



The Head Beneath the Altar: Hindu Mythology and the Critique of Sacrifice (Studies in Violence, Mimesis, & Culture)

Brian Collins

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In the beginning, says the ancient Hindu text the *Rg Veda*, was man. And from man's sacrifice and dismemberment came the entire world, including the hierarchical ordering of human society. *The Head Beneath the Altar* is the first book to present a wide-ranging study of Hindu texts read through the lens of René Girard's mimetic theory of the sacrificial origin of religion and culture. For those interested in Girard and comparative religion, the book also performs a careful reading of Girard's work, drawing connections between his thought and the work of theorists like Georges Dumézil and Giorgio Agamben. Brian Collins examines the idea of sacrifice from the earliest recorded rituals through the flowering of classical mythology and the ancient Indian institutions of the duel, the oath, and the secret warrior society. He also uncovers implicit and explicit critiques in the tradition, confirming Girard's intuition that Hinduism offers an alternative anti-sacrificial worldview to the one contained in the gospels.

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