates the story of the marriage of the moon and the daughter of the sun....”</p>	<p>The hymn talks of the marriage of Sūryā to Soma, and the latter is considered distinct from the moon in the Rigvedic context. The equation of Soma to the moon is largely a later development. This is common Indological understanding but Doniger seems unaware. In fact, this very hymn states that ‘chandrama’ (moon) was one of the two wheels of the bridal chariot. So how could her husband Soma be the same as chandrama (the moon)?</p>
19	127	fn.	<p>Concerning the word ‘svayambhu’, Doniger states – “The Rig Veda (10.83.4) applied this name not to creator but to Manyu, “Anger”. By the time of the Mahabharata. However, it is an epithet of Manu and then of Brahma.”</p>	<p>Quite a meaningless statement because at least as early as Yajurveda (Madhyandina) 40.8, the epithet is clearly applied to the Supreme Being.</p>
20	128	2	<p>Doniger calls the Vedic worshipper’s successive praise of different Deities as ‘serial monogamy’ and then gives this parallel – “You, Susan, are the only</p>	<p>Comparing a Vedic worshiper to an unfaithful, untruthful and philandering boyfriend is a perfect example of how Doniger's personal biases and cultural conditioning render her deaf and blind to an ethos totally different from her own. Her flippant</p>

<sup>34</sup> Kazanas, Nicholas. “Indo-European Deities and the Rgveda”, in *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, vol. 29, nos. 3-4 (Fall & Winter 2001), pp. 257-293. Fn. 14 on page 283

			<p>woman I've loved; you are the only one."          "You, Helen, are the only woman I've ever loved; you are the only one."</p>	<p>analogy, besides being incredibly disrespectful, fails to even remotely convey the true spirit and intent of a Vedic worshiper.</p> <p>What Doniger forgets is that <b>in real life</b>, Susan and Helen are completely different women, and the debauched boyfriend will not reveal his love for Susan to Helen or vice versa</p> <p>But the Vedic Deities are not separate from each other, and the worshiper's devotion (or lack thereof) to one Deity is not hidden from the other Deities either! The Vedic Deities are born of each other, they merge to constitute one Divinity, their origin is One, they represent different aspects of One truth and so on – all these are some inter-relationships of Deities stated in the Rigveda. Surely, Susan cannot be born of Helen or Helen of Susan!</p> <p>To quote just a few Vedic references -          They call Him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni, and he is the Divine good winged bird (the sun with beautiful rays). The sages describe one and the same Agni in various ways and call it Agni, Yama and Matarisvan. Rigveda 1.164.46          Agni itself is Indra, Vayu, Brahma, Vishnu and Brahmanaspati. Rigveda 2.1.3          Varuna and Mitra are but functional manifestations of Agni. Rigveda 2.1.4          Vishnu, Rudra and Marut are also functional manifestations of Agni. Rigveda 2.1.6          That (Supreme Being) is Agni; that is the Surya; that is the Vayu; that is the Chandrama; that is Jyoti; that is Brahman; and that is Prajapati. (Madhyandina) Yajurveda 32.1</p>
21	130	2	<p>"Agni is the Brahmin, Varuna the Brahminical sovereign, Indra the warrior, and the Ashvins the Vaishyas. There are no Shudra gods in the Vedas."</p>	<p>It is anachronistic to talk of castes of Deities in the context of Rigveda.</p> <p>In any case, Doniger is wrong. In Shatapatha Brahmana 11.2.7.16;</p>

				<p>6.4.4.13, the devatas are also divided into four castes. According to that text, Varuna is a Kshatriya (not Brahmin). And Pushan is a Shudra Deity, contrary to Doniger’s claim that there are no Shudra Deities in the Vedas.</p> <p>Jaiminiya Brahmana 1.68-69 associates Sudras with the Deity Vesmapati. Sometimes, the Vishvedevas are also associated with the Shudras.</p> <p>For more details, a paper by Arvind Sharma, a foremost scholar of Hinduism may be consulted.<sup>35</sup></p>
22	133	1	<p>About after-life in Rigveda, Doniger says – “When it comes to the inevitable end of that span, the Rig Veda offers a varied but not necessarily contradictory images of a rather muted version of life on earth; shade (remember how hot India is), lots of good-looking women (this heaven is imagined by men), and good things to eat and drink.”</p>	<p>It is a fiction of Doniger’s imagination that in the Rigveda, lots of good-looking women are promised to men in their after-life.</p>
23	133	fn	<p>Discussing Rigveda 10.16.1 which asks Agni to consume the body being cremated thoroughly, Doniger remarks – “The great French Indologist Loius Renou translated the idea of being cooked perfectly as <i>au point</i>, just as one would say of a good steak.”</p>	<p>Doniger obviously knows that beef is an anathema to modern Hindus, and perhaps for this reason, she has made a remark that would be highly offensive to Hindus today, especially when made in the context of their holy scriptures. So much for cultural sensitivity and appreciation of diversity! One wonders if she would ever dare to bring in Pork chops while discussing the Koran or the Torah.</p>

When Doniger claims that “Intoxication, though not addiction, is a central theme of the Veda, since the sacrificial offering of the hallucinogenic juice of the soma plant was an element of several important Vedic rituals.” (p 122), we have come a full circle, back to Colonial Indology.

<sup>35</sup> Arvind Sharma, “Of Sudras, Sutas and Slokas: Why is the Mahabharata Pre-eminently in the Anustubh Metre?”, pp. 225-278 in *Indo-Iranian Journal*, vol 43 (2000)

Rev A: 20 Feb 2010.

Permission is granted to reproduce this document on other websites.

For any comments and suggestions, write to [vishalsagarwal@yahoo.com](mailto:vishalsagarwal@yahoo.com) .