



Vedic Voices: Intimate Narratives of a Living Andhra Tradition

By David M. Knipe

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For countless generations families have lived in isolated communities in the Godavari Delta of coastal Andhra Pradesh, learning and reciting their legacy of Vedas, performing daily offerings and occasional sacrifices. They are the virtually unrecognized survivors of a 3,700-year-old heritage, the last in India who perform the ancient animal and soma sacrifices according to Vedic tradition.

In *Vedic Voices*, David M. Knipe offers for the first time, an opportunity for them to speak about their lives, ancestral lineages, personal choices as pandits, wives, children, and ways of coping with an avalanche of changes in modern India. He presents a study of four generations of ten families, from those born at the outset of the twentieth century down to their great-grandsons who are just beginning, at the age of seven, the task of memorizing their Veda, the Taittiriya Samhita, a feat that will require eight to twelve years of daily recitations. After successful examinations these young men will reside with the Veda family girls they married as children years before, take their places in the oral transmission of a three-thousand-year Vedic heritage, teach the Taittiriya collection of texts to their own sons, and undertake with their wives the major and minor sacrifices performed by their ancestors for some three millennia.

Coastal Andhra, famed for bountiful rice and coconut plantations, has received scant attention from historians of religion and anthropologists despite a wealth of cultural traditions. *Vedic Voices* describes in captivating prose the geography, cultural history, pilgrimage traditions, and celebrated persons of the region. Here unfolds a remarkable story of Vedic pandits and their wives, one scarcely known in India and not at all to the outside world.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Knipe (emer., South Asian studies, Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison) provides an essential work of anthropological scholarship, a product of his more than 35 years of field research as well as careful textual analysis. It is a rare resource for anyone interested in India's Vedic traditions, their continued embodiment in living practice, and their potential loss... It is a model work of contemporary Indology that surely will be widely cited long into the future... Essential." --*CHOICES*

"With Knipe's book, personal narratives cohere into a rich portrait of the struggle to preserve Vedic heritage in modern Indian society, and a vibrant tradition comes into bold relief. In bearing witness to the diverse experiences of these multi-generational families, *Vedic Voices* offers a corrective to the perception that Vedic traditions have vanished entirely from the subcontinent or else survive only as scattered relics without relevance to the modern religious landscape. Knipe's elegant synthesis of ethnography, philology, and history results in an accessible and compelling book, one that should command the attention of Indologists, anthropologists, and historians of religion alike." --*Journal of the American Oriental Society*

About the Author

David M. Knipe is a historian of religions focusing on Hinduism and Vedic studies. He conducted field research in India from 1971 to the present. In 1974 he released *Exploring the Religions of South Asia*, his educational television series of 15 programs on Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, and Christianity in India. Since 1980 he has concentrated on field studies in the Godavari Delta of Andhra Pradesh.

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