



# South Asian Funeral Rituals



Islam

Every soul shall taste death.

*Quran 29:57*



# Islam



- Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, and Pakistan
- When near death
  - Those around him are called upon to give comfort, reminders of God's mercy and forgiveness may recite verses from Qur'an



# Islam



- Upon death
  - Eyes of the deceased should be closed
  - Body covered temporarily with a clean sheet
    - forbidden for those in mourning to excessively wail, scream, or thrash about
  - strive to bury the deceased as soon as possible after death, avoiding the need for embalming or otherwise disturbing the body of the deceased



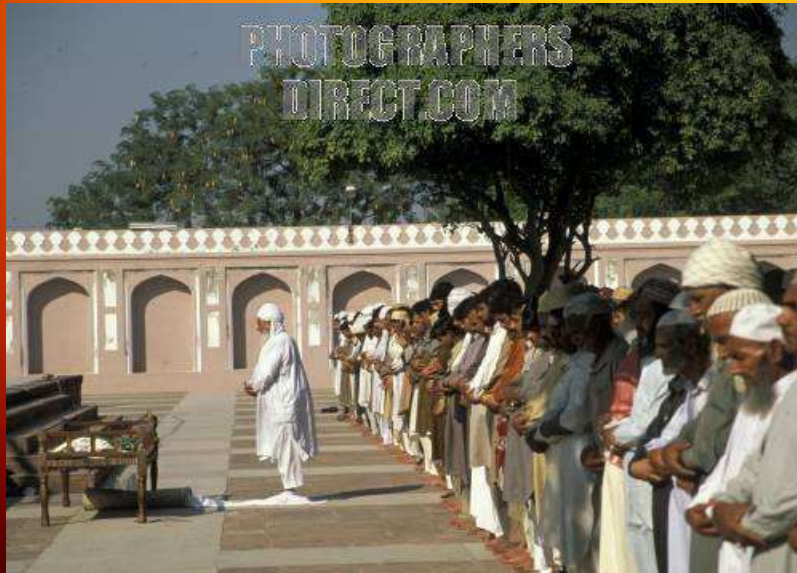


# Islam



- Preparation for burial
  - the family or other members of the community will wash and shroud the body except for the deceased killed as a martyr
  - body will then be wrapped in sheets of clean, white cloth (called the kafan) while martyrs are buried in the clothes they died in

# Islam



- **Funeral Prayers**
  - deceased is then transported to the site of the funeral prayers (salat-l-janazah)
  - The community gathers, and the imam (prayer leader) stands in front of the deceased, facing away from the worshippers



## ■ Burial

- deceased is then taken to the cemetery for burial (al-dafin)
- only the men of the community accompany the body to the gravesite
- deceased is laid in the grave (without a coffin if permitted by local law) on his or her right side, facing Mecca
- it is discouraged for people to erect tombstones, elaborate markers, or put flowers

# Islam



- Mourning
  - Loved ones and relatives are to observe a 3-day mourning period
  - Widows observe an extended mourning period (iddah), 4 months and 10 days long



# Buddhism



# Buddhism



- Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka
- the monastic Sangha plays a prominent role in the funeral proceedings
- offering of cloth on behalf of the dead (mataka-vastra-puja)
  - done prior to the cremation or the burial of the body
  - Monks are assembled in the home of the dead person or in the cemetery
  - proceedings begin with the administration of the Five Precepts to the assembled crowd by one of the monks

# Buddhism



- offering of a length of new white cloth to the monks
  - The cloth, called a pamsukula — literally, a dust-heap cloth — is intended to be cut into pieces and then stitched into a robe
- pouring of water
  - close relatives of the deceased sit together on a mat and they pour water from a vessel into a cup placed within a plate until the cup overflows
  - the monks intone in unison the stanzas extracted from the Tirokuddha Sutta of the Khuddakapatha



# Buddhism



- preaching for the benefit of the dead (mataka-bana)
  - conduct a monk to the house of the dead person, generally on the third day (or occasionally on any day within a week) after the funeral and to request him to preach a sermon suited to the occasion





# Buddhism



- At the end of the sermon, the monk gets the relatives to recite the necessary stanzas to transfer to the deceased the merits acquired by organizing the event
- a gift is offered to the monk, and the invitees are also served with refreshments



# Buddhism



- offering in the name of the dead (mataka-dana)
  - Three months from the date of death, it is customary to hold an almsgiving (sanghika dana) in memory of the deceased and thence to repeat it annually

# Buddhism



- Some Buddhists also cremate bodies, while others perform sky burials, in which a dead body is cut up and left at sacred sites for vultures to eat.
- Buddhists believe the soul is immortal and that the body is only a shell to hold the spirit.
- They believe it is better for other creature to benefit from the body, rather than letting it rot.





# Hinduism





# Hinduism

- India, Nepal and Sri Lanka
- As death approaches
  - The person is placed in his room or in the entryway of the house, with the head facing east.
  - A lamp is lit near his head, and he is urged to concentrate on his mantra.
  - Kindred keep vigil until the great departure, singing hymns, praying and reading scripture.

# Hinduism

- The moment of death
  - Holy ash or sandal paste is applied to the forehead
  - Vedic verses are chanted
  - a few drops of milk, Ganga or other holy water are trickled into the mouth
  - After death, the body is laid in the home's entryway, with the head facing south, on a cot or the ground – reflecting a return to the lap of Mother Earth.
  - lamp is kept lit near the head and incense burned

# Hinduism

- A cloth is tied under the chin and over the top of the head.
- The thumbs are tied together, as are the big toes.
- Religious pictures are turned to the wall, and in some traditions mirrors are covered.

# Hinduism

- The Homa Fire Ritual
  - a fire ritual (homa) is performed to bless nine brass kumbhas (water pots) and one clay pot
  - The "chief mourner" leads the rites. He is the eldest son in the case of the father's death, and the youngest son in the case of the mother's





# Hinduism

- Preparing the Body
  - The chief mourner now performs arati, passing an oil lamp over the remains, then offering flowers.
  - The male (or female, depending on the gender of the deceased) relatives carry the body to the back porch, remove the clothes and drape it with a white cloth.
  - Each applies sesame oil to the head, and the body is bathed with water from the nine kumbhas, dressed, placed in a coffin (or on a palanquin) and carried to the homa shelter.

# Hinduism

- The young children, holding small lighted sticks, encircle the body, singing hymns.
- The women then walk around the body and offer puffed rice into the mouth to nourish the deceased for the journey ahead.
- A widow will place her tali (wedding pendant) around her husband's neck, signifying her enduring tie to him.

# Hinduism

- Cremation
  - Only men go to the cremation site, led by the chief mourner
  - Two pots are carried: the clay kumbha and other containing burning embers from the homa.
  - The body is carried three times counterclockwise around the pyre, then placed upon it.
  - Men offer puffed rice as the women did earlier, cover the body with wood and offer incense and ghee.
  - With the clay pot on his left shoulder, the chief mourner circles the pyre while holding a fire brand behind his back.



# Hinduism

- At each turn around the pyre, a relative knocks a hole in the pot with a knife, letting water out, signifying life is leaving its vessel.
- At the end of three turns, the chief mourner drops the pot. Then, without turning to face the body, he lights the pyre and leaves the cremation grounds.



# Hinduism

- At a gas-fueled crematorium, sacred wood and ghee are placed inside the coffin with the body. Where permitted, the body is carried around the chamber, and a small fire is lit in the coffin before it is consigned to the flames. The cremation switch then is engaged by the chief mourner.

# Hinduism

- Return Home; Ritual Impurity
  - Returning home, all bathe and share in cleaning the house.
  - A lamp and a water pot are set where the body lay in state.
  - The water is changed daily, and pictures remain turned to the wall.
  - The shrine room is closed, with white cloth draping all icons.

# Hinduism

- Bone-Gathering Ceremony
  - About 12 hours after cremation, family men return to collect the remains.
  - Water is sprinkled on the ash; the remains are collected on a large tray.
  - Ashes are carried or sent to India for deposition in the Ganges or placed in an auspicious river or the ocean, along with garlands and flowers.

# Hinduism

- First Memorial
  - On the 3rd, 5th, 7th or 9th day, relatives gather for a meal of the deceased's favorite foods.
  - A portion is offered before his photo and later ceremonially left at an abandoned place, along with some lit camphor.
  - Some offer pinda (rice balls) daily for nine days.



# Hinduism

- 31st-Day Memorial
  - On the 31st day, a memorial service is held.
  - A priest purifies the home and performs the sapindikarana, making one large pinda (representing the deceased) and three small, representing the father, grandfather and great-grandfather.
  - The pindas are fed to the crows, to a cow or thrown in a river for the fish.

# Hinduism

- One-Year Memorial
  - At the yearly anniversary of the death (according to the moon calendar), a priest conducts the shraddha rites in the home, offering pinda to the ancestors.

# Zoroastrianism



# Zoroastrianism



- Indian Subcontinent
- Preparation and Viewing of the Body
  - The body of the recently deceased is washed in gomez (unconsecrated bull's urine) and water
  - The clothes he will wear and the room in which he will lie before final disposal are also washed clean.
  - The body is then placed on a clean white sheet and visitors are allowed to pay their respects, although they are forbidden to touch.
  - A dog will twice be brought into the corpse's presence to keep away demons in a ritual called sagdid.



# Zoroastrianism



- Wards Against Contamination
  - Once the body is prepared, it is handed over to professional corpse-bearers, who are now the only people allowed to touch the corpse.
  - The cloth on which the body rests is wound around it like a shroud, and then the body is placed either on a stone slab on or in a shallowly dug out space on the ground.
  - Circles are drawn on the ground around the corpse as a spiritual barrier against corruption and as a warning for visitors to keep a safe distance.
  - Fire is also brought into the room and fed with fragrant woods such as frankincense and sandalwood.

# Zoroastrianism



- Final Rites at The Tower of Silence
  - The body is traditionally moved within one day (during the day) to the dakhma or Tower of Silence.
  - Mourners who follow the body also always travel in pairs, each pair holding a piece of cloth between them known as a paiwand.
  - A pair of priests makes prayers, and then all in attendance bow to the body out of respect. They wash with gomez and water before leaving the site and then take a regular bath when they return home.
  - At the dakhma, the shroud and clothes are removed through the use of tools rather than bare hands and are then destroyed.
  - The dakhma is a wide tower with a platform open to the sky.
  - Corpses are left on the platform to be picked clean by vultures, a process which only takes a few hours.
  - The remaining bones are deposited into a pit at the base of the dakhma.

# Zoroastrianism



Tower of Silence

# Zoroastrianism



- Ritual Mourning and Remembrance After The Funeral
  - Prayers are regularly said for the dead for the first three days after death, for this is the time that the soul is understood to remain on earth.
  - On the fourth day, the soul and its guardian fravashi ascend to Chinvat, the bridge of judgment.
  - During this three-day mourning period, family and friends generally avoid eating meat, and no food is cooked in the house where the body was prepared. Instead, relatives prepare food in their own homes and bring it to the immediate family.
  - At the home, fragrant woods continue to be burnt for three days. In the winter, no one may enter the immediate area where the body rested for ten days and a lamp is left burning during this time.
  - In summer this is done for thirty days.