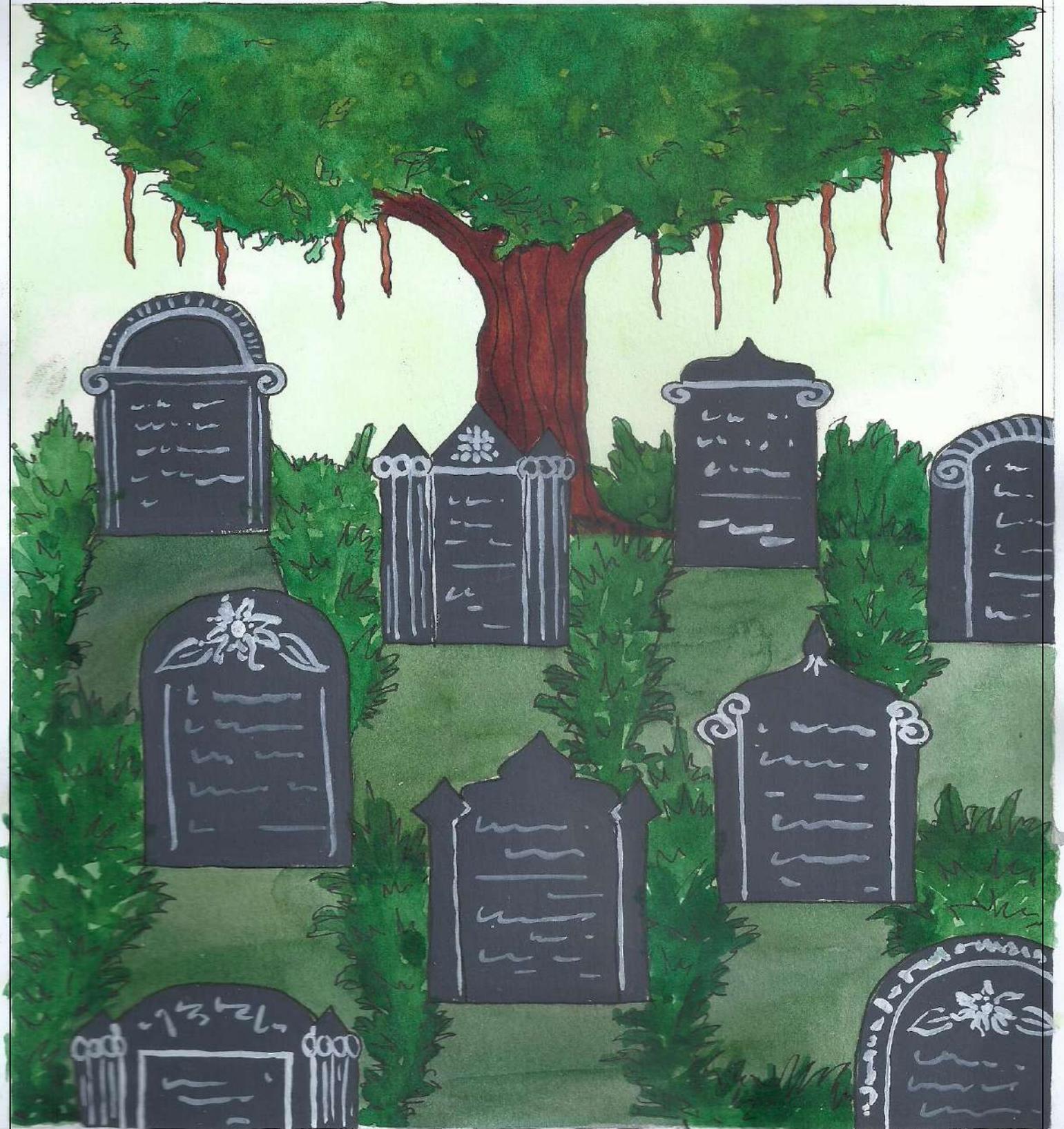
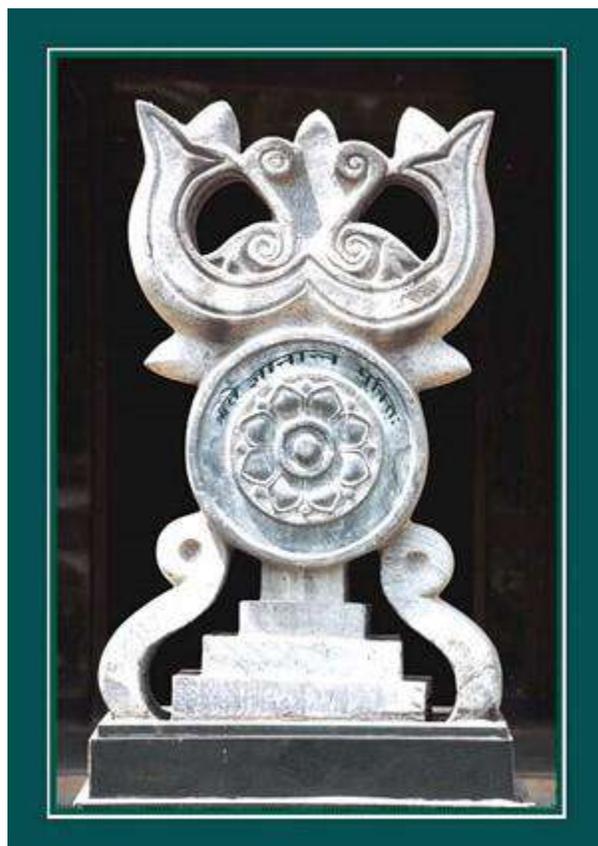


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INTRODUCTION

Despite all differences, people across the globe are united by emotions, such as distress, pleasure, arrogance, ecstasy, anguish, grief and so on. Yet, their means of expressing these emotions, are varied. For instance, the joy of celebration is equivalent to all cultures, but the manner of celebrating a festival is just as unique. Similar is the case with death and the nature of conducting a funeral for a deceased. While, the case of death is equally painful for everyone, irrespective of their ethnicity or cultural belonging, the difference lies in giving expression to that pain.

Death and the manner of treating the dead has continued to play an essential role since the beginning of civilization. It has been a way of recognizing and separating one culture from another, giving an insight into the socio-economic and cultural paradigms of a region. Archaeologists and historians have been known to have identified ancient sites with a particular set of inhabitants only with the kind of burials found, since no other remains existed. The steppes stretching from the Black Sea to the Transbaikal region are replete with ancient burials of ancient pastoralists, and contain almost no ancient settlements. The excavations in the Eurasian steppes, in general, has led to the uncovering of only ancient burials. The burial remains are the only evidences of the material culture and spiritual beliefs of the ancient inhabitants of the region [Alekshin. "Burial Customs as an Archaeological Source" *Current Anthropology*, Vol 24, (2). 1983. 137].

The book delves into the death rituals and burial traditions of cultures and civilizations, across the globe. Travelling through time periods, the project contains work done on rituals and funerary practices of Ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Harappa, Greece and Roman. In the chapters exploring these early societies, an attempt has been made to comprehend the myriad of religious beliefs and cultural patterns through the burial practices. Death has been used to showcase the superstitious beliefs and class structures present in the Mesopotamian society. The method of treating death in the Greco-Roman era is also an insight into the intricately woven relationship that beings shared with religion and their gods. While the work on Ancient Egypt covers both these aspects, it also gives a glimpse of the economics related to death. In the Egyptian civilization, it will be evident through the article as to how many professions were formed out of the regular funerary practices. The article on Harappa, written in Hindi, looks at the peculiar burial patterns discovered in the site. To expand the theme of mythology and death, the project also contains work on the Vikings and their burial practices, along with the interpretations of death in Norse Mythology. The concept of 'hell' and 'heaven', which is a critical point in so many religions, has also been explored, however only through the lens of Christianity, owing to human constraints of time. This article gives the audience an idea of not just the various versions of Hell in religions other than Christianity, but also opens the reader to ways in which religion creates narratives to trap people to garner support and subtly pressurize the masses to except their norms, unless they want to fall into their scariest nightmare- Hell.

The practices of indigenous tribes like those living in America, Oceania, North East India have also been covered. Over-crowding in cities is pushing these tribes, further into the periphery and their own culture and practices has already been under attack and over powered by the urban

populace. An insight into their world, ritual practices and traditions, therefore, is critical and urgent. Some of the articles also look at the transition over time that certain areas have witnessed with constant evolution and movement, which include the ones on Latin America, Central Asia and Africa. Central Asia has been viewed during the late Ancient, Medieval and the Modern Era, portraying the differences in the customs of the region brought about by migration and urbanization. In Latin America too, practices have been traced from the colonial time to the modern age, showcasing the way traditions were affected during the Colonial era and due to repeated warfare and civil unrest. On the other hand, the article on Africa mostly describes the concepts of afterlife among the several cultures that decorate the continent. Apart from this, the Lingayats, a group of people from India, who worship a particular form of Lord Shiva also have their own unique customs and traditions for the deceased, which has been discussed in one of the articles. Another article deals with the Inuits and their burial practices and funerary customs. Moreover, an article is also dedicated to the Rudaalis of Rajasthan, India. They are dalit women who are professionally hired to cry at funerals since it is considered “undignified” for a woman of a higher caste to weep in public, painting an image of the entrenched structures of caste that never fail to taint any ritual.

Going beyond regions and civilizations, some of the works also look at the assorted representations of death in the environment. These include works which look at the way death is perceived in the 21st century all over the world and the various symbology related to death as portrayed in popular culture and seen by common people. In Mexico, a festival known as the ‘Day of the Dead’ is celebrated. An article dedicated to the holiday has also been included which explores the origins of the holiday and the special nature of its celebrations. Furthermore, there is also an article that sees the idea of gender through death, which is an attempt to bring forth the perception of death through a gendered framework and shed light on the extent of normalcy that the system of patriarchy enjoys in the society, that it creeps into an act as solemn and personal as death.

The project in no way covers all rituals of death and burials across the world. There are several shortcomings, owing to various factors. However, this project is the combined hard work of several students who have taken the effort to investigate patterns and nature of death and the traditions related to it. Death is more than just an end to life; it comes with a plethora of meanings which differ from person to person. This is in no manner, an attempt to give meaning to death. It is just an effort to view death according to the way various cultures perceive it and gain a deeper understanding of how much the end of a life is quintessential in shaping cultures, histories, societies and mankind as a whole.

-Anoushka Deb

हड़प्पाई अन्त्येष्टि

- पूनम

समाज की विभिन्न रीतियों के ही समान अन्त्येष्टि की भी अनेक रीतियाँ प्रचलित थी। वैदिक अन्त्येष्टि रीतियों में से आधिकांश को हम किसी - न - किसी रूप में आज तक प्रचलित पाते हैं। वैदिक काल में अन्त्येष्टि की मुख्यतः दो प्रकार की रीतियाँ प्रचलित थीं शवदाह और समाधी दाह - संस्कार उत्तर वैदिक काल में आधिकाधिक लोकप्रिय होता गया और आज यह अन्त्येष्टि की सबसे प्रचलित रीति है पर समाधी देने की प्रथा कुछ मतों के लोगो में आज तक प्रचलित पाई जा सकती है। जिसमें समय - दर - समय परिवर्तन आता गया है तथा इनमें नये नियमों व विधानों को भी जोड़ा गया है। किसी समाज की संरचना को समझने के लिए अन्त्येष्टि एक मुख्य तथ्य के रूप में भूमिका अदा करती है। शवाधान का अध्ययन सामाजिक विषमताओं को परखने की एक विधि है। मिस्त्र के पिरामिडों का अध्ययन जिस प्रकार उस सभ्यता के सामाजिक जीवन पर प्रकाश डालता है उसी प्रकार हड़प्पा सभ्यता में भी शवाधान एक विशेष महत्त्व रखते हैं।

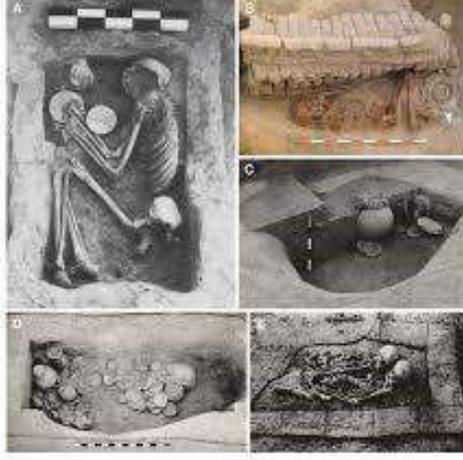
हड़प्पा , कालीबंगा , लोथल, राखीगढ़ी और सुरकोतदा में पाए गये कब्रगाहों का अध्ययन किया गया है। इन हड़प्पाई स्थलों पर मिले शवाधानों में मृतकों को प्रायः गर्तों में दफनाया गया था कभी - कभी शवाधानों की बनावट एक दूसरे से भिन्न होती थी। कुछ स्थानों पर गर्त की सतहों पर इटों की चिनाई की गई थी। सामान्य रूप से शवों को लिटाकर उत्तर की दिशा में रखा जाता था जिसमें शवों के पाँव दक्षिण की ओर रखे जाते थे [वैदिक साहित्यों में दक्षिण दिशा को पितरों की दिशा कहा गया है]



दंपती को एक हड़प्पा कब्र में दफनाया गया

शवों के साथ - साथ उनके साथ वस्तुओं को भी दफनाया जाता था। जिसमें भोजन , मृदभांड, औजार और आभूषण रखा जाता था जो इस ओर संकेत करता है कि हड़प्पा वासी इस मान्यता में विश्वास करते थे कि मृतक इन वस्तुओं का उपयोग मृत्युपरांत करेगा इसका अर्थ यह हुआ कि वह (हड़प्पाई लोग) मृत्युपरांत भी आलौकिक जीवन को मानते थे। पुरुष एवं स्त्री दोनों के शवाधानों से आभूषण मिले हैं। अध्ययन में एक शवाधान से पुरुष खोपड़ी के साथ शंकर के तीन छल्ले , मनके जस्पर (उपरत्न) के मनके तथा सैकड़ों की संख्या में बारीक मनको से बना एक

आभूषण मिला है। कुछ शवों के साथ तांबे के दर्पण दफनाये गए थे। इसके साथ - साथ साधारण वर्ग की कब्रों में घरेलू वस्तुएँ ही मिली हैं जो सामाजिक विषमताओं को प्रकट करती हैं। धनी वर्ग के लोग मृतकों के साथ घरेलू वस्तुओं के साथ - साथ बहुमूल्य वस्तुएँ भी दफनाते थे जो उनकी सामाजिक प्रतिष्ठा को प्रदर्शित करता है। साधारण वर्ग की कब्र उनकी आर्थिक स्थिति को दर्शाती हैं। हड़प्पा वासी स्पष्ट रूप से धन का उपयोग अपने जीवन काल में करने को प्रथमिकता देते थे।



हड़प्पा में विभिन्न स्थलों में कब्र के सामान मिले

कालीबंगा से कुछ प्रतीकात्मक कब्र मिले हैं जिनमें शव नहीं रखा गया था। मोहनजोदड़ो और हड़प्पा में कब्र में गाड़ी गई मृतक की हाड्डियाँ पायी गई हैं। लोथल में पुरुष और स्त्री को भी एक साथ दफनाया गया था। शवों के दाह - संस्कार के बाद अस्थियों को गाड़ने की प्रथा भी हड़प्पा वासियों में प्रचलित थी। सधवा स्त्रियों के मरने पर उनको सजाने का प्रचलन था इसकी पुष्टि हड़प्पा की समाधियों से होती है। इस प्रकार हड़प्पा - संस्कृति में जादुई आस्थाओं तथा अन्त्येष्टि व्यवहार का वैविध्य दिखलाई पड़ता है।

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MESOPOTAMIA- WHAT LIES AFTER DEATH

- Sadiya Ahmed



A Sumerian Grave

The Mesopotamian civilisation existing in and around modern- day Iraq during the same time as that of the Pharaohs of Egypt, had a very different view of death from their contemporary civilizations. Death was gloomy for Mesopotamians; they saw it as a penalty for sin. For them, it was something to be feared. They believed that humans were created from clay mixed with the blood of a sacrificed god. Thus, they believed themselves to be partly immortal; the spirit did not die after death but continued to live a dingy afterlife. They continued to have all the

needs and emotions while they were alive, but after death the spirit would live a dark existence eating only dust and clay in a place deprived of water. The only respite from this was the food offerings and proper burial rituals performed by their descendants. So, preventing anyone's body being buried was a way of taking revenge.

The evidence of burials in Mesopotamia can be traced back to c. 5000 BCE in ancient **Sumer** where food and tools were entombed with the dead. According to the historian Will Durant, "The Sumerians believed in an after-life, they pictured the other world as a dark abode of miserable shadows, to which all the dead descended indiscriminately and that the land of the dead was beneath the earth because of this, it seems, graves were constructed in the ground to provide the deceased with easier access to the nether world". In ancient world the graves were marked by a stone, carrying the dead person's name and likeness. Most were buried in cemeteries, but the bodies of babies have been found under the floors of houses, often curiously buried in cooking pots. Although the dead were buried but no attempts were made to preserve their bodies. Throughout Mesopotamia, the ordinary people were buried below the family home or next to it so that the grave could be regularly maintained and if people were not buried properly, they could return as ghosts to haunt the living. This haunting could take the form familiar from popular ghost stories where a disembodied spirit causes issues in the home or, more seriously, as a form of possession in which the spirit entered into the individual through the ear and wreaked havoc on one's personal life and health. Cremation was uncommon in Mesopotamia because of the scarcity of wood but, even if fuel for a fire was available, they would have preferred to bury the corpse because they believed that the appropriate place for the souls of the dead was in the nether world of the goddess **Ereshkigal** and not in the realm of the gods. If one was cremated, it was thought that one's soul ascended sky-ward toward the abode of the gods and as a human soul, would not be at home there. It was far more fitting for one's spirit to descend to the underworld with other human souls, it was believed that the dead "went to a dark and shadowy realm within the bowels

of the earth, and none of them saw the light again". Archaeological excavations carried out in the 1920s CE by C. Leonard Wooley revealed the Royal Tombs of Ur in which were found many exquisite works composed of gold, lapis lazuli and carnelian (most notably the diadem of Queen Puabi). In the one of the tombs, dubbed 'The Great Death Pit' by Wooley, the bodies of six guards and 68 ladies of the court were found. It is thought that these were the favourite of the king and were chosen to accompany him to afterlife.



Carvings portraying afterlife: Crossing a river that happens to be a part of the afterlife journey

The dead were largely feared in Ancient Mesopotamia. It was widely believed that, murdered and evil spirits could escape the land of the death to cause havoc among the living by entering the bodies of the living through their ears. Likewise, the dead could rise up and torment the living if not given a proper burial. The Mesopotamians, whether south in the region of Sumer or north in Akkad, were so concerned with the proper burial of the dead that they often built tombs inside or next to their homes so they could continue to care for the deceased and prevent the problems which arose from haunting. Personal possessions were always included in these tombs as well as gifts, even modest ones, which were to be offered by the deceased to the gods of the underworld upon arrival there. Kings, of course, were laid to rest with more elaborate presents for the gods as the grave goods excavated throughout Mesopotamia attest. So, even the bodies of enemies were buried in a manner such as to prevent this from happening. It was widely believed that the souls of the dead would remain there unless given license by the gods to return to the land of the living for some specific reason. These reasons could include improper burial procedures, death of a person by drowning where the body was not recovered, murder of a person in which the body was never found and so never properly buried, or to resolve some unfinished business or provide a true account of the events surrounding their death, such as when one was murdered and needed one's death avenged and the murderer brought to justice in order to rest in peace. The appearance of the ghost or spirit of the departed was considered to be bad. The dead were supposed to remain in the nether land and were not expected to cross it. When such an event did occur, it was a sign that something was wrong and those who experienced a spiritual encounter were expected to take care of the problem, so that the ghost could return to the nether land. No soul was permitted to leave Nether land for any reason, not even a goddess, as illustrated in the poem *The Descent of Inanna*, in which even the Queen of Heaven (and Ereshkigal's sister), Inanna, had to find a substitute to

take her place once she moved back to the world of the living. The scholar Robert D. Biggs writes, “The dead – especially dead relatives” – might also trouble the living, particularly if family obligations to supply offerings to the dead were neglected. Sickness in Mesopotamia was considered an outward manifestation of some sin that was being punished either by the gods or by the spirits of the departed and a was sick assumed to be guilty until proven innocent. Upon one’s death a spiritual entity that was known as *Gidim* was created, it was this *Gidim* that would return to haunt the living if proper attention had not been paid to funeral rites and burial or if there had been some unlawful act involved in the person’s death, there are also records of loved ones returning from the afterlife with warnings or advice.

The details of the afterlife in different cultures varied. Significant texts were recited during the religious ceremonies, out of which the most notable are *Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld; Ishtar’s Descent to the Netherworld; Nergal and Ereshkigal* and most famously the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. These contemplate the meaning of death, recount the fate of the dead in the netherworld, and describe mourning rites. Mesopotamian afterlife beliefs were not static or uniform, like all cultural systems; ideas of afterlife transformed throughout time. Beliefs and practices pertaining to the afterlife also varied with socio-economic status. In literary accounts the netherworld is described as a dark “land of no return” and the “house which none leaves who enters,” with dust on its door and bolt. Yet other accounts moderate this bleak picture. For instance, a Sumerian work referred as *The Death of Urnamma* postulate that the spirits of the dead feasted in nether land on the arrival of the ruler Urnamma. Shamash, the sun god of justice also visited the netherworld every night on his daily circuit through the cosmos.



The Queen of the Night plaque depicting either Ereshkigal or Inanna

According to a myth about the marriage alliance between the god of war *Nergal* and the goddess of netherworld *Ereshkigal*, the netherworld can also be a place of passion and love. It must be emphasized that the Mesopotamian netherworld was not a “hell.” Although it was understood as the geographic opposite of the heavens, and its environment was largely an inversion of heavenly realms (for instance, it was characterized by darkness instead of light), but it did not stand opposite to heaven as a possible dwelling place for dead spirits based on behaviour during life. It was neither a place of punishment nor reward. Rather, it was the only otherworldly destination for dead spirits whose bodies and graves had received proper ritual care. Mesopotamians had no concept of either physical resurrection or metempsychosis. Rather, *Enki*, the Sumerian deity of wisdom and magic, ordained death for humans from their very inception. Mortality defined the fundamental human condition, and is even described as the destiny of mankind.

The condition of the corpse is compared to deep sleep and, upon burial in the ground, the body

fashioned from clay “returned to clay”. In Mesopotamia life did not end after physical death but continued in the form of an *eṭemmu*, a spirit or ghost dwelling in the netherworld. The *eṭemmu* had to undergo an arduous journey in order to reach the nether world. In the Nether world, both non-elites and elites required the rituals after death but the necessity of death cults for the elite was particularly emphasized. The primary difference between death cults of the two appears to have been that, for ordinary people, only the deceased personally known to their descendants—such as immediate family— required individual *eṭemmu* cults. In contrast, royal cult offerings were made individually to all ancestors of the reigning king and as long as offerings continued regularly, the *eṭemmu* remained at peace in the netherworld.

Morals and beliefs of the people in any age can be divided into two categories, the standards actually preached and followed among the masses and the ideals proclaimed by the thinkers or prophets, Clay tablets found in archaeological excavations describe the cosmology, mythology and religious practices and observations of the time, rituals and beliefs were influenced by the religion and mythology. Dynasties in Mesopotamia changed, that is why the beliefs and approaches also changed over time as did the deities prominent in them.

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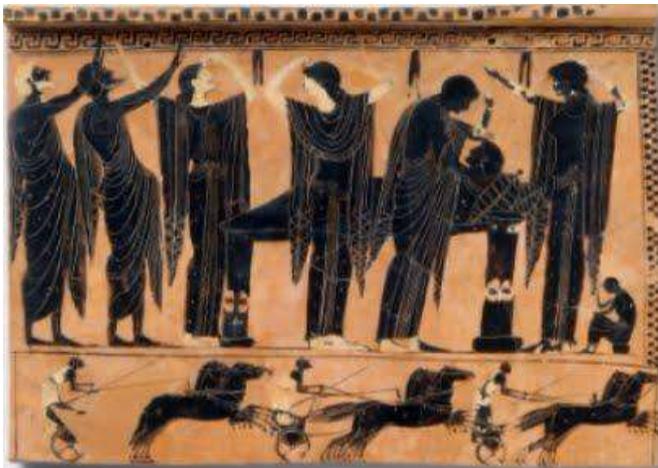
BURIALS OF ANTIQUITY: THE GRECO-ROMAN AGE

-Roshni Bakhshi

Graham Oliver in his edited work *The Epigraphy of Death* states, “Burials and cemeteries from antiquity, indeed from all periods of history, reveal a great deal about culture. Oliver further states, “Ancient cultures have often been judged on the evidence of their monumentalization of death: Egypt, Greece, Rome have all been read through their memorials for the dead. Thus, one could say so that the glories of ancient civilization were seen through the evidence of their burials.”

The study of Greco-Roman burial practices according to Robert Garland has itself had an extensive history which stretches back to the seventeenth century with the publication of Sir Thomas Browne’s *Hydriotaphia* in 1658. These studies have constantly been changing focus from practices, practical concerns and fantasies of the period, to the treatment of a corpse, the conception of afterlife, cult of ancestral tombs and so on.

Taking into account the chronology of Ancient Greece, historians categorize the Greek burial traditions from the Bronze age (around 3200 BC), the Mycenaean age (1100 BC), Archaic age (800 BC), the Classical age (500 BC), the Hellenistic period (323 BC). The Historiography of Greece depends not only archaeological data but also upon the statements made by Homer and other Greek writers. However, historians believe that one must exercise caution in using these evidences as rituals mentioned in these works cannot be securely dated to any one historical period of the Greek age. It has also been argued that the Homeric poems exercised profound influence and control over popular speculation about the afterlife. Another useful source of information for our understanding of post burial rites is provided by a large series of fifth century Attic white ground oil flasks (*lekythoi*).



Greek funerary art on tombs or burials.

According to the Homeric works the ancient Greek conception of the afterlife and the ceremonies associated with burial were already well established by sixth century B.C. In the “*Odyssey*”, Homer describes the Underworld, deep beneath the earth, where Hades, the brother of Zeus and Poseidon (God of Thunder and Seas respectively) and his wife, Persephone, reigned. One instance mentioned by Homer talks of the ghost of Achilles (hero of the Trojan war) meeting Odysseus (another hero of the Trojan war). The Homeric belief of death, an ideology can be seen evolving

throughout the Greek period from Archaic to Hellenistic. The *Iliad*, a work of Homer also emphasises the necessity of a proper burial and refer to the omission of burial rites as an insult to human dignity.

There is reference of elaborate burial rituals conducted primarily by the relatives of the deceased and in this case mainly done by women. According to Ancient Greek works like the *Illiad and Odyssey* and further corroborated by present day scholars like R. Garland, J. Boardman, the rituals were customarily of three parts: **The prothesis** (laying out of the body); **the ekphora** (funeral procession) and the **interment of the body** (cremated remains of the deceased). After being washed and anointed with oil, the body was dressed and placed on a high bed within the house. According to the scholars of the Metropolitan Museum of Art the lamentation of the dead is featured in Greek art as early as Geometric period. The deceased was then brought to the cemetery in a procession, the ekphora. John Boardman and Donna Kurtz in their work focused on Greek burials believe that, “very few objects were placed in the grave but monumental earth mounds, rectangular built tombs and elaborate marble gravestones (stelai) and statues were often erected to ensure that the deceased is not forgotten.”

Robert Garland in his work *The Greek Way of Death* stated that, “The Mycenaeans seemed to have practised secondary burial, when the deceased and associated grave goods were rearranged in the tomb to make room for new burials. Until about 1100 BC, group burials in chamber tombs predominated among Bronze Age Greeks.” The tholos is characteristic of Mycenaean elite tomb construction. Archaeologists term this as a round structure, built upon a couple of steps, supported by columns and a domed roof.

The Archaic and Classical age sees a wide variety of funerary and burial traditions with a change seen distinctively after 1100 B.C. Herein, the Greeks began to bury their dead in individual graves rather than group tombs with Athens as a major exception; the Athenians normally cremated their dead and placed their ashes in an urn. There is a general consensus among scholars that during the early Archaic period, Greek cemeteries became larger, but grave goods decreased. This greater simplicity in burial coincided probably with the rise of democracy and the egalitarian military of the hoplite phalanx (free citizens- propertied farmers and artisans), and became pronounced during the early Classical period (5th century BC). During the 4th century, magnificent tombs re-appeared.



Charon's Obol

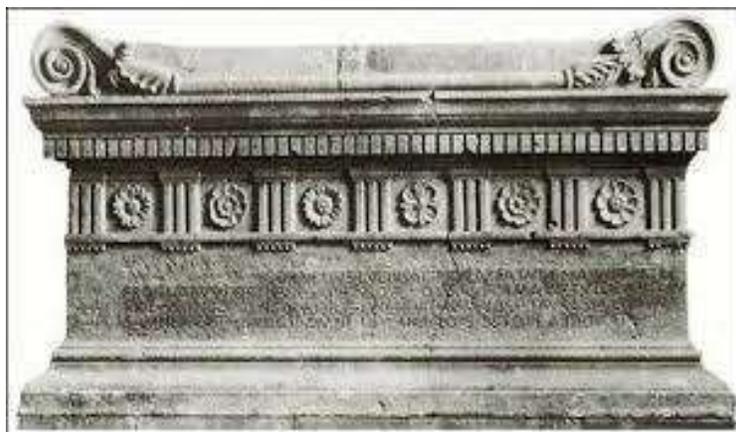
The most lavish funerary monuments according to the scholars were erected in sixth century B.C. by aristocratic families of Attica. Each monument had an inscribed base with an epitaph in verse to memorialize the dead. Examples of such lavish monuments can be seen in the region of Kerameikos. The area was used as a cemetery for centuries according to scholars with excavations from the geometric period to the classical period as well.

Women played a major role in funeral rites. They were in charge of preparing the body. The mouth was sometimes sealed with a token, referred to as "Charon's obol". A coin was used, and explained as payment for the ferryman of the dead to convey the soul from the world of the living to the world of the dead. It offered instructions for navigating the afterlife and addressing the rulers of the underworld, Hades and Persephone.

Robert Garland's view on the funeral rite termed as prothesis wherein, "after the body was prepared, it was laid out for viewing on the second day. Women led the mourning by chanting, tearing at their hair and clothing, and striking their torso, particularly their breasts." He states that, "Before dawn on the third day, the funeral procession (ekphora) was formed and travelled to the resting place. At the time of funeral offerings could only be made by relatives and a lover. This was done by dedicating a lock of hair, honey, milk, oil and meals from the first harvest. Once the burial was complete, the house and household objects were thoroughly cleansed with seawater and hyssop, and the women most closely related to the dead took part in the ritual washing in clean water." Graham Oliver mentions, "A funeral feast called the perideipnon took place this feast was a sign of gratitude towards those who took part in burying the dead." He also believes that the dead were also commemorated at certain times of the year, such as Genesia a festival held in Athens in order to please the goddess of revenge - Nemesis. The Greek hero cult had festivals dedicated in honour of the death of Greek heroes. For example- Theseus, Achilles, Odysseus.

According to Valerie Hope, a scholar who has undertaken research in the field of Roman burials and practices, "evidence of Roman death is rich and varied including archaeological, monumental, visual, and literary." In this context, it is important to note that Rome and its empire, existed for centuries but most of the evidence regarding death rituals is closely associated with 1st century BC and 1st and 2nd century A.D. Most scholars give ample credit to two literary work: Pliny the Elder's Encyclopaedic listing and Virgil's *Aeneid* which talks about funerals of Italians, Trojans, Carthaginians.

An important aspect regarding Roman funerary traditions is that it was included in the *Tradition (mos maiorum)*, the unwritten code from which Romans derived their social norms. On the basis of evidences rendered it has been understood that Roman cemeteries were located outside the sacred boundary of the cities. Writing on the role of family and collegia in funerary practices Valerie Hope states, "... funerals were primarily a concern of the family, which was of paramount importance in Roman society, those who lacked the support of an extended family usually belonged to guilds or collegia which provided funeral services for members."



A Roman Sarcophagus

Regarding the disposal of dead, we see evidence of inhumation or cremation. As seen from the scholarly work of Heather Awan emphasising the popularity of Roman sarcophagi, “the funerary urns in which the ashes of the cremated were placed were gradually overtaken in popularity by the sarcophagus as inhumation became more common. The sarcophagus is a coffin for inhumation burials, widely used throughout the Roman empire starting in the second century A.D. The most luxurious were of marble, but they were also made of other stones, lead and the end panels of lead and wood. These were extensively decorated with scenes of hunting, feasting or stories.” Heather Awan also mentions, “Another stage in burial traditions distinct of Rome is that of **libation** (ritual pouring of liquid or grains as an offering to a deity or in memory of dead) this can be seen with evidence of feeding tubes near tombs.”

In parallel to the Greek tradition, Robert Garland writes that the Roman funeral rites took place at home and at the place of burial, which was located outside the city to avoid the pollution of the living. The funeral procession (*pompa funebris*) transited the distance between the two. Valerie Hope states that, “Eulogy (*laudatio funebris*) and chant (*nenia*) were formal orations in praise of the dead.”. It is also known from the work of Cicero that sacrifices were made in the presence of the corpse which was seen as an offering made to deities of the underworld. With the end of the death duties at the ninth day after the person died, the funeral feast and rites called the Novendialis or Novemdialis were held. A libation was poured onto the grave. This concluded the period of full mourning. It is also believed that in the last month of the Roman calendar the dead were honoured at a nine-day festival called the Parentalia, followed by the Feralia when the potentially malign spirits of the dead were propitiated. The works of Roman scholars like Pliny and Cicero mention that during the Parentalia, families gathered at cemeteries to offer meals to the ancestors, and then shared wine and cakes among themselves.

The Roman death rituals drew clear similarity from the traditions of the Greek period with practise of lamentation and the process of anointment. Another similar practice seen from literary evidences is the placing of Charon’s obol- placing a coin in the mouth of the deceased. Celebration of the dead through festivals can be seen both in the Greek and Roman worlds. A very interesting aspect of death that one finds common is that of the notion of pollution of death corroborated by evidence of burials outside cities.

Standard accounts of Roman mythology like *Aeneid* of Virgil and Pliny’s work describe the soul as immortal and judged at death. Valerie Hope finds it unclear as to how ancient such beliefs were, as they seem influenced by Greek mythology and mystery cult.

The Greco-Roman age practised traditions unique and distinct to its time, which has been possible to reconstruct with the help of literary, archaeological and epigraphic sources. This gives further impetus to studies on death and rituals in the Greco- Roman world as well as a source to understand Antiquity.

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EGYPT: BEYOND MUMMIES

-B. Sriprathusha

“The soul takes nothing with her to the next world but her education and her culture. At the beginning of tourney to the next world, one's education and culture can either provide the greatest assistance or else act as the greatest burden, to the person who has just died”

-Plato

The first thing that comes to our mind about Egypt are the pyramid and the numerous mummies, that give a glimpse into the traditions revolving around death. Egypt lies in North Africa on the Mediterranean Sea and is one of the oldest civilizations on Earth. This civilization has probably been the most sensitive about death and burial, especially with regards to the royal family, a fact reiterated time and again by popular culture. Tombs, which are a characteristic feature of the Egyptian burials, have also been considered the home and final resting place of the dead whose soul however, goes live on in another realm. Tombs were found located in caves and underground, and are structures designed specifically for the purpose of containing the deceased and their personal artefacts, jewellery or even pets because it was believed that these would be required by the dead in the afterlife. The construction of a tomb also reflected the status and belief of the person buried there.

A great section of the Egyptian economy was devoted to death preparations among other activities. Labour was divided according to one's specialization. As suggested by shreds of evidence, some agents specialised in digging tombs, some in designing and others in decorating them. Others specialised in creating statues and coffins which were needed for the funeral rituals. Artisans also specialised in weaving linen as this special fabric was used for bandaging the mummies. Yet another ritual was the formulation of the incense that was required for the purification of the body. Other Egyptians worked as priests and made their living by performing the funeral rites.

During the early Predynastic period in Egypt (c.6000-3150 BCE), burial traditions were practiced keeping in mind, the scope of eternity. Grave goods for the afterlife have been discovered by archaeologists. The discovery of ginger inside the tomb is also an evidence of an effort made to preserve the body which was recovered from the site of a tomb in Gebelein in Egypt and is dated to around 3400 BCE.

In spite of evolution and alteration in the burial ceremonies from the Predynastic to the Ptolemaic dynasty (323-30 BCE), the Egyptians continued to focus on eternal life and life beyond death. The ideology became well known throughout the ancient cultures via a cultural spread through trade and knowledge via the precious silk route which came to influence other civilizations.

The Greek historian Herodotus stated that the Egyptian ceremonies concerning the burials were very dramatic in mourning the dead, as Egyptians believed that the deceased would find joy in an eternal land beyond the dead.

The soul was thought to consist of nine separate parts: *Khat*, *Ba*, *Ka*, *Shuyth*, *Akh*, *Sahu*, and *Sechem*. *Khat* was the physical body; *Ba* referred to the mobile quality of the dead which allowed

the soul to traverse between the earth and afterlife. Initially it was exclusive to the Pharaoh who could emerge from his tomb and accompany *Re*, the Sun in his daily journey crossing the world from West to East. The element became a part of every Egyptian after they had a way to the spells that were used only for the tombs of the dead Pharaoh of Egypt. Egyptians believed that *Ba* left back the body in the tomb and journeyed towards heaven at night and came back during the daytime. *Ka* is the individual's life force or the entity that stays in the tomb along with the body which never left. Egyptians referred to *Ka* as the person's double since this element could survive even if the body is destroyed. It resided in the deceased's statue or mummy. Egyptians believed that this entity received food and other offerings that humans provided at the tomb and its survival depended on the practice of receiving the offerings.

Shuyth was the shadow self; *Akh* was the immortal spirit, it is similar to *Ka* but *Akh* also has the ability to help and assist the living whereas the *Ka* receives help from the living through the offerings; *Sahu* and *Sechem* are aspects of the *Akh*; *Ab* is the heart, and the source of both good and bad. The *Khat* needed to exist in order for the *Ka* and *Ba* to recognize itself and so the body had to be preserved in as intact a manner as possible.



Osiris

Every civilization had its own mythology. The story which inspired Ancient Egyptians to believe in the existence of the Afterlife and burial rituals was the Myth of Osiris and Isis. Osiris was a pharaoh of Ancient Egypt who ruled the region along with his wife Isis, who was a great magician. But Seth, Osiris' brother who was extremely jealous of the latter's power wanted to oust him and hence, ordered a coffin, disguised as a grand beautiful box with many jewels wherein he captured Osiris and threw it in the Nile, thereby becoming the pharaoh of Egypt. When he found Osiris' body, he cut it into fourteen pieces and scattered it over the Nile. Isis managed to collect all parts save for one, which was eaten by fish. After reconstructing his body, she prepared his burial. Osiris became the king of the afterlife. She erected an elegant temple for Osiris to receive offerings from the living. She raised their son Horus away from his uncle, Seth, only for him to grow and defeat the latter and becoming the Pharaoh of Ancient Egypt.

The tomb was not only a place for the dead, but for more precious and rich items like gold. The beautiful shabti dolls were also included in the afterlife, as the shabti dolls could be woken to life by the use of powerful spell. The doll assumed the dead one's tasks. Since the afterlife was considered a long-lasting and beautiful version of life on Earth, the shabti dolls would perform all the tasks so that the soul could relax and enjoy it. Shabti dolls were indicators of wealth and status of the individual buried in the tomb. Other than the doll, the most common items found buried were combs, jewellery, bread, weapons, a favourite object and even one's pets. All of these items would appear with the soul in the afterlife and the dead would be able to make use of them.

There were many traditions which were considered essential to the continuation of the soul's journey: the most important was the opening of the mouth ceremony. In this ceremony, a priest

would invoke Isis and Nephthys who had brought Osiris back to life, as he touched the mummy with different objects like adzes, chisel at various spots while rubbing and smearing the body with different oils. In doing so, he restored the use of ears, eyes, mouth, and nose to the deceased one. The deceased would now be able to hear, see, speak, and smell. Finally, the mummy would be enclosed in coffin. The living would go back to their daily routine, but the soul continued its eternal journey.

Re, the sun god was also the god of both living and dead along with the eternal cycle of death and rebirth. The kings were sons of Re, as he took different forms during his journey to the underworld because it was replete with dangers and struggles. Ancient Egyptians desired to be reborn again in the afterlife as Osiris and hence they mummified their dead bodies as if a part is missing. They created a replica to replace the missing one, to make a body whole again. Egyptians believed that the body must be buried incomplete otherwise, rebirth in the afterlife is impossible.



The Process of Mummification

Mummification of the body was an important burial ritual. Mourning and funeral were essential when a distinguished man died. All the women of the household plastered their heads and faces with mud, and left the body indoors, to perambulate the town with the dead man's relatives; their dresses fastened with a girdle and breasts bared and beaten. Even the men, for their part, followed the same procedures, wearing a girdle and beating themselves. When the ceremony gets over, they take the deceased for mummification.

Egyptians used to bring the body of the deceased to the embalmers, who offered three types of services: the expensive one, the cheaper and the cheapest service. Choosing one of these types depended on the family's budget. The expensive one was chosen by the noble class, as the latter took 70 days. The important ingredient in the process of mummification was the divine salt, also known as *natron*. The divine salt had defatting and desiccating properties and was the preferred desiccant. Common salt was also used in most economical burials.

In the expensive one, the embalmers laid the body on a table and washed it. Firstly, the brain was removed via the nostrils with a hook. They left a few parts which could not be reached with the

hook. The head was washed throughout with chemicals; the whole abdomen was removed; cavity was thoroughly cleaned and washed out with palm wine ground spices. The process continued, with other substances such as cassis. Subsequently, the body was sewn up, and placed in divine salt, covered entirely over for seventy days. After this period the body is washed and then wrapped from head to foot in linen cloth and smeared on the underside with gum. The body is given back to the family in this wrapped condition. A wooden case, in the shape of a human figure, is made for the body.

The cheapest method of embalming included washing out the intestines and keeping the body in divine salt for seventy days. To preserve the corpse, they removed all the internal organs, as they believed that the deceased would still need them; the viscera were placed inside the sealed jars. The heart was left inside the body as it was considered the aspect of the soul. After the embalmers removed the organs and washed the body, the corpse was wrapped in linen and the canopic jars were under the protection of Mesu and Heru, the sons of Horus. The organs soaked in resins were in these jars. The expensive service also included magical amulets and charms for protection along with these products. This body was placed in a simple coffin. The wrapping was also known as the 'linen of yesterday' because, initially poor people would give their old clothes to the embalmers to wrap the dead body. The funeral was a public affair, if one could afford.

Women were hired as professional mourners and referred to as 'Kites of Nephthys' as they would encourage people to express their grief over the deceased, through their own cries. They also expressed how short life was and how sudden death came and no one can hide from death, but also how important the eternal aspects of the soul were and gave confidence that the dead would pass through the trials of the weighing of the heart in the afterlife by Osiris to pass the beautiful paradise of fields of reeds.

To pass the paradise of fields of reeds, the soul would make its way towards the hall of truth in the company of Anubis. The amulets attached to the body were provided to remind the soul of its journey. Anubis, the guide of death, would accompany the soul to where it would wait with others for the judgement by Osiris as the soul would confess in front of Osiris, Anubis, Thoth and 42 other judges.

The confession was recited to establish the moral virtue of the deceased one. If the deceased's confession is acceptable, he/she would present his heart to Osiris to be weighed in the golden scale against the white feather of truth. If the heart was found to be lighter than the feather, the soul would move on and if it was the opposite, the deceased one was eaten by the female demoness Ammit who was known as death of heart and the soul went to the great Egyptian underworld.

We can conclude that the Egyptians believed that death was not the end of life but only the beginning of the next phase in an individual's eternal journey. Generally, Egyptians stated death as their great friend who treats the deceased ones according to their deeds. Furthermore, Egyptians also believed in rebirth. In ancient Egypt the dead were buried with special grave offerings in ditches in the deserts, which were also similar to other great civilizations. As their civilization developed, their religious beliefs and burial practices also expanded. Egyptian burials also helped historians to know about their traditions and culture. They were brought to the spotlight and it

became a part of our knowledge. Many Egyptian burial traditions still exist in our present-day society. Many still embalm their loved ones and have them buried in a coffin with prayers and some people continue to visit the deceased ones at the grave yard to give offerings.

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VALHALLA AND HELHEIM: DEALING WITH THE DEAD IN THE VIKING AGE

-Seerat Kaur

The Vikings were warriors, during the late Ancient age, who inhabited much of the Southern Scandinavian region. Popular images of the Vikings include images of swords, axes, helmets, ships, pillaging, looting, slaughter, and destruction. This image of the Vikings exists most likely because the Christian victims of their attacks complained about the destruction of their churches and congregations. However, it is not only for this reason that the Viking age has piqued the interest of scholars and historians over the ages. In the 19th century, romantic artists, and musicians also wrote about the heroism of these warriors. The Vikings were seen as free, and unbound by the constraints of feudal structures. They were loyal to their comrades or brothers in arms. Stories about their valour, and overseas adventures are also popular. Studies of how Vikings are portrayed in films, comics, media, and music has come to form part of a university's new postgraduate qualification. The MLitt has been developed by the University of the Highlands and Islands' Centre for Nordic Studies, which is based on the Northern Isles. Course leader Dr. Donna Heddle said, 'The Vikings have been incredibly influential in world history and culture.'

Stories of the Vikings, especially the myths attached to them have gained a lot of popularity. This is probably, in part, due to the films, and series that have come up, which tell us about their Gods, and the Viking way of life. Films like the *Thor* series (2011-), series such as *Vikings* have also popularized the Vikings, their history, their mythology, and their way of life. Other films and books based on Vikings include *Beau Geste* (1939), *Rocket Gibraltar* (1988) and *Beowulf* (2007). The novelist, Jenny Colgan, who has written for the *Doctor Who* (2005) line of stories, has come out with a new *Doctor Who* book featuring the Vikings.

The translations of Icelandic sagas allowed the audience overseas to read about the Viking society in the North Atlantic. They were seen as a collection of free men, ruled by their own laws, rather than a King, on the fringes of the habitable world. The word 'Viking', has come to be used for people from the areas covered by the modern Nordic countries of Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden in the period c.800-c.1100. Although infrequently, the word 'Viking' was used by their contemporaries to refer to those Scandinavians, especially men, who attacked them, they were also seen as a people who sailed across the North Sea, The Baltic, and down the Russian rivers into the Black Sea and beyond. The Viking age, however, like all other historical epochs, is an artificial scholarly construct. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines a Viking as, 'Any of the Scandinavian seafaring pirates and traders who raided and settled in parts of North-Western Europe in the 8th to the 11th centuries.'

The object of this article is to understand the death rituals and burial practices of the Vikings. The funerary rituals of the Viking Scandinavians had a distinct individual character. The burial practices were not common to the whole of the Norse world. While studying burial practices across Scandinavia, Johan Callmer demonstrated that local variation was present at the level of individual communities, villages, and even extended farmsteads. People dealt with the dead in broadly consistent ways – through cremation, or inhumation. They differed in the details of grave

construction and elaboration, the placement of the body and the selection and deposition of objects that accompanied the deceased. These grave goods could very well include vehicles, furniture, farm equipment, slaughtered livestock, and in some rare instances, other humans who were apparently killed in connection with the funerals. Neil Price finds special rituals in island communities, and the funerary rites of places such as Gotland, Oland, Bornholm, and Aland are different from the mainland. It has been suggested that this diversity does not mean that there was varying treatment of the dead in the society, instead, it is evidence for the illusory nature of the Viking age itself.

The funeral and burial rituals of the Vikings was affected largely by their pagan beliefs. The Vikings believed that their death would lead them into an afterlife and into one of the nine realms of the Vikings. The two realms in Norse mythology that were commonly associated with the burials and funerals were Valhalla and Helheim. These realms are also known as ‘halls of the dead’. Historians have uncovered some details about the most common halls of the dead. The Goddess Freya, for instance, was believed to have welcomed many of the dead into her hall, called Folkvang, or ‘field of the people.’ There was also an underwater hall for the Vikings who died while at sea.



Helheim

The most well-known ‘halls of the dead’, or realms were Valhalla and Helheim. Valhalla was a place for fallen warriors, who died in battle. The dead in Valhalla were said to battle each other all day and each night, their wounds would heal. Wolves guarded the gates of Valhalla and gleaming shields protected its ceiling. In contrast, Helheim was for those who had died from a ‘dishonorable death’, i.e., to die in bed of sloth, or to die in one’s old age.

Ancient Norse funerals for free men and women were full of rituals and were, at times, highly theatrical. An aspect of the Viking age mortuary behavior that is often overlooked, which is clear from the settlement-burial correlations is that everyone was not accorded a grave. For those who received burials, the most common practice was cremation, which was followed by the interment of ashes either in unmarked graves or under mounds. Funeral rites began with preparing the body. The

dead were draped in clean clothes and were adorned with jewels. Most often, the corpses were burned in situ, and the grave was raised over them. Often, objects were burned with the dead. Sometimes, the ashes were overlain by unburnt items placed during the construction of the grave. In some cases, objects were deliberately broken before burning, perhaps to mark their death as well.

Free Vikings could qualify for a traditional Viking funeral. The high ranking and well-respected Vikings had elaborate burials and funerals. A respected warrior could have his remains buried in a longboat. Slaves on the other hand, were not given a Viking funeral. If they hadn’t already been sacrificed and cremated along with their masters, they were buried in shallow graves. Vikings also

offered prayers to Odin and other Gods, depending on the person and their position in society. They were strictly pagan and their funerary rites reflected those beliefs. If a warrior were to pass, his fellow Vikings would pray and chant to help him find his way to Valhalla. Respected members of the Viking community would bid farewell to the deceased and wish them an easy journey to the afterlife. Depending on the deceased's position in society, a few words would be spoken or the speeches could go on for hours.

The variety in the graves can be best ascertained from the objects deposited along with the dead. Most common were items of personal dress, ornaments, weapons, implements for food preparation or textile production, agricultural tools, among many others. The selection, combination, particular type, quality, quantity, and the positioning of this material are all factors in the variation within Viking age mortuary rituals. Burial mounds could be of various shapes and sizes, from low humps in the ground to monumental barrows up to 10 m high or more. They could be circular, oval, rectangular, and triangular. The marking of graves was elaborate and widespread and was usually achieved with stones. The meaning of these stone settings is undetermined. However, several explanations have been proposed. A recent idea has seen the treuddar as representing the roots of a tree – Yggdrasill, which is the world tree. Inhumation, as a burial practice was rare but occurred across Scandinavia. A prominent form of high-status inhumation found in concentrations throughout Scandinavia sees the dead buried not in a coffin but instead in an underground chamber. The majority of the chambers are the size of small rooms – square or rectangular pits with wooden walls. A mound was often raised over these chambers. In some of the chamber graves, such as in Birka, the dead are buried in a seated position, on chairs or stools. At times, they had objects placed in their hands or on their laps, with grave goods laid out in front of them.



The Osenberg Ship Burial, thought to be for a Viking Queen or King

The most spectacular burial rite of the Vikings was the deposition of actual ships in graves. Another kind of ship burial was the burning of the vessel. A typical feature of ship burials was the deposition of either one, or at least two or four bodies, in small chambers built amidships. They were also sometimes laid out on the deck timbers. Many ship graves have also provided evidence

of animal sacrifices – horses, domesticates, household animals, exotic animals – peacocks and owls. Another aspect of the ship burials is their construction for both men and women. This egalitarian ritual has considerable implications for the status of women in the Viking society. A significant number of Viking graves contain individuals who were clearly killed to accompany the primary occupant of the burial in death. The human accompaniment of the dead was most common with ship burials. They sacrificed slaves, sometimes two or three, when a respected Viking died. There is a Norse poem, *Sigurðarkviða hin skamma*, or ‘The Short Lay of Sigurd’, which describes how this human sacrifice should take place:

Bond-women five

Shall follow him,

And eight of my thralls,

Well-born are they,

Children with me,

And mine they were

As gifts that Budhli

His daughter gave.

Another important aspect we must note is that different regions had different customs. Lindholm Høje in Denmark, for instance is an impressive Viking burial site that is open to visitors. Many of the graves in Lindholm Høje are marked by stones in the shape of ships. The Vikings from Central Sweden laid the stones out in a circular or triangular pattern.

In conclusion, confronting the material remains of death is not always a straightforward process for archaeologists (cf. Downes and Pollard 1999), but in an ethical context, it is imperative to respect the general dignity of the dead. According to Neil Price, the variability present in the graves could also be, to some degree, the result of some spontaneous gesture, the deposition of objects with an emotional resonance. The presence of material culture with personal value in graves might also reflect a formal custom for it to be disposed in such a way. The Viking ways of death were not in any way similar to those of the 21st century, but they did contain in them the human universals of loss, separation, memory, and the uncertain concern for an after-life.

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HELL AND ITS VARIOUS FORMS IN CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY

-Ishita Ahluwalia

To interpret history as nothing but a mere study of facts, events and chronology would be just concentrating on half its scope. In reality, history also focusses on the notions that have been created by humans and used as a tool of stabilising the society and laying down certain norms for the people in all ages. Thus, understanding the concept of afterlife and the various connotations attached to it becomes quite necessary, as it not only throws light on the perception of the people but also the basis of the society of the said time.

Classical period accounts of a very vibrant and dynamic history where there was inquisitiveness and in-depth knowledge about various fields of life. The fact that, even after umpteen centuries, the great Renaissance movement focused at reviving the ancient classical antiquity further solidifies how grand and venerated the Ancient period was. Therefore, it becomes quite imperative to comprehend the notions which prevailed in the Classical mind-set, their perceptions of concepts which revolved around daily life and even beyond that.

Here, it is important to consider that throughout history, the concept of Hell (or the infamous 'afterlife') evolved with the passage of time, and varied in different places, cultures and was internalised by people through multifarious customs, rituals and traditions which were supporting it. Also, it must be accepted that mythology must also be considered a significant contributor to the reconstruction of Hell as a concept, for the simple reason that there can never be first-hand accounts of the same! However, the beliefs attached to it and the ideas of how people carried on their burial activities clearly throw a significant amount of light on their perceptions of Hell. The aim of this work is to trace the history of hell and the various forms it acquired and assumed in various cultures and timelines of Ancient History.

Talking about Ancient Egyptian Culture, the concept of Hell, referred to as the Underworld, cannot be largely reconstructed for no material information exists pertaining to that of the Pre-Dynastic Era, yet the Documents of the Early Empire of Egypt provide information on how the deceased were provided with abundance of meat, drinks and other material comforts, such as concubines. As per E.A Wallis Budge in his work, *The Egyptian Heaven and Hell*, the qualification of entering the spiritual afterlife was not so much the living of a good, saintly life on earth, as much as a knowledge of the magical figures which represented the authority and prowess. In simple words, for them, afterlife was decided not on the basis of one's virtues or good deeds, but as per their magical proficiency and their identity in the magical realm.

Quoting the bulky *Book of the Dead*, he further suggests, that it becomes quite evident that the underworld for Egyptians was the *SEKEHET-AARU*- known as the land of the blessed which dominated the view of afterlife in their civilisation. They enumerated several sections of the *Sekehet-Aaru* which depicted one filled fully with fire, another one having gushing, roaring waters capable of sweeping away just about anything, another section being the abode of a serpent- Rerek, most importantly, another section housing the "Destroyer of Souls".

Thus, it becomes visible that though their afterlife is a sacred symbol of the ‘land of the blessed’ as per their beliefs, yet the very institution considers of several brutal and oppressing sections which can be deemed fit as that of rewarding punishments to those who were not deemed as having conformed to the norms of magic.

Throwing light on the Early Christian civilisations for they held a very interesting approach towards the concept of Hell is a must. As per *The Grotesque Body in Early Christian Discourse* by Istvan Czachesz, the Jewish *Apocalypses* become a major source of information about the various sins that lead to Hell and the various punishments that are delivered in the same. Quoting the ‘underworld’ of Lucian’s *True Story* he suggests how punishment for adultery was accorded in Hell wherein the ‘sinner’ was hanged by the genitals for their sins. He further continues the brutal description suggesting that the adulterer is whipped with mallow, bound by the genitals, and taken off to the ‘abode of the wicked’ where he is wreathed in smoke and suspended by the testicles.

The first Christian description of hell is contained in the *Apocalypse of Peter* wherein the body itself is the source of pain - the head is placed in mud, hair is used to hang women by it, eyes are burned, burning flame is put in the mouth, people are forced to bite their tongues and then hanged by it, innards are eaten by worms, men are hanged up by their genitals, and they are made to dance on sharp pebble.



Luca Signorelli, *The Damned Cast into Hell*

Hell, in Christian understanding, is described as a horrendous place altogether, where the entire body is subjugated to pain. The upside-down position of the body indicated that hell is a place of negative reality whereas the Jewish scriptures describe the underworld as being populated by shadows in the stage of non-existence.

Another grotesque notion about hell is that it is a place where people are made to sit in filth. Associated with the idea that sinners are dirty and so they remain eternally in dirt in the vicious ‘underworld’. The filth is also referred to as bodily discharges such as blood, sweat, pus and excrement. In fact, Hell is further described as consisting of a ‘River of Diarrhoea’, river

of fire, blood and slime.

In context of the *Apocalypse of Paul*, a very different list of sinners is described such as blasphemers, partners of adulterers, murderers, women procuring abortion, persecutors of the church, false witnesses, disobedient slaves and children, etc. Thus, hell becomes a tool of discipline and a means of consolidating the institutional frameworks of the Church. The fact that people tend to have the same bodies in Hell that they had on Earth, is the logical explanation that they used the same tongue, hands, eyes or genitals to commit the sins that they were being punished for, hence,

the same body parts would be used to punish them. This creates a sense of realism for the concept of Hell.

Alice K. Turner in her work, *The History of Hell* throws light on how Dante presented an image of Hell in his work *Divine Comedy* where he married the Early Christian thoughts on Hell with shades of Hades philosophy. His perception of Hell in the universe can be understood by imagining Earth being pierced right to the centre by a hole in the shape of an irregular funnel. This hole, for him, was formed by the weight and force of Lucifer and his followers when they struck Earth while falling from Heaven. Keeping the traumatic image of Hell intact, he describes that the very first Canto of his hell, which he refers as *Inferno* consists of leopards, purgatory mountains and she-wolves and the entrance has inscribed on it, 'Abandon hope, all those who enter here'.

He then begins to describe the circles of hell, wherein no one is punished in the first circle of hell, however the second circle holds those who were lustful and were whirled in their worldly desires. The Third circle would trap the gluttons in a cold, heap of garbage. The fourth circle would capture the misers and spendthrifts and then pit them against each other. In the Swamp between the Lower and Upper "Hell" there were placed the 'angry' who tore each other in their fits. The Fifth circle consisted of a moat whereas in the Sixth Circle were the heretics who burned in fiery graves.

The Seventh circle comprised of the river of Boiling Blood wherein those who had committed violence were immersed in the horrid flow of the river. The hell he described also consisted of Wood of Suicides and the Burning plains where the usurers and blasphemers and homosexuals were punished. Thus, through the effective imagery and great deal of thought put in by Dante on the concept of Hell, it becomes quite clear that in Early as well as advancing perception of Hell, the main basis was that of a grotesque, gory body where severely brutal punishments were accorded to those who sinned.

Therefore, carefully treading the Early myths of Egyptian and Christian thought on the Underworld, it becomes quite evident that in almost all the cultures the notion of Hell was quite prevalent and it was also used as a tool of discipline wherein describing the cruel punishments of afterlife would help forcing the people to conform to the norms laid down by the same authorities which described Hell.



Naraka

The Indian conception of Hell was no different, the *Garuda Purana* which is one of the ancient scriptures of the Indian continent clearly describe the horrid that is Hell. Referring to Hell as *Naraka*, there are deadly punishments that are mentioned which are accorded to the sinners in hell. Among them were *Tamisram* where those who lived the lives of robbers were bound with ropes by *Yama's* servants and then were thrashed until they bled or fainted. Then there is another punishment which included torment by snakes wherein those who seized others' property

were thrown into the serpent section where the serpents would torment them to no end.

Then there is another one known as *Kumbhipakam* where those who kill animals for pleasure are plunged into huge vessels containing boiling oil. *Garuda Purana* also mentions Hell as a place which is terribly hot where those who were disobedient to their elders would be subjected to never ending running in the unbearable heat. Also, those who neglected their duties would be beaten heavily to a pulp and then given time to recover and beaten again.

Here it must be mentioned that these are mere examples of the numerous punishments that are mentioned in the *Garuda Purana* and the fact that it is filled with such gory details clearly reflects as to how the scripture made sure that the notion of Hell was deeply implanted in the heads of all people so they would mind their actions and blatantly follow the instructions that were laid down in front of them. For going against any norm would lead to such humiliating and excruciating punishments in the afterlife.

Therefore, it can be concluded that hell as a concept has not only been evolved on the lines of religious dictums but also manipulated as a way of instilling obedience among the followers and this has been utilised to its prime by not just one culture but almost all the civilisations. However, if there is any truth in it, cannot be proved for there can never be first-hand accounts of the same.

Moreover, it could also be that the time spent on Earth might turn out to be the hell we are bound to serve whereas afterlife consists of only Heaven and everything blissful.

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THE SIGN OF THE TIMES

-Preksha Kothari

**The glories of our blood and state
Are shadows, not substantial things;
There is no armour against Fate;
Death lays his icy hand on kings:
Scepter and Crown
Must tumble down,
And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked scythe and spade.**

These are some lines from John Shirley's poem, signifying the fact that death is a universal process that has come to be seen as forming an important part of history. Though experienced throughout the world, its perception across cultures and regions is quite unique and diverse. This can be seen in the way grief is comprehended, people are put to rest, the various rituals attested to the community. However, there is a sense of familiarity when one looks at the symbols that signify and are associated with death that are seen in every culture. For instance, flowers, fauna, Gods and so on along with the icy hand and scythe in the above poem. In popular culture, death has been embodied in symbols such as the skull and cross bones, the famous Deathly Hallows from *The Harry Potter* series (1997-2016), Arthur Conan Doyle's famous story, *The Five Pips* as well as numerous poems and visual media. Let us take a deep look into this chasm of signs and their meanings.



White Chrysanthemums

Naturalistic elements like flora and fauna is seen as signifying the aspects of birth, death and afterlife. Flowers are used to denote one's sadness, sympathy towards the deceased and their grieving. In Eastern countries like Japan, Korea and Laos, White Chrysanthemums are used in funeral services and mean lament and grief, while in countries like Spain, Poland and Croatia, Chrysanthemums are symbolic of death and are used only in graves. For the indigenous tribes of Mexico, the Carnations being 'the flowers of the dead' are placed all around the corpse while they

are being buried. Lotus is often seen as being a symbol of new birth, something which was adopted by the ancient Egyptians too. They portrayed their goddess Isis' inception from a lotus flower, thus placing a dried and preserved lotus in the hand of the mummified dead to showcase the new life the dead soul enters. The ancient Greeks and Romans associated flowers like Hyacinths, Roses and Anemones with death and rebirth, often planting them near graves.

Certain rivers have always been associated with taking the dead to the afterlife or Hell. They are often mythological but sometimes do exist in the physical realm as well. The Sanzu River or River of Three Crossings, is a mythological river in Japanese Buddhist tradition. Before reaching the afterlife, the souls must cross the river through one of the three passages: a bridge, a ford, or a stretch of deep, snake-infested waters. The burden of one's sins in the physical world will decide which path an individual must take. It is deemed that a fee of six *mon* must be paid before a spirit can cross the river, a belief reflected in Japanese funerals wherein the casket of the dead is buried accompanied with the six *mon*. The Styx is a very popular river in Greek mythology that takes the souls of the dead to the underworld for judgements. Along with the Acheron, Cocytus, Phlegethon and Lethe, it forms a part of all the rivers that flow through the Underworld and accord different punishments. In Hindu mythology the *Vaitarna* river, lies between the earth and the *Naraka* and is believed to purify one's sins. Furthermore, while the righteous see it filled with nectar-like water, the sinful see it filled with blood. The souls that have committed heinous offenses are to cross this river after death. The Ganges is also a pivotal river that has been revered for ages and sees cremations on its banks, ashes in its waters as well as people bathing in it to wash their sins.



A Raven

Animals and birds, in a wide range of cultures, are symbolically connected to death in a number of ways, often considered to be the harbingers or omens of looming death. In Anglo-American beliefs and cultures, birds like robins and swallows flying down one's chimney are seen as an omen of death. Crows are very much associated with evil and death in England. Blackbirds are profiled as being harbingers of bad times due to their black colour as well as ravens, which are universally depicted as the companion of the famed Grim Reaper. According to a Danish story, a raven's appearance in town portends the death of the local priest. Birds that are nocturnal are also stereotyped, with their calls and screeches viewed as bringing impending death. A rooster's crow at night is an indication of death in England and Scotland. The owl is probably the most infamous symbol of death, harshly described in numerous tongues as "the evillest bird, the prophet of doom." In China, the owl is heard to cry "*wā, wā!*" (dig, dig!), urging the need of a grave. In Southern India, it is possible to predict someone's death by listening to the number of times the screech of the owl is heard. A single cry means death and eight cries signify sudden death.

Humans have a tendency to give personification to things that are still an enigma; one of them being death. Throughout the world, we see numerous examples of death being accorded a persona. The most famous is that of the Grim Reaper, dressed in a black hooded cloak and carrying a scythe, ready to take the departed to the other world. The Dementors of the Harry Potter Universe have been inspired by the Grim Reaper. In Medieval England, death was portrayed as an armed woman with bat wings and hawk claws, her hair let down. Slavic peoples used to consider death to be female, while Germanic ones viewed it as male.

The ancient Greeks personified death in the form of Thanatos, who was accompanied with his brother Hypnos to take the dead. The ferryman Charon ferried the dead on his boat across river Styx and led them to the realm of Hades, the Greek lord of the Underworld. In the Hindu pantheon, *Yama raja* has been seen as the God of Death, often portrayed as being black in colour, sitting on a buffalo carrying a mace. He himself escorts the souls to Hell (*Nark*). *Dhumavati* is a lesser-known goddess of death who is often associated with inauspicious things like crows and the dark and is commonly depicted as an aged, unattractive widow. In the Irish culture, the Banshee is seen as an old witch who is the harbinger of death. When one spots her, they pray for the safety of their family as a member might join her. A Banshee often wails, shrieks and screeches to signal someone's incoming death.



Victorian mourning jewellery

Colours are global symbols that are interpreted and pertain to the certain culture of a region. Donning dark colours for mourning has been strongly associated with death and loss for centuries in the west and is a practice believed to date back to the Roman times. In Western cultures, black clothing was worn as a social symbol to let others know a person was mourning. This became an elaborate ritual when Queen Victoria, mourned the death of her husband, Prince Albert for 40 years. This inspired other Victorian widows to wear black widow's weeds for between one and two years after the death of their husbands. These widows had to dress appropriately for coming out in the public eye, donning a mourning bonnet and a black crepe veil over their visage for the initial six months. Widowers were expected to mourn their wives for only between three and six months and were able to go on with their lives wearing their everyday suit, which was usually a dark colour. Fashion was an

integral part of mourning culture, manifesting itself in clothes as seen above as well as in jewellery. For instance, the rise in popularity of mourning jewellery like brooches and rings. They were particularly made with polished stone and were to be black in colour. It also was also not uncommon for the bereaved to incorporate the intricately knotted or woven hair of the person who died into mourning jewellery, as a sentimental and tangible way of remembering a loved one. An Australian designer, Pia Interlandi designs clothes specifically for the dead to be buried in their graves and uses heat-sensitive technology to leave their beloved members' hand prints wherever they embrace them.

In indigenous Australian culture, widows traditionally wore white mourning caps, or '*kopis*' made from plaster. Worn throughout a grieving period which could last anywhere from a week to six months, the thickness of the plaster could represent the depth of the widow's sorrow. At the end of her mourning period, the *kopi* would be placed on her husband's grave.

People in East Asian countries like Japan, Korea wear white mourning clothes as a symbol of purity and rebirth. In Cambodia, the official religion is Buddhism, a faith which believes that when someone dies, they are reincarnated, in a circle of life. The family of someone who dies, wear white in the mourning process in the hope that their loved ones are reborn again.

In India, white is the common colour of mourning. Men don dhotis, kurta pyjamas and women often wear either a *saree* or a *salwar kameez*. The dead too are covered in white sheets and then with flowers and incense sticks.

The idea of white mourning, otherwise known as *deuil blanc* in French, was formed during the 16th century when white was worn by bereaved children and unmarried women. The trend soon became a custom for the reigning queens of France, which inspired Mary, Queen of Scots (1542-87) to follow suit after the loss of three immediate family members within a period of 18 months.

In South Africa, red has been adopted as a colour of mourning, representing the bloodshed suffered during the Apartheid era. The Celtic cultures also cite red as the official colour of death and mourning. Many devout Catholics in Brazil also wear purple, alongside black, while mourning the loss of a loved one. In fact, it can be considered disrespectful and unlucky to wear purple if you are not attending a funeral, as the colour has a sacred, devotional meaning to it. In Thailand, purple defines sorrow, and is reserved for widows to wear while mourning the death of their spouse, while other funeral mourners are required to wear black at the funeral.

Therefore, wherever we go and whatever we do, Death is omnipresent and has a strong sense of being denied but eventually accepted. Throughout centuries across civilisations, rituals and beliefs related to this phenomenon have been made, destroyed and passed down to us today. Hence, one must try and become aware of these, their reasons and their significance; these symbols and cyphers are extremely important for the human race as a whole.

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CONCEPTS OF AFTERLIFE IN AFRICAN CULTURE

-Jharna Naiding

Africa being a diverse continent has extraordinary traditions and culture values. There are about three thousand ethnic groups, inhabiting the continent. For many centuries, they had numerous trade relations with far-off countries, which proved to be both a boon and a bane for them. Regardless of these influences, Africa has its own identity. It stems from Earth's first evolved humans who resided in Africa over 500,000 years ago.

A distinct trait of the African culture is how the people live together with harmony. In many families, the parents, children, grandparents, aunts all might live as neighbours, or even together, which is called an "extended family". Everyone in the family has their own roles & duties, which is organized into traditional age grade system. This 'age grade' system marks a life stage and lasts from 8 to 15 years. These systems are mainly prevalent in East Africa but also in some West African societies, such as the Bambara and Igbo. In Kenya and Tanzania, Masai boys move up to the Moran warrior life stage in their teenage years, where they learn cattle-keeping skills and Masai traditions. There is a strong culture of kinship across Africa, which often begins with the clan, a small group of families or villages that share a common language and culture. Hundreds of years ago, some clans were unified under kings and emperors. Today, people still honour these traditional rulers.

As people grow older, they move gradually from the Sasa period to the Zamami period. The birth is a slow process which is finalized long after the person has been physically born. In the same way, death is a process which removes a person gradually from the Sasa period to the Zamami. The 'Sasa' period refers to the time between one's existence on earth and the period after death within which the departed is remembered by relatives and friends who knew him/her. When the last of these survivors die, the departed ones enter the 'Zamami' period which is complete death. Death and the afterlife are two concepts that have always gone hand in hand in African cultural thought and practices and as well as in the African mode of philosophical reflections and religious beliefs. As per Idowu, the third native born leader of the Methodist Church Nigeria, who is also well known for his ethnographic and theological studies of the Yoruba people states that the common Yoruba belief is that death is a creation of *Olodumare* (God) the creator, he was made for the purpose of recalling any person whose time on earth is fulfilled. According to Frank Eyetsemitan, the traditional African belief system is also referred to as ancestor worship, which is based on the realization that life is cyclical and not linear. Grounded on this system of belief, the dead are believed to exist in a different world and can reincarnate in their next birth. It is held by certain traditional African notions that the dead are closer to a "singular supreme being" than the living.

Many African traditions which believe in life after death, hold the opinion that when a person dies, they transcend into another realm which is not physical as earth. For them, death is not the end but the beginning or in some cases, prolongation of life. This gives an explanation as to why death in most African traditions is not regarded as a tragedy, rather it is celebrated with several rites of passage.

Theophilus Herman Kofi Opoku is a native Akan linguist and missionary who adds that in the afterlife, the dead are not cut off directly from the earthly life, for they may disclose themselves in dreams or show themselves to their living relations to give instructions, warnings or information. They may convene their relatives who are alive to appear before them to explain the reason of their death and may punish them. However, those who suffered bad deaths and those who lived “bad lives” cannot become ancestors, and are regarded as evil ghosts. They are mostly dreaded and believed to become evil spirits continuing and causing evil plagues and occurrences. It is impossible to verify the truthfulness or falsity of such dreams and claims of appearances of ancestors.

According to Allan Anderson, it is the widespread belief among many African people that witches and wizards are not admitted to the world of spirit, and therefore they are refused suitable burial. Sometimes their bodies are subjected to actions that would render such kinds of acts impossible, such as burning, chopping up, and feeding them to hyenas. Among traditions and legends, to be expurgated from the community of the ancestors in death is the nearest equivalent of hell. It is believed that if the funeral rites are not observed in the correct way, the deceased may come back to trouble their relatives who are alive. The Chagga of Tanzania consider this journey to the world of ancestor ship as nine days. To make the journey easier, the corpse is anointed with fat, fed with milk, and covered with a hide to protect it from the elements. Some kill an ox at the burial of the deceased, which will later go together with the surviving relative’s home; this enables the deceased to act as shielding ancestor. The ancestors are also considered custodians and enforcers of justice and morality among the living, and because they are considered supernaturally closer to God, they function as intermediaries between God and the people.

Becoming an ancestor could be seen as a normal step following death. An ancestor would negotiate for the living and protect them. In that regard, it meant that it is in ancestor ship one could find the continuation of life after death. Nevertheless, life after death could not certainly be seen as continuation, in case, of a “bad person”. According to the tradition, when a “bad person” died, the cycle of life would be interrupted because the deceased will not be reincarnated. In that case, life after death could be seen as an intermission.

Many of the Africans believe that the dead go to the land of the spirits or ancestors which is under the ground. Despite this fact, some cannot anticipate any physical or geographical separation between the physical and spiritual world as they believe that the dead simply arrive there in its spirit form. This belief may have emanated from the fact that there has been a general practice of burying the dead in the ground.

Since the concept of life after death is universal in African tradition, certain measures are taken so as to prepare the death for the life after. For instance, the Abaluya (a Bantu ethnic group in Kenya) bury their dead naked as a preparatory stage for rebirth in the next world. On the other hand, the Madi’s of South Sudan bury their females with the opening of their genitals wrapped to avoid the flow of menstrual blood to avoid embarrassment of the people in the next world; while the males are buried with their penis cut out and the foreskin removed to aid erection and procreation in the next life.

Most African traditions believe in re-creation of the dead. This means that there is a widespread belief in the reborn of hitherto dead individuals. But this is only partial reincarnation in the sense that only some human features or characteristics of the living and dead are reborn in some children. However, some Africans such as the Yoruba people of West Africa believe that the departed return to their creator, and the final destiny of the person depends on how they lived on earth. God is believed to mete out judgment to people after death, and they have to give account of their earthly life. It is believed that when a deceased person is not properly buried or has an unfinished business in the physical realm, the person may be reborn. Often times, a newborn is named after the deceased person to signify his/her reincarnation.

Even though African tradition believe in afterlife, the issues or reward and punishment in the afterlife is largely contested. Africans believe that the destiny of each and every individual and the community are interdependent, interconnected, and intertwined. The Yorubas, Lozi, and Landagaa believe that the life one has lived in the physical realm determines the reward or punishment of such a person in the afterlife. This belief helps to deter individuals in the society against bad behaviour. It serves the purpose of a societal check to ensure that everyone obeys and does the right thing.

On the other hand, some clans in Kenya do not believe in a punishment or reward of the afterlife. It is simply a continuation of the physical realm. The belief of afterlife has been strongly associated with the traditional culture of Africa. There have been continuous debates about the afterlife in Africa which discusses about this world and this life. After death, the ancestors are still involved in the lives of their people. In the African worldview, then, philosophies about the "afterlife" and "this life" correlate with one another.

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THE LAST RITES OF THE MONGOLIAN STEPPES

-Ananya Chaudhuri

What is death? A question which everyone dwells upon whether they are a philosopher or a common individual. It is the end of one's life. It is the idea or concept of death that is fascinating to a lot of people. This fascination takes the form of several questions, such as- 'What happens after death?', 'What happens to one's soul after they die?', 'Where does one go after they die?' and so on. These questions are at times not just questions but modes of feeding into people's curiosity and hence much of the relatives of the dead eventually end up believing in a lot of assumptions to the above-mentioned questions. For instance, its peculiar how the Harappan people buried their dead- placing objects next to the bodies, in case they needed those essentials in their afterlife.

In this article, I will particularly focus on such practices of burials and death in the late ancient-medieval and modern or contemporary times, in the realm of Mongols and Turks, in and around Mongolia. The two former terms or groups of cultures assimilated to form an ethno-cultural synthesis that arose in Asia around the 14th century among the ruling elites of the Golden Horde and Chagatai Khanate. The ruling elites of the Mongol Khanates conquered and took over the populations of the Turks and eventually become Turco-Mongols. Mongolia was the country which had seen the emergence of one of the most powerful rulers in history: Chenghis Khan.



A Kurgan balbal

A major source of information comes from the Orkhon texts which was discovered in 1889, which talks of *balbal* figures, statues of men and women holding a cup in front of their navel, which were found all the way from Mongolia to the Black Steppes. These were apparently erected by Turk men in memory of the dead. There is a minor debate arguing whether *balbals* denoted the dead themselves or foes of the dead. The essential elements of a 'Polovtsian' (a group of Turkish nomads) burials was firstly to be a hillock piled up over the dead man and secondly, a statue erected in his memory with his face turned towards the east. The rich, being more luxurious in living standards (or death) were buried differently having *mausolea* in the form of pointed huts or stone houses.

Sadly, even with an abundant availability of primary sources for Mongol burial customs, it has been said to be impossible to give a full account considering the complexity and diversity in the nature of the material. There is agreement to the fact that all members of the Royal Mongol Family were buried in inaccessible places, mostly high mountains. Royal cemeteries were forbidden ground or taboo called *Qoruq* and guarded by detachments of soldiers. In Mongolia, the cemetery which consisted of the graves of Chenghis Khan and his descendants was called the 'Great Qoruq'. Some scholars are of a general opinion that the Mongol cult of the dead and the shamanistic rites associated with it were of a more

primitive and barbaric character than the Turks' funerary rites. But more than barbaric, the former's rites and beliefs involved a lot more taboos than what the latter even thought of. Adding to this, a small observation indicates the protection of funeral grounds and the dead, ensuring that they are safe and comfortable held a big place in Mongolian hearts and minds.

A writer called Veselovsky convincingly shows that the people killed by or for the Khan were to serve him in the next world. Moreover, on the death of a Khan, the Mongols would immediately issue orders that all roads were to be closed and that all should remain exactly where they were, either in towns or the desert. This was a way of showing respect by halting all daily activities and also reflected the faith in a Khan. The coffins were made of scented wood and the dead would be robed, placed with gold and precious objects in the coffin. Palladius (scholar) had written that the coffin was bound with four golden bands and placed on a catafalque of white felts and carpet. The funeral procession would move out on the third day after the Khan's death. Foremost was a female shaman, led by a horse with a highly decorated saddle. During the journey, a ram or goat was sacrificed each day. However, some articles believe that there is no mention of any kind of animal or any other sacrifice either, in the event of death of a Khan.

One thing that the literary sources fail to mention, that I found while checking other sources, is a custom which is certainly still observed by the shamanistic forest dwelling Turks and Mongols, that is, mainly the building of rostra or raised platforms in trees for dead shamans. Certain kinds of beliefs existed in the minds of the Mongols regarding the dead, for instance, it was a taboo to take the name of the dead and their custom of killing all people of Royal extraction without shedding their blood. This fear of the dead probably explains why the guardianship of royal cemeteries was assigned to the forest *Uriyanqats*, a race believing to hold strong shamanistic powers, again emphasizing on protecting aspect of the dead in their bed.



An open-air burial

But with time, like everything else, changes started to occur. With Mongolia becoming more diverse and with migration happening in and out, after 1921, the Mongolians started to change their burial rites. The open-air burial or "casting-out" burial is a very ancient custom among the nomads of Asia, which had already been in use, several centuries before our era. Apart from the open-air burial, there were other funeral practices in Mongolia such as cremation, embalming and the "water-burial", another form of open-air burial. Nobles were also buried in coffins, but unlike Lamaistic

dignitaries, these coffins were buried with additions like weapons, horses, food and other things, which were meant to help them in the next world - in Erlik-Khan's kingdom, Erlik-Khan being the god of death.

One thing that is surprising in this new time period was that the burial rites were not monotonous even among the common man. For example, when people died from infectious diseases, they were cremated to reduce the danger of an epidemic. To reflect on a child's innocence and the purity of their souls, children who died under the age of 3, had different burial customs, in turn reflecting Mongolians' thoughtful sensibilities and presence of mind. Also, the lamas had certain tasks like: to pray, to guide the spirit to heaven, to offer food, provide protection to the family of the deceased from evil spirits by burning incense, etc.

Another interesting episode that occurred was that the modern period or the contemporary era saw the rise of Buddhism in the above-mentioned areas leading to changes in the beliefs of the burial rituals and rites. This was mainly because Buddhists believed in giving up of all material pleasures whereas even when dead, the Mongols and Turks were buried with certain luxurious or useful items. The Buddhist and socialist ideologies which dominated the area post 1980s, believe that one should die without possessions.

The Mongolian funeral procession began to be performed according to Buddhist rituals. This meant that monks started to become extremely important in ways where the monk who specialized in the almanac would be consulted about what to do with the corpse, how to touch the remains, where and how to bury it, how to prepare for the funeral, indicating on even the colour of the cloth used to wrap the deceased's body with. He provides closure to the family by telling them where the soul goes after death. The remains can stay in the *ger* or *yurt* (portable tent), which they construct during one's death, from three to seven days before burial. The remains of parents and other uncles and aunts can apparently stay a week without burial but this rule was different for different people without any proper code of differentiation. Like almost every culture's tradition of doing something special in memory of the deceased, Mongolians also act in a similar way, like requesting benedictions and eating only coarse grains(millet) for a few days. At the end of this period, they feed stray dogs and does a funeral repast. Nowadays, due to urbanization and globalization, a worldlier funeral system has been introduced in Mongolia. The cremation of dead bodies has recently started to become a popular practice.

Every culture at the end of the day, no matter rich or poor, always wants to let the dead depart in the best way possible. Like marriage, death is the other occasion in a family, which at most times, brings together one's loved ones. This too, is a time, when one wants to accomplish all the tasks which will ensure a proper afterlife for their dear departed. Mongolia is no different, from any time period, whether they be Turks, Mongols or Turco-Mongols.

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DEATH, MOURNING AND FUNERAL PRACTICES IN LATIN AMERICA

-Riya Malhotra

According to CGM Robben, anthropologists, and in particular those from Western societies, stand in a peculiar relation to death. They have often had a brief personal brush with death at home, but only become engrossed in the cultural complexities of death, mourning, and burial once in the field. The ethnographic experience overshadows their general understanding of death, misleading them into believing that their own culture has a much poorer death culture than that of their hosts, and may also result in the misinterpretation of the ordinary, shallow and secular death cultures of the Western society along with complex, profound and sacred death rituals elsewhere. The inevitability of biological death challenged early generations of anthropologists to look for universal features in the diverse cultural responses to death, whereas later generations became absorbed in the practices themselves through meticulous ethnographies and sophisticated interpretations.

While the death customs of the first world, in the early modern age have received an important share of attention by scholars, death in colonial Latin America has flourished into a new area of studies only in the past fifteen years. This is surprising, since the topic of death underlies many of the commonly addressed themes in Latin American colonial history. Demographic historians long have understood the importance of examining death to make sense of the past. *Ars Morendi*, meaning the art of dying, represents the basic point of departure in the concept of good death for much of the early and present-day scholarship on Latin American death ways, which typically examines popular piety by first defining the good death and then showing how the Roman Catholic ideal is reconstructed according to popular belief and practices.

According to Robben, there exists a great variation in cultural beliefs about death and dying in Latin America. The idea of death as an irreversible event is strong in Western culture but many cultures have processual, cyclical or stage-like notions of death. Furthermore, cultures differ in the substantive ways to give meaning to such notions. The people of Brittany and France have a fatalistic worldview. Whereas, according to Anne Straus in her article “The Meaning of Death in Northern Cheyenne Culture” (1978), the Cheyenne consider death as a long process during which a person’s development is reversed.

In the words of scholar Bronislaw Malinowski, of all sources of religion, the supreme and final crisis of life – death – is of the greatest importance. Death is the gateway to the other world in more than the literal sense. Scholars took note of psychologists’ and journalists’ derisive indictment of the modern prudishness and cult of denial, and a literature formed around the legal, social, medical, and historical aspects of death.

Dying was not conceived as absolute as those that would later define dying in scientific terms, under the sign of the secular ideal. The afterlife had not yet been privatized as an affair of memory. Thanopolitics—the control of dying, the rules according to which one dies, the rules over the possessions of the dead and the possession of the corpse, the exchanges tying the ancestors to the living, etc.—made up the fabric of everyday life. But if death gave meaning to life, the ways in



Colourful tombstone in the General Cemetery of Pucallpa, Peru

which it did so were particular and contingent. In other words, death was not the same death in seventeenth-century France or at any given moment in Spain and throughout the Spanish viceroyalties in the Latin Americas.

Scholarship on Latin America has studied changes in burial practices over three centuries, with a particular focus on the rupture in the governance of the placement of the dead, represented in the move away from burials within churches to cemetery interments. These are cited as evidence of tensions and negotiations between baroque and enlightened conceptions of the world. In her recent study on death in the Andes, Gabriela Ramos emphasizes the importance of church burial in the conversion of Andean peoples, for whom burial within the church resonated powerfully in the sixteenth century. Tombstones and mausoleums get an artistic makeover in Peru, where painters, or funeral artists draw religious symbols on aboveground cemeteries, creating colorful walls that give life to burials. Open-casket wakes are held by many Latin Americans followed by a two-day confinement in the Catholic cemetery, although not all Latin Americans are Catholic. Hence, their funeral practices do not have significant differences.

The demise, like the creation, of the human being is a process, which is seen as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in many Latin American traditions. Those who die a “bad death” may also become isolated from the tribal community. The most common “bad death” is death by violent accident. Accidents, particularly violent accidents, disturb the spiritual balance of the individual and may result in the loss of good spirits. A “good death” is a tribal death, one that serves a tribal purpose and exemplifies tribal values; a “good death” contributes to the tribal solidarity and provides for the security of the self within the tribal community. The different values accorded to death apply both to the *Vaqueiros* (Parish in Portugal) who die and to their survivors. A good death is one that is hardly felt, rapid and without pain; a bad death supposes a long illness or a slow and painful agony together with a consciousness of the approaching end.

According to Maria Catedra, if death from old age may be seen as the culmination of a natural process, suicide involves a sharp and drastic interruption of this process. Suicide is in some sense the most “cultural” way of death because it occurs according to the will of the *Vaqueiro*. Among the circumstances leading to suicide may be a desire to avoid the punishment of the law. A similar feeling of defenselessness results from prolonged sickness. When there is no hope that the person will get better and a bad death is expected, suicide is considered a “logical” solution.

Many Latin American traditions believe that continuity of the non-physical or spirit self after death is clear. The spirit-self is animate, even when separated from the body: it has self-awareness, it perceives its own death, separates from the body, and moves on to another place.

According to Erika Hosselkus, the deaths of great rulers and nobles demanded scripted, meaning-laden responses from survivors. Material gifts, including slaves, articles of clothing, jewelry and adornments, weaponry, and food were functional. Survivors also invoked and honored their gods through dedication of sacrificial hearts, blood, and fine gifts. Such overtures to the deities protected not only the dead, but also those who remained on the slippery, slick, summit of the earth, where misfortune struck anyone who disregarded or defiled tradition. Finally, scribes and priests memorialized a ruler or noble’s death in the painted and oral histories that preserved cultural memory and transmitted it to future generations.

Miruna Achim and Martina Will de Chaparro, observe that the global effect of epidemic disease “on the attitudes of ordinary people trying to survive in colonial societies in formation” in Latin America is little studied. “It is death as a qualitative, instead of a quantitative, fact that had until recently seemed to elude the historian,” they state. However, other non-annals histories from the region occasionally address indigenous contact-related death as well.



A Chilean Cemetery

Burials within churches during much of the colonial period meant that *Limenos* (a male native or resident of Lima, Peru) shared many ritual spaces with the dead, justifying this practice with the reasoning that individuals must be buried as close to the altar as possible, as a means to escape purgatory and reach heaven more easily. In her study of burial reforms in New Spain, Pamela Voekel argues that this practice stems from the belief that the church as a consecrated space was holier than other locations, that the altar acted as a further reflection of God’s holiness, and that saints

represented in such spaces acted as intercessors on behalf of the dead. To be buried in such a space near the altar or saints’ images served not only as a symbolic reflection of one’s piety for mere mortals to observe, but also as an enhancement of one’s holiness and virtue in the eyes of God. Most *Limenos* came into frequent contact with the smells and dangers of putrefaction in churches by the late eighteenth century, although this did not deter them from carrying out church burials.

The capital of Peru, Lima's General Cemetery opened on May 31, 1808, nineteen years after the first royal decree reached Lima from Spain ordering the prohibition of burials in churches and the construction of an extramural cemetery. In most of the Latin American territories, the burial or cremation generally takes place within one to three days after the death. However, cremation is not common in places like Costa Rica. But in areas like Guatemala, there are four stops along the way for praying during the procession to the cemetery: the house doorway, yard, entrance onto the street, and the first street corner. At each stop, they place pennies on the casket to buy the deceased's spirit's entrance into heaven. Whereas, a Puerto Rican funeral typically follows Christian funeral traditions but also may have cultural influences. Likewise, since most Chileans are Catholic, a Chilean funeral service typically follows Catholic traditions. The varied architectural styles of the graves are a fascinating reflection of the golden age of Cuba. Many of the graves are in a state of disrepair because the families fled before the revolution and abandoned the graves of their loved ones.

According to Anne Straus, one's death should be as valuable a contribution to the tribe as one's life. In the days of warfare and still today in times of war, the best death was to die in battle, in defense of your community and your place within it. The old people are respected for their wisdom and their spiritual powers, for their special place in the life system of creation. The exquisite pain of loss through death is said to be the hardest thing a human being must face in the arduous journey on the surface of the earth.

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GENDER AND DEATH ACROSS CULTURES

-Shrishti Kashyap

The World Economic Forum, in its report about the Global Gender Gap estimated that at the current rate, it will take us almost a century to achieve gender equality. It is the bitter reality of the society that it still makes distinctions, exclusion, or restrictions on the basis of sex. In some sense every ritual from our birth to death and even after death affirm differences between men and women.

A patriarchal society exists to ensure the subjugation of women. Religious codes of law, laid down by upper caste men have worsened the condition of women in the society. Have you ever wondered why women are not allowed to be a part of the cremation rites in the Hindu culture? Why society prefers males to be the chief mourner? If we ponder on these questions, we wouldn't find any concrete answer apart from vague mumbling about traditions.

It is believed that only if a male member will perform the last ceremony the soul of the deceased will find liberation. According to the traditional beliefs in Hindu mythology, tears are considered as pollutants during the last rite of the deceased. Women, stereotyped as being soft hearted and emotional may shed tears and thus it may not make the dead person rest in peace. A funeral scene, in that context, is a devastating scene, which women will not be able to watch.

These death rituals are more than seeking liberation and being impure. It is closely related to division of labour and the issue of hire. Women are supposed to stay at home and take care of the family when male members of the family remain with the deceased and go for the cremation process. There is always an option for women to attend funerary rites in some or the other circumstance, but patriarchy overrules that.

The sole purpose of the funeral ritual is to aid the deceased in the passage to the next life. The specific belief in the continuation of previous life led to the tradition of accompanying the dead with some of their necessary commodities for their daily life.

In some parts of Africa, especially in the west of the continent, rulers or members of the ruling group in general were granted the privilege of being accompanied by the members of the court, from ministers to servants and slaves and to wives and concubines, in their death. In case of the female members of the court, they were usually followed by attendants and not their spouse. Attendants could be both male and female. The exception in this custom could be seen at Asante in west Africa where husband followed wife to death if he was the commoner and married to the female member of the royal family.

This kind of custom was built on social and political status, and not upon differentiation between sexes. The custom was a burden, especially for the groups that had to bear its cost with sacrificing lives. Therefore, there were frequent attempts by lower classes to acquire the right to be followed by humans during their death. As this right extended to the lowest classes, the differentiation between bearers of rights and bearers of duties developed between the sexes. It was believed that men were born with the right to be accompanied to death and it was a woman's duty to follow a man to death as the latter held the lowest position in the society.

In India, there was a custom of burning wives along with their deceased husband on the same funeral pyre, called *Sati*. The original meaning of the Sanskrit word *Sati* was simply “faithful wife”; only later was the term applied specifically to the woman who immolated herself. We find the earliest written source for Sati in a Greek account of the burning of a widow with the body of an Indian military leader around the fourth century B.C.E. Sati was to be found in all caste and in all social strata, even among the outcastes, due to attempts at acculturation and sanskritization. Initially, it was being performed at the death of rulers and important warriors but the Brahmins were against this custom as it conveyed enormous social prestige. In order to deprive the warrior classes (*ksatriyas*) of their monopoly, the Brahmins started to regulate Sati with religious prescriptions, thereby lowering the requirements and opening the custom, both to themselves and the lower castes, including the outcastes. On the death of her husband, a wife burned herself on the funeral pyre with the dead body.

Why was there such custom? Why did wives even want to accompany the dead? Why is it reserved solely for women? Were they sanctioned by religion? Most of the sources emphasize on the specific belief in the future life. Afterlife is thought to be the replication of this life, with individuals having the same position. Acts such as that of sati were considered meritorious and even encouraged by the society because widows were considered an economic and social threat to the society. After the death of her husband she had no option other than Sati because no one will take her responsibility and the society will not see a woman living alone as per her own free will, lest she gets empowered. Moreover, the existence of a widow meant the existence of a woman without a husband, without a man to control her, she could do anything that she pleased, even challenge the society and demand her husband’s share of property. Such customs linked religious beliefs hereafter with power struggles in the society between the sexes in a unique manner. Following someone to death is both an expression and a result of power struggle in a society. It symbolizes the fatal reality of inequality between the sexes. It clearly draws a line between the privileged and the discriminated groups.

A slightly different form of Sati occurred in Bali and Java. The difference was that in Bali and Java, Sati was restricted if not *de jure* then at least *de facto*, to the wives and concubines of the rulers and the members of the aristocracy. The women were either burned on the funeral pyre or stabbed to death.

The killing of widows is also reported from many islands in the South Pacific, for example; Fiji, the Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu). Here, strangling was the usual method. As a rule, it was done by relatives. Special case was presented by China, where women committed suicide after the death of their husbands, sometimes many years afterwards the death.

After a lot of criticisms, the custom of being followed to death eventually became outlawed but it wasn’t the only custom which was oppressive. The situation of women was undeniably bad. Society even had restrictions on their way of lamenting.

The ancient Greek city states banned the public lamentation of Greek women and replaced these with male funeral oration. In the Islamic world too, there is a tense relationship between women’s lament and a centralized religious authority. Lament as a gendered form of demonstrating grief

has been dubbed against Islam so that women who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca don't lament at funerals.

In India, women, especially high caste women, weren't allowed to make public appearance. They couldn't cry in front of commoners even if their husband was the one who died. Making public appearance was against the dignity of women. For representing their grief, they had special groups of low caste women known as *Rudaalis*. It is their job to cry at funerals.



The difference between a male and female tomb. The higher one being the former's and the lower, belonging to the latter

Women have a history of oppression that runs longer than one can imagine. Widows were suppressed in the name of widowhood and weren't allowed to be the part of mainstream society while there were no such restrictions for widowers. Widowhood was painful and humiliating to women because of ritual sanction of society against widows. They were expected to renounce all the earthly pleasure, shave their heads, discard their jewellerys and live in seclusion. Widows in some areas still have very limited freedom to marry and secure property rights.

Each culture has its own set of beliefs about the meaning and the purpose of life and what happen after the death but one thing which is common amongst all is the misery of women. They are treated as inferior even after their death. So, we can say that patriarchy goes beyond the death. It is systematic and deeply entrenched, something which is reflected in the physical realm as well as the world of death.

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CELEBRATING THE DEAD: AN INSIGHT INTO MEXICO'S DAY OF THE DEAD

-Srishti Snehal

The celebration of *Día de los Muertos* (or Day of the Dead) in Mexico provides a fascinating glimpse into the diverse perception of death across cultures. As the name suggests, it honours and celebrates the lives of deceased souls. The Day of the Dead is a specifically Mexican term referring to the Mexican version of a pan-Roman Catholic holiday, All Saints' and All Souls' days, observed on November 1 and November 2 respectively. The Day of the Dead is at its core a sacred occasion, aimed towards acknowledging, honouring as well as nourishing deceased ancestors by creating a kind of spiritual connection with them. It is a mortuary ritual which seeks to fulfil both the alimentary and emotional needs of departed souls. Celebrants who properly provide for their ancestors during this period can, after death, expect to receive the same treatment from their descendants.

A multitude of tourists descend upon Mexico to witness these canivalesque, exotic and colourful ritual performances and artistic displays. From October 31st till November 2nd, Mexicans clean, decorate and maintain vigil over relatives' graves. Everything from elaborate tombstones to simple earthen mound graves are adorned with flowers, food offerings and candles, aesthetically arranged in the honour of the deceased. Sculpted sugar candies in the form of skulls, skeletons and caskets all suggest a direct confrontation with mortality. Decorated bread, plastic toys and paper cut outs, most of them playing humorously on the death theme are evident. Here, most of the practices and artistic displays connected with the festival (such as special food offerings, home altars and cemetery vigils) are a folk elaboration quite distinct from the official liturgical components.



Mictecacihuatl as depicted in the Codex Borgia

Scholars suggest that the origins of the festival are rooted in Mesoamerican cultures and perhaps Aztec festivals that celebrated the goddess *Mictecacihuatl*, queen of the underworld. Since the Aztecs were the leading power holders at the time of the Spanish conquest, it is reasonable to suppose that their iconography rather than that of their predecessors was what carried over into the art of colonial Mexico and exerted a long-term influence over folk art associated with the Day of the Dead. Anthropologist Stanley Brandes states that information of figurines from colonial era mainly come from friars like Ajofrn. Their texts indicate that by the mid-eighteenth century, people in the Valley of Mexico were buying whimsical figurines made of sugar paste for this occasion. The festival was predominantly native to the southern parts of Mexico, the northern regions were in fact introduced to this tradition only within the last 2 centuries.

The advent and influence of Christianity which sought to silence indigenous voices probably suggests that, the festivities we see today probably vary

somewhat from the Mesoamerican *Día de Muertos* celebrations. The most convincing argument for this cause includes the shifting of the festival's dates; previously celebrated sometime around early August onwards, Christian influence shifted it to coincide with All Saint's Day in early November. Mesoamerican Indigenous peoples have infused these dates (of Saint and Soul day) with additional significance based on the pre-Columbian belief that the souls of children and adults visit the earth on separate dates (Nov 1st and 2nd respectively)

One of the most striking features of the Day of the Dead is the prominence of unusual delicacies, which is served or arranged in a special manner only during this time of the year.



An Ofrenda

The Day of the Dead features food in two ritual contexts placed on gravesites during the cemetery vigil, and displayed on home altars. The *ofrenda* refers to food (offerings) that facilitates the relationship between living and deceased relatives. They are seen as a commemorative gift to the deceased souls who are being honoured on this occasion.

It is interesting to note that the Mexicans are not under the belief that the returning souls actually eat the fruits and other delicacies that are set out in their honour. However, they do believe that deceased relatives are spiritually present and aware that their living kin have gone out of their way to honour and remember them. They also believe that the spirits derive some nourishment and contentment from the smell of the food displayed in their honour.

It is the essence of the food - the flavour and aroma - that the dead take from their offerings. Cándido Reyes Castillo, from the state of Puebla, states that, "of course, there are those who say the dead do not return, but I know they do. I feel sure of this, because when we offer food to the deceased it loses its aroma and taste"

Ordinary foods, such as oranges, bananas, squash as well as cooked items such as tamales and chicken/turkey mole, too are a regular feature of the *ofrenda comestibles*. Everywhere that altars are erected, family members take account of the individual tastes of their deceased relatives in deciding which foods to include in the *ofrenda*. Liquor is a common feature of home altars, although generally not graveside ofrendas. Liquor is offered exclusively to deceased male relatives while the wishes of the female relatives concerning such taboo topics are not acknowledged, perhaps because home altars are on public display. The most common ofrenda ingredients consists

of breads, candies, fresh petals among others. Across the country, bakers sell *pan de muerto* (in the United States, whimsically termed “dead bread”) the special bread that looks like twisted bones with white icing. The markets are filled with rows of sugar skull candies with tin-foil eyes and gold grins, sugar coffins and corpses. A *New York Times* report stated that in Mexico City, the dead’s annual homecoming brought forth the designer in everybody.

The prominence of sweets on this occasion is noteworthy with abundance of fruits, squash cooked with brown sugar and of course pan de muerto moulded from a sugary dough. There is a proliferation throughout Day of the Dead season of sculpted sugar candies in the form of skulls, skeletons, and caskets, used in altar decorations as well as presenting gifts to friends and relatives. It is interesting to note the very chemistry of these food offerings. The consumption of ‘dead bread’ has its basis in one of the oldest and most widespread Spanish saying: *El muerto al hoyo y el vivo al bollo* [To the grave with the dead and bread to the living]. The rise of bread dough can be associated with vitality and hope while sugar in its essence is energy in a concentrated form.

The most prominent symbols found in today’s Day of the Dead celebrations comes from the last half of the 19th century. It was at this time that short poetic epitaphs, known as *calaveras* (skulls) began circulating. Newspapers and broadsides (posters) filled their pages with these rhymed satires, often victimizing public figures- politicians, athletes, literati and movie personalities. They acted as a vessel of public opinion and continues to be the collective, anonymous voice of the Mexican people. Historians viewed the emergence of these calavera as a consequence of the freedom of the press that arrived with Mexico’s independence from Spain in 1821.

Contrary to what one might expect from a festival that deals with such morbid themes, the Day of the Dead is replete with expressions of humour and light-heartedness. By the late 19th century, the printer and cartoonist José Guadalupe Posada was creating powerful calavera images each year on the occasion of the Day of the Dead which showed vivid and lively skeletons and skulls with grinning teeth, dancing, drinking and masquerading as well as scenes of a cemetery picnic and markets of sugar skulls. Perhaps the most famous of Posada’s images is that of La Calavera



Decorated graves in a cemetery

Catrina, where he re envisioned *Mictecacihuatl*, the Aztec goddess of the underworld, as mentioned before. The female skeleton *Catrina*, portrayed as a fleshless skull with fancy hats and large feathers, has now become one of the most recognizable icons of this Mexican holiday. Traditions of the holiday also include families praying around the altars and telling anecdotes about the deceased. Sometimes, people adorn shells so that when they dance, the noise will wake up the dead. Instances of religious imagery occurs as well since caskets and altars are occasionally decorated with a simple sugar cross.

It is important to remember that the Day of the Dead art is seasonal that is, representations of death that occur during this period are not incorporated into funerals or permanent tombs year-round. The image of 'Macabre Mexico' is not entirely true, funerals here like everywhere else are also replete with grief in contrast to the festival celebrations. Anthropologist Kristin Norget recorded the testimony of a man in Oaxaca who on the Day of the Dead in 1990 stated that, "Funerals are sad because you know that you're not going to see the difunto, and so you feel his absence. It is not only the immediacy of death—the fact that it has just occurred—but also the palpable, concrete presence of the inert cadaver that produces a predictably sombre tone at Mexican funerals."

But one cannot deny the fact that Mexicans have a unique relationship with death, one that inspires hope, courage, and resilience. Octavia Paz's *The Labyrinth of Solitude* has provided one of the most influential perspectives of Mexican identity and summarises a range of views on how Mexicans relate to death. In one of Paz's most famous passages he states, "*The word death is not pronounced in New York, in Paris, in London, because it burns the lips. The Mexican, in contrast, is familiar with death, jokes about it, caresses it, sleeps with it, celebrates it; it is one of his toys and his most steadfast love. True, there is perhaps as much fear in his attitude as in that of others, but at least death is not hidden away: he looks at it face to face, with impatience, disdain, or irony . . . Our contempt for death is not at odds with the cult we have made of it.*"

Paz provides a beautiful insight into how the culture has learnt to embrace death instead of fear it, how they have greeted death like an old friend instead of fleeing from its inevitable prospect. Both historically and culturally, the Dead of the Dead, which after all is the Mexican version of the pan Roman Catholic celebration of All Saints' and All Souls' Day has become much more salient in Mexico than anywhere else. It has incorporated traits that have increasingly become associated with Mexico, particularly the calaveras as well as the pervasiveness of humour, music, colourful ritual performances and art displays. What is clear is that, for Mexicans, foreigners and people of Mexican descent, the holiday has come to symbolise the very essence and soul of Mexico. Within Mexico, it is a key symbol of national identity. It signifies a union between life and death and there are important lessons to be learnt from the revelry of both. The Day of the Dead is not just about acceptance, rather it is the total embracement and celebration of a binding, destined fear that brings people together.

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GRIEVING WOMEN OF RAJASTHAN- THE RUDAALIS AND THEIR DYING TRADITION

-Mannat Kaur Kandhari

*“Pando bhalo na kosko, beti bhali naek
Leno bhalo na baapko, sahib rakhya tek.”*

*[Walking on foot even for a mile is not favoured, nor is the birth of a single daughter.
A debt of one’s father is not favoured, so may God protect us from these misfortunes.]*

- A popular Rudaali saying in the Darogi community.

India is the land of diverse cultures that spread over a vast expanse of 29 states with differences ranging from gender, class, caste and their upstanding social issues and the beliefs that counter them. India’s professions have always been interlinked with caste practices that dictated the professions of castes and its many subsets. Occupations were generally regarded as a hereditary practice and that of changing professions, even in contemporary times, is generally not acceptable in society which is much along the same lines of providing equal representation to all castes, classes and genders in India. Where on some level there is the possibility of a discrimination free environment of working, however, throughout major parts of India, it is still very much prevalent in the form of caste - induced professions. One such arresting example is that of the ‘Rudaalis of Rajasthan’, who in Modern India are also known as the ‘Weeping Women of India.’ Yes, they mourn for a living. Yes, they are always dressed in black *odhnis* which is the favourite colour of *Yama*, the God of Death and yes, they belong to a certain lower- caste which makes them eligible not to have a family, because if a grieving mourner finds cheer and delight with ‘loved ones’, who will cry at funerals?



Rudaalis of Rajasthan draped in their black garments

Moirologists, or fake mourners began to come up in the different parts of the world, but were prominently known in China and and the Middle East. This type of Professional mourning was practiced as a full-fledged occupation in ancient and medieval Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures. Professional mourners, are remunerated to grieve or provide a eulogy. While the world has already experienced professional mourners, as we point to their existence dating back to Ancient Egypt- the Rudaalis in Rajasthan, India, belonging to different communities, religions,

and castes can be perceived as quite a unique combination of gender divide as well as caste cultures

being enhanced on an equal footing. The term, 'Professional Mourners' can come as a cultural shock to some, yet on another parallel, it is the need of the times to accept the fact that it exists as a very real and legitimate line of work. It may seem like a bizarre profession to us, even today, where there are endless possibilities to take up any kind or line of occupation, but in the hinterlands of Rajasthan, the tradition needs to stand tall so that it can combat the enculturation and automation of the changing times that are slowly eliminating such mourning practices.

For her book, *The Lost Generation: Chronicling India's Dying Professions*, Nidhi Dugar Kundalia explores the deprived yet augmenting aura of the Rudaalis quoting, '*chelas* are actually *darogas*, the hereditary servants who are the illegitimate offspring of a *thakur* with a *daori*, or female servant. The girls that were born to the *daoris* were usually killed at birth or given to high ranking tribal officials as dowry for their legitimate daughters. The nobles, chiefs and *thakurs* house the *daoris* in separate accommodations, often on the fringes of the *havelis*. Apart from serving as concubines for these *thakurs*, the *daoris* also doubled as rudaalis, or mourners, for the family in times of death and sickness.' She further implores into their world of subjugation and dependence on a male. As a profession, Rudaali sees the social issues with abject poverty that they are born into, which renders their personal emotions as a commodity for sale, only to be bought by upper-caste men. *Their tears have a price tag.*



The Rudaalis in mourning during a funeral

In conversation with an upper-caste man from a village in Jaisalmer, whose views point to depths of caste discrimination and genderisation in society, 'Women's brains are hardwired to feel loss and grief. They have a weak heart.' He further emphasizes, 'We don't allow the women in our families to make a sight of themselves outside our homes. High-caste women do not cry in front of commoners. Even if their husbands die, they need to preserve their dignity. The Rudaalis cried for them and for anybody who needed the urge to cry but was not permitted to by society. The whole village feels the loss... She represents their sadness.' In a socially segregated society, the rank and the status enjoyed by women mirror the social order. Rudaali can be seen as a disreputable orthodox profession where bereavement required a public display of unrestrained sentiments. It turns out, that mostly the women who become Rudaalis are who face heavy and staid poverty or generally belong to the lower castes in society. In a book by Salman Akhtar and Gurmeet Kanwal,

where “Bereavement” seemed to be more specifically linked with death than either “mourning” or “grief,” which are used in connection with losses and separations of other kinds as well.

The position of the low-caste women in society make them subject to exploitation on the basis of being bought and sold, and being paid for a necessary requirement and display of emotions. Nidhi Kundalia also points out how, ‘If a girl is born, she is mostly “laid to rest” right away.’ This can also be seen in context of how women can pose to be a burden for the family as there are no material gains in raising them, other than getting them married or providing a substantial dowry for them and thus, acts as a stigma in society. In the beginning of the article, the popular saying simply talks about the very harsh reality that even the sons born to Rudaalis don’t carry the name of their father- which is the main reason for deeming the *darogas* and *daoris* as illegitimate children, among the numerous communities that have a widespread essence of Rudaalis in Rajasthan. These Rudaalis pray to the God *Bheruji*, who himself was a lusty bachelor and loved seducing young girls, especially from lower castes, in order for the upper-caste men to live long lives, which is but another means of attainment and exploitation of the impoverished women.

With the constant modifications taking place in society, there have been many art and literary representations of the Rudaalis and their profession as a rare source of work. The book *Rudaali* by Mahaswetha Devi which is an ironic tale of exploitation, struggle, and survival. It also launches a scathing attack on the vestiges of feudalism in rural India. It is quite ironical to some extent that in a country where women are perceived as manifestation of Goddesses, they are also marginalized and exploited by that very society that worships them. Quoting some lines from the short story which appropriately describe Rudaali(s), "Her wail screeched through the dead bare deserts, breaking the silence of decades. She cried, Finally, she let out the wail long hidden."

The socio-cultural custom of hiring a Rudaali throws a direct insinuation to the association and gap between the Upper caste and Lower caste for hiring a Rudaali meant to be a status symbol and amplified family reputation and pride. The Rudaalis being so open with her emotions in front of upper caste women, in reality undermines their high status and hits hard on the gender ideologies scheming funeral services among the caste and its related institutions. Caste defines the social status of women as pure or impure in the community. It is suitably enunciated through the adaption of Mahaswetha Devi’s short story into a movie, as being dressed in black with frazzled hair, the rudaalis shed tears copiously, bemoaning over the dead by dancing in an erratic manner. Her story portrays Rudaalis as a modern woman who fulfills her dreams instead of being tied up in matrimonial gratification. The movie is a subtle satire that points out the vicious practices on diverse life cycle rituals. Such obsolete traditions are the result of a dismembered society, where rituals act as catalysts in the cultural power houses. Directed by Kalpana Lajmi, the Dimple Kapadia starrer movie *Rudaali* has a very acroamatic dialogue- “These tears are your livelihood...just as you cut wheat and plough land, you’ll be able to shed these tears.”

As described in the *Lost Generation*, ‘they gasp and cry loudly, tossing their heads back, and wail to the heavens, beating their chests and slapping the ground in front of them. Their veils drop every now and then, exposing their faces and long necks tattooed with traditional symbols. Soon, thick tears start flowing, staining their cheeks with black kohl in the process, falling on to their odhnis. They don’t wipe the tears away, most dry under the hot sun before fresh ones flow down.’

However, even though their sole purpose of working is to cry for someone they don't even know on a personal level, the rudaalis don't receive a lot in the means of money or payment. Till about 30 years ago, they were charging five to six rupees for all the wailing extravaganza and accompanied the corpse to the cremation ground. Along with their dues, they receive rice, leftover rotis, atta, raw onions and old clothes. To keep up with the act, the Rudaalis often thought about their own painful lives to induce and prolong crying. But when this did not work, some used saliva, some used the bark of aak leaves that makes eyes watery, while some also used a kohl-like substance that causes burning sensations, making them teary-eyed.

'Every time a visitor enters, the rudaalis wail louder in a show of irreplaceable grief and loss.' For the Rudaalis, intervals between the crying and mourning sessions only come when they break for lunch. This performance goes on for twelve days after a death, because the longer the mourning period, the better the financial stature of the family in class denomination. Over the years, they received two hundred rupees for twelve days, whilst mourning at landlords' homes and little to no money from many others.

The gendering of rituals by the Rudaalis acts as a sort of amusement for the upper castes and classes. However, the Rudaali tradition is dying and over the years there are fewer and fewer of them. Today, they are only found in the villages of Marwar. With the worldview changing on many existing practices and traditions, people prefer sophistication and quieter funerals. As there has been massive advancements in technology and medicine, the need for the Rudaalis has gone down remarkably and find it difficult to make a living out of the only line of work that is accessible to them. Alternate professions for them are limited which mostly include prostitution, slavery and begging in the streets. Nothing is pre-determined and only time can tell if they are accepted and if their profession is embraced. Left untouched by time, these women showcase the real lament of a woman.

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NATIVE AMERICAN DEATH RITUALS AND BURIAL TRADITIONS

-Maitreyi Pandey

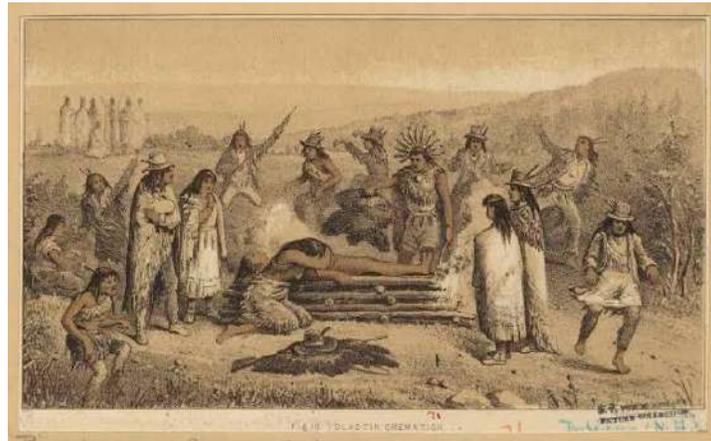
A common mistake made by most laymen, is to homogenise and characterise all Native Americans or as some may call them Red Indians as a single group of people practicing nature worship. This common conception is a result of the White Man Saviour complex. Starting with the first conquest of the Americas in Brazil by the Portuguese and its subsequent takeover by the Spanish. The Spanish not only wrote low of the natives calling them savages but also brutally murdered and massacred them, significantly curbing down their spiritual or religious practices. Spanish were not the only Europeans involved, in the annexation of the Americas and the execution of its Natives, there were many more such as Britain, Netherlands, France and even Russia! The time period of the conquest coincided with the Age of Exploration (discovery of new lands representing the might of countries and to search for new sources of wealth due to internal wars in Europe and Black Death) and the Crusades and Counter Reformation where the Catholics reclaimed their religious superiority from the Puritans, Lutherans etc (all opposed to the Church and the orthodox model of Christianity). A lot of Reformist also shifted from mainland Europe to Americas preach their doctrine of faith and start businesses. The conquest came as a slippery slope to Natives and their culture, the most detrimental of all being the lack of written record or history by the Natives. The Natives hadn't developed a method of written communication and most of the practices and customs were passed on to the younger generations orally. This disadvantage, but in some senses seen as a source of societal bonds helping them preserve their culture, coupled with significant decrease in population due to small pox brought by the Spanish and the murder of Natives as well as Conversion to Christianity and incoming of slaves leading to demographic changes hampered the preservation of native culture. Later many laws were placed on them restricting them from practicing their religious practices. But who were the natives before the Spanish? And what was their culture?



The regions inhabited by the Native Americans

Though there isn't any definite time period to the documentation of the natives, they are said to have arrived from Eurasia through the land bridge between Serbia and Alaska during the Ice Age some 30,000 years inhabiting the area since upper Paleolithic or in some studies the Mesolithic age. A fixed set of practices and customs among the different tribes is said to have developed roughly 12,000 years before the first European colonisation in 1492. The indigenous people are an extremely diverse group often claiming regional identities and associated customs such as the Arctic tribes, for example, simply left their dead on the frozen ground for wild animals to devour, Hopewell societies of the Upper Midwest placed the dead in lavishly furnished tombs. Southeastern tribes practiced secondary bone burial. They dug up their corpses, cleansed the bones, and then reburied them. One could say the basic factor influencing these customs was the topography and resource availability, i.e. the Southeastern has fertile areas to dig up land and rebury the dead whereas the cold arctic barely left them with any other option. The

meat from the dead would be eaten by the wolves and the latter would be meaty enough to be good hunts. However, most of them share the common belief of the Two Souls; one that leaves the body when we die and the other roams around and eventually dies, like a Spirit (Nagi). This theory surrounds many of their burial customs, usually the natives left food or some personal belonging of the dead alongside them in their grave or outside the grave pit. This was done to aid them in the afterlife, for warriors the gifts often included not only their wives and weapons but also their favourite horses. The Northeast Iroquois, prior to the Five Nations Confederation in the seventeenth century, saved skeletons of the deceased for a final mass burial that included furs and ornaments for the dead spirits' use in the afterlife. Honouring the dead was imperative, widows cut their hair and other mourners usually discarded their ornaments or blacked their faces. California tribes engaged in wailing staged long funeral ceremonies and held an anniversary mourning ritual after one or two years. Southwest Hopi wailed on the day of the death and cried a year later. When children died, in Ojibwa or Chippewa tribes, a doll would be made from the dead child's hair. The mother would carry around the doll for a year in remembrance of the child.



A Native American Funeral

Other forms of burial included covering the skull of the dead in vermilion symbolising fertility (sign of rebirth or afterlife). Tree and scaffold burial, this was an extremely elaborate burial and was often performed only in areas of timber abundance. Observed in the Yakotins of South Dakota, the burial involved an aerial structure, on top of which, in a box (made out of a broken canoe), the body was kept which was wrapped in cloth in order for it to be watertight. The box was so small that any living person could barely fit into it, the pillars of the scaffold were 8 to 10 meters high to prevent the wild animals for getting near the body. Similar to the traditions of the other tribes in afterlife, the body was kept alongside other objects such as swords or food to aid the dead in afterlife. On the sides of the scaffolds many little buckets and baskets hung containing water to drink and food for the dead. My take on the design of the scaffold and the decision to keep the body tightly packed in a box was to make enough space for the items since making the scaffold was a tedious, resource extensive task. This could explain why the elaborate structure was not built for everyone. If the body was that of a Squaw (Native American woman) or a child, they were only accorded last rites and then thrown into the jungles to be devoured by the wild animals. The

Scaffold setting was often meant for the chiefs of the tribe exclusively. The grandeur of ceremony was not limited to just the structure, symbolic of high prestige, but extreme measures of testifying grief were performed by the community. Mourners tore out their hair and placed it next to the skull of the body, the relatives cut off, according to the depth of their grief, one or more joints of the fingers, divesting themselves of clothing even in the coldest weather, and filling the air with their cries. The ceremonies of lamenting the death of the tribe chief even involved the Squaws making tepees and dancing around it singing about the virtues of the chief. Later the eldest man would come out and call for the Great Spirit (*Wanagi Tanaka*) to take the soul to the afterlife.

Along with the insecurity of the death due to the obliviousness of where one went after they died and the beliefs in concepts of souls and spirits arose the idea of ghosts. Most prevalent in the Apache and Navajo cultures, it surrounds the idea that some individuals who died in an untimely manner or were not given proper last rites tend to haunt the people and resent the living. This being a subsection on the larger narrative of the afterlife shaped the burial traditions of these communities. The dead were buried swiftly and the mourning family purified itself ritually and moved to a new place to escape their dead family member's ghost. The Navajo also buried their dead quickly with little ceremony. Navajos exposed to a corpse had to undergo a long and costly ritual purification treatment. The Navajo, would refuse to use the name of the person for at least a year after their death, in the belief that it would call back their spirit from the afterlife. The Navajo also believed that sudden and violent deaths could cause bad spirits, or *Chindi*, to haunt the bereaved family. In this case, rituals were especially important. The Seminole tribe would place the body in a small open-sided building called a *chickee*, then relocate their entire settlement to move away from it. They would also sometimes take all of the possessions of the person who died and throw them into a swamp. There were also ceremonies exclusively for the ghosts or offerings made to them before the commencement of any ceremony. A portion of their feast was separated along with some tobacco, cloth and water, all things enjoyed by the living which caused resent in the disembodied Spirits. In the procession, these were publicly prayed over by the eldest man, a veteran and then burned or buried in a secluded part of the village in its outskirts. In the prayers the Man would request the ghost to not cause misfortune to the community and to be a well-wisher of its people.

In the social context, the patriarchal concept of looking at women as possession of their husbands continued sacrificing them at the death of the latter. However, they held important posts in the burial processions. The Squaws used to wrap the bodies in watertight bandages and dance to awaken the spirits to take the soul into the afterlife. In my view I contend this as the reason why the Squaws were given this duty was because the men didn't want to touch the body of the dead and therefore does not designate any high position to them. To elaborate, the burials or symbolic gestures for women were not nearly as elaborate as those of their male counterparts such as totem pillars, which were wooden pillars with decorative engraving of legends or the family heroes. Another group was involved in the burial rituals, the bonepickers. The honoured officials of the bonepickers were men and rarely women. They were identified with heavily tattooed bodies and long grown nails to perform their "revolting occupation". Mostly seen in societies that practice Tree and Scaffold burial, after a specified period of time while the mourners below were still

lamenting, the bonpickers ascended the scaffold. With their long nails, they scrapped all the flesh off of the body. The skeleton was then put into a coffin and buried whereas the flesh was burned.

With the arrival of Christianity, the Jesuits and other missionaries opened schools and other institutions to attract the natives to convert. Putting severe restrictions on the activities and mercilessly killing Natives if they dared to practice their faith, the latter were left with no choice but to convert and leave behind their culture. The Natives were admitted to Christian boarding schools and were taught the lessons of the Bible, indoctrinating them with Christianity. This severely hampered their lives but some continued to struggle and strive for independence to practice their indigenous belief. Some have also transformed Christianity by adding their customs into it such as All Souls Day celebrated on 1 November to commemorate the dead.

Today, though the Natives are unfortunately among the lower income group because of institutionalised racism in America denying them opportunities, they have been able to safeguard their culture and traditions.

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THE OCEANIA REGION AND DEATH

-Devanshee Sharma

The Oceania region has mostly remained historically isolated and colonially neglected which explains why most communities of this region are still quite in sync with their rites and rituals. Oceania primarily comprises of Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Micronesia, Tonga, Marshall Islands, Palau, Tuvalu, Samoa and Nauru.

People in Pacific treat death with more solemnity than any other event in a person's life. Customs vary in ways of treating the corpse, mourning and preservation of the remains. Death rites differ according to the status of the deceased, beliefs about veneration of ancestors and even the kind of death the person has had; good or bad. Death is considered "god's will" and there is a relationship between the soul and the dead, the corpse and the ritual, and finally, the living and mourners. The relationship between them is established by a scale of rites which is an expression of the social order. Bringing in the aspects of eschatology there is a metaphorical relationship of body and the soul and the forms of rites as well. Lastly, the involvement of the living and the dead symbolizes the gradual extinction of the social person. Robert Hertz, in his seminal essay on the mortuary rites in the Pacific region states that there are two types of objects: flesh type and the bone type; wherein the latter seems to mediate between the living and the dead. There are cases when the possessions of the deceased are destroyed but instances also exist in which the objects of the dead are kept as relics or heirlooms. As Hertz puts it "death as social phenomenon consists in a dual and painful process of mental disintegration and synthesis." The process of fixation of the memory of the deceased takes place as well.

In the Pacific region, there is an emphasis on the 'collective representation of death' and as far as emotions are concerned, they are predominantly seen as social and not individual expressions. A recreation of social relationships following a death takes place in ceremonial presentations of mostly perishable items. The exchange of food, money and mats takes place and is seen as a transition of the deceased from the world of the living to the world of the dead. In some cultures, gradual ritual detachment of the deceased corresponds to the similar treatment of a dead person's belongings. For instance, in northwestern Australia there is emphasis on ritual use of the objects of the dead and the production of metaphorical bodies for the dead. Ritual actions with material objects of the deceased result in the categorization of two types of objects that are either inalienable or serve as mediators between the dead and the living. What's important to note is that in these cultures, death is not a full stop for the individual but the living continue as a group. The rituals continue for a stipulated period and the primary focus is on the restoration of the social order, although specifics pertaining to the political authority and the fate of the soul or fertility vary.



Burial of a Maori Queen

In New Zealand, particularly among the Maori population, people may gather to hear the last dying wishes of the person. At the time of death, the *tuku karakai* is chanted, with the intention of releasing person's spirit from the body so as to commence the journey to the underworld. Later, during the funeral, songs and chants are sung to be addressed to the dead person and a year later, there is the unveiling of the headstone of the person's grave. This replaces the traditional *hahunga* ceremony when the bones of the deceased would be disinterred

and transferred into a receptacle for placement in a sacred location for the bones of the ancestors.

In Samoan cultures, whenever the eye is fixed in death, the scene in the house becomes that of indescribable lamentation and wailing. The wails can be heard till long distances and the infliction of wounds and tearing of hair are all 'offerings of blood' made to the gods to appease their wrath and avert death. On ordinary occasions, the body is prepared for the burial within a few hours of death but if the deceased were of high rank, customs and observances changed. Visits of sympathy are made by the persons of surrounding districts and lamentations are put forth; both feigned and real. Funeral obsequies of a chief of rank lasted from ten to fifteen days, whether he died of a natural cause, an illness or warfare, particular signs of mourning were displayed by fighting men called *auosoga* and during the period of mourning the deceased and the death house are continuously watched by men appointed for the task. After the burial, and until the period of mourning period ended, the days were usually spent sham-boxing fights and wrestling matches. The nights were reserved for dancing, jesting and sexual procreation, distinctive to period of mourning called *taupiga* or *valegase*.

Many of the death and mourning cultures have now been replaced or rather largely phased out in the modern times; particularly the blood offerings, the gravesite ritual of genital exposure and the *tulafale* appeasing the gods. Many of the changes were dictated by Christian influences and were replaced by solemn behavior of the mourners that reflect Christian influences. Such as that of the clergy performing the final rituals and pronouncing a biblical benediction to release the deceased person into god's care.

In Australia, a dead person's close relatives will sing and invoke the sacred names of the dead person's water hole and country with its mythological associations. A large number of burial sites are perhaps also reused. There are evidences of mass burials in south eastern Australia

In Papua New Guinea, rites for the dead involve many layers of meaning. There are fears and concerns over the possible malicious intent of the ghost of the deceased, financial obligations, and consequences if acquisition of poison or sorcery. The family member has been transformed into one of the living dead, often leaving the family in a state of anxiety and fear.

In these cultures, death is not a mere passing event rather a state between life and the afterlife and may include the sick and the very old. In Papua New Guinea, some elderly people officiate their own funerals while they're still alive and relatively healthy. Taking the opportunity to say farewell to friends and family and seeking to reconcile sour relationships, bequeath their valuables to their family and friends they conduct a feast as well, thereby, displaying the creativity and initiative by the principal actor in the transition from elder to the ancestor.

Commensality with the dead is a phenomenon predicated on the entanglement of spiritual values with material culture which is central to the issue of funerary practices in the region of Oceania. Though the adoption of modern Christian practices has seeped into the native death rituals, the communities of the pacific have found ingenious ways to not entirely let go of the traditions.

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THE LINGAYATS AND DEATH TRADITION

-Jayati Srivastava

When we talk about the death traditions of various communities that exist all over the Indian Subcontinent, we should bring up one very prominent, strongly bound, dedicated and widespread community- the Lingayats. The Lingayat community originated in the 12th Century CE over the Southwestern region of India which is present-day Karnataka and eventually spread further to most of the parts of Deccan including Maharashtra. They are the devotees of the *linga*, which is one of the worshipped forms of Lord Shiva. This community associates itself with the *linga* and has formed its rituals and traditions according to the principles of Lord Shiva. They have made a big contribution to the early medieval history of Shaivism.

Their death tradition is as unique as their other traditional practices. Although they consider themselves to be within the four folds of the Hindu community, they bury their dead, instead of cremating the corpse, which is the normative death ritual in Hindu tradition. The question is, why do they not follow the common practice? The answer to this lies in the fact that the death rituals are not just the practices performed for the sake of it but also contain certain ideologies behind it. According to W. Crooke in his work, *Primitive Rights of Disposal of the Dead, with Special Reference to India*, the practice of burying dead bodies was prevalent in India during and for a brief period after the prehistoric and proto-historic period. The dead were buried along with their properties, sometimes with expensive clothes, jewellery, their favorite articles, and even food items so that they could carry it to their next lives. But later on, when the dominance of the Brahmanical religion started to take place over large areas of the Subcontinent, the burial practice was replaced by the practice of burning the dead. The idea of “ghost” after the death of a person came into being. Where earlier there were practices of keeping the relics of the dead in the world, the idea of vanishing all the articles related to the dead along with his dead body started to dominate the tradition of burials. The dead bodies were burnt with the idea that it would be easier for the soul to break away from the material world and go to the abode of gods easily and then come back to Earth with a different body (known as the concept of rebirth). But Lingayats had a separate ideology altogether. They did not believe in rebirth. According to them, there is only one life and it can be made either good or bad, depending on one’s deeds and all punishments for the wrongdoings and rewards for the good, are given in this life itself. They believed that the dead are reunited with the *linga* which is called *linga aikya* (unity with *linga*). After death, the dead body or the *shava* becomes equal to Shiva and therefore, the body is decorated with flowers and worshipped. The body was made of soil and it should go back to where it originated from, after death. Another important philosophy that they follow is worshiping of *Istalinga*, which is a symbolic manifestation of the formless God which is why it is believed that the dead is united with the formless one the supreme *Lingayikya*.

The Lingayats usually dig a steep hole to the bottom of the grave in the north and east corner which they cover with either cow dung or whitewash and dust of the holy man's feet is thrown into it. The corpse is dressed in Lion cloth. The body is buried in a sitting position with the *Ishtalinga* amulet kept in the hands. They also put a piece of gold in the corpse’s mouth. Finally, the grave is filled with stones and earth with the mound that is raised over it.



A Lingayat Grave

There is one more very important aspect of Lingayat's death tradition and that is the importance they give to the natural substances, for example, the soil. They believe that soil is a very naturally strong and unique substance given to us by God that can dissolve everything. Humans are born out of this soil, eat food that is sown in this soil and sustain themselves on it all their life. Therefore, they must bury the dead in the soil to complete the cycle of going to the same place from where they originate.

If we observe the death traditions of Lingayats more closely, we also see that the keeping of amulet in their hands after their death signifies the importance that the community gives to the benefits and lavish materials that a man achieves all through his life which can be somewhere associated with the concept of 'materialism'. But if we take it on a positive note, we can also believe it to be the importance given to the merits of a person even after their death since their supreme merit was considered to be their union with Shiva. The concept of burying the dead in the sitting position signifies how this worshipping posture was so important in their tradition. It also showcases the shift from the common traditional beliefs of burying the dead in the straight laying down posture which is present almost all over the world in every religion or society. The system of putting a gold piece in the mouth of the dead before burying is another symbol that can be somewhat attached to the concept of "purity" of the body as it is a part of the supreme now because gold is considered to be pure. There can be another possible logic behind it which is the geographical association of the community with the gold rich Karnataka region of India where the group originally belonged to. The complete death ritual has many symbolisms and significant meanings behind it which makes it an important part of the Lingayat community.

Lingayats differ with the main traditional Brahmanical structures in several other ways. The concept of "anti-pollution" as mentioned in the article by C. N. Venugopal titled, "Factor of Anti-Pollution in the Ideology of the Lingayat Movement", questions the rigid caste system of the Brahmanical society. According to their leader 'Basavana', members of all castes are welcome in their community and there was no discrimination as such. Also, there are many other beliefs, they do not believe in incarnations or after-life, going against the system. Their rituals and practices are

comparatively gender-neutral, for instance, in the group, females are allowed to worship Shiva Linga and participate equally in all the rituals, widow remarriage was common since the origin of the community itself, and so on. By knowing these aspects of the Lingayat community, we get to know how deeply associated and involved the members of the community were. The principles of equality, liberty, and harmony would have attracted a wide range of people in southern India tempting them to become a part of the group. Its ideologies and love for the Shiva linga made it somewhat a part of a wider ideology of Shaivism which was quite popular in the early medieval period but some of its remarkable features make this group distinctive from all others present at that moment. Their love for the Linga form of Shiva was such that, it could reflect even in their death rituals which seemed more like a procession enjoying the dead one's union with God rather than a sad demise of a being.

The philosophy associated with the death traditions of the Lingayat community is very rich and unique which is still a very fresh and interesting topic to research. This unique community has a beautiful death ideology and rituals of its own which has been challenging the existing orthodox Brahmanical rituals and neutralizing the "taboo" related to the death of a person. Therefore, it is time to unleash our minds into the unique and interesting history of the death traditions and other common practices of this community to know more as Ronald E. Osborn rightly said, "Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered, you will never grow".

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INUITS: LIFESTYLE AND SEPULTURE

-Apala Naithani

The primeval occupants that represent the demography of the Arctic and Sub-Arctic domain of Greenland, Canada and United States and comprise the regions of far flung area of eastern Russia (Siberia) speak for the culture and heritage of the community of Inuits. They are often ascribed as Inuits, Inupiat, Yupik and Alutiit, all these nomenclatures characterised as “the people” or “the real people”, varying with their languages and dialects.

The living conditions that prevail in such regions are harsh, dry and extremely cold. The lifestyle of the inuits is similar to what is popularly accredited to the tribal culture. They live in small groups of family and friends which usually represents a “band”. A dexterous and proficient hunter is for all intents and purpose considered the “leader” of the band, their diet comprises of the meat of bears, narwhals, caribou, seals, roots from the vetch plants, berries and bird eggs. During winters they often make self-fashioned igloos and in summers their abode is constructed with animal bones with animal skin cover which are colloquially referred as sod houses or drift houses.

The Inuits and their culture rest preponderantly on the spiritual world. According to the Inuit faith system, the whole corporeal sphere is administered by supernatural powers or owners called “inua”, they are often used as symbols of personification when describing something insensate. The Inuits take as gospel the concept of the “upper world” and the “under world”. In the opinion of the Inuits, the upper world incorporates the Earth with mountains, valleys and the sky at large while the underworld encompasses the areas of sea which can be entered through various pathways from the mountains itself.



An Inuit family from Noatak, Alaska

Lately there has been an Americanisation of Alaska and therefore the demarcation among various tribes has become indistinct. The intensification of social contact has led to the rise of exogamous relationships in terms of inter-tribal and inter village marriage. The Western Inuits of Alaska can be divaricated into two groups based on their dialectical and mortuary practices into the bargain. The Northern Mortuary group inhabiting the Western Coastal belt from Alaskan Peninsula to Norton Sound and the Southern Mortuary Group inhabiting the area from Norton Sound to Point Barrow. The rasp and jarring living conditions only make the inuits wish for a pleasant

and effortless life.

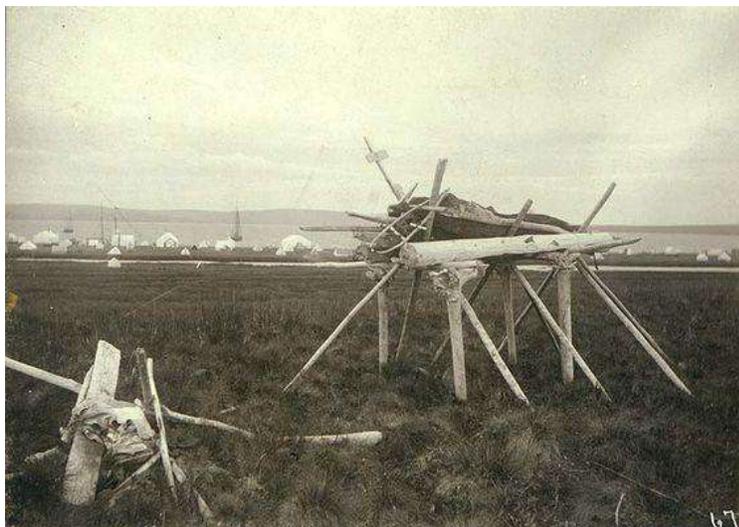
The Inuits of Western Alaska are of the opinion that inuit afterlife has no significant eternal punishment, for them, both good and even are analogous. Contrarily, the Inuits of Greenland presume true that the soul of the dead can either go to the upper world or the underworld, they

prefer under world as according to their belief system underworld is rich and is bounteous with food and if the soul goes to the upper world it will all the more suffer because of cold and famine. The Inuits of Greenland also give credence to the idea of ghosts as they can reappear in the mortal world and make their appearance felt by whistling next to the ear and asking for food. They also disembody themselves as guardian spirits to their children and grandchildren, especially to those who are named after them.

There are assorted and variegated reasons for death among the inuits. As aforementioned the world of inuits is replete with the notions of the animate and inanimate things possessing spirits and therefore when we expound on the causes of death it becomes pertinent to dichotomize reasons as Natural/ Visible deaths and Mysterious/ Invisible deaths. The reasons for the natural grounds of death makes room for war casualties, domestic quarrels, accidents, conflicts with wild beasts, suicide and old age. The Mysterious reasons of death implicates sickness, insanity, child birth, evil spirits and disappearance. It has also been witnessed that because of the increasing economic compulsion, a social custom of taking away the life of an old man or a person who is suffering from any illness is taken away by any family relative or a shamin and thus the idea of “contemplated death” comes into play, which clearly highlights the fact that how economic circumstances dictate the life of people belonging to the community of inuits. But the trend is now shifting and many sick patients now seek medical assistance from a professional doctor generally known as *Yungchowista*. In case of death the body is shrouded in new reindeer skin parka, new mukluks and new seal skin mittens.

The Inuits hold this personal belief that if a person is psychologically not sound then they have been attacked by an evil spirit and evil spirits enter the body in which a good spirit will no longer reside. The people who often turn violent in the process are killed immediately and no embellishments or amulets are put in their grave as they will bring unhappiness and bad luck in the next birth. Many times, a person who is on his death bed often takes the call of choosing their own place for burial and it becomes of utmost importance and the sacred duty of the relatives of the dying person to full fill their last desire.

If we talk about the burial practices of the inuits then we see that how the body is to be buried the



Inuit grave with snowshoe attached to piling, Port Clarence, Alaska

same day of the death and the body of the dead is never taken out through the main entrance but through windows or smoke holes. It will pose a bit of a trouble if the deceased person died in an igloo, then the portion from the ice wall is removed to take the body of the deceased. Loud moaning, wailing and mourning is carried out by the relatives when the dead body is being taken away from the dwelling but no tears of sorrow are shed as the inuits believe

that to distance the everlasting happiness the departed has to cross the river of tears and if the relatives will also shed tears then the deceased will be lost in the river of tears and it will be a hard feat to reach the place of eternal glory. The Inuits of the Norton South prepare the corpse for inhumation by bringing the body into a jack-knifed position by stretching the knees up to the shoulder and placing the head and the forearms across the abdomen. The head is then pushed down so that it rests on the knees and in similar position, then the body is covered in the death sheath made of reindeer and sealskin and is encircled with rawhide lashings. The body is placed into the box that has been built by the men of the village and in case the corpse is male then the cadaver is made to wear the clothes that are made especially made for the burial. In some places the body is not buried entirely and is left open for various predatory animals to come and feed on the dead and in some areas the body is buried with some stakes and personal implements and belongings of the departed.

The Inuits of Western Alaska prepared a burial technique of burying the dead near the innie or tent. Therefore, the shores of Western Alaska are dotted with many burials. On the other hand, in the Alaskan Peninsula the departed are buried in the wooden box. The Inuits of the south of the Norton Sound believe that the spirit of the dead male lingers for about five days and that of a female for four days and thus working with tools with sharp edges is strictly prohibited as it can injure the spirit. Western Eskimos also make offerings of food to the deceased such as walrus meat, berries, reindeer meat, seal meat, muktuk, dried fish and clams. Sometimes the relatives place these delicacies in large amounts near the burial place of the departed and eventually they have a feast with their deceased and loved ones.

When we throw some light on the types of graves, we find that in the Yukon River about Norton Sound and lower Kuskokwim River, the graves that are built are above the ground level so as to prevent it from ravage animals. Also, special ornaments and tools of the deceased are placed. For example, if it is a man then his tools and weapons are placed along with the body and if it is a female then her sewing kit, skinning and tanning implements are placed supplemented with some household things like her earrings, rings, beads etc. In typical Yukon-Kuskokwim burial there are posts that are upraised along with the burial and on these posts are kept the property of the deceased.

The Americanisation of Alaska, as already mentioned, clearly explicates how Christianity has left a deep impact on the religious and mortuary customs of the indigenous people of Alaska. The customs that are personal, homegrown and endemic to the people of Inuit community are slowly waning away as we have seen the proliferation of group burials in Bering Strait which was never primitive to the people of Inuit community.

Bringing down the curtain we can consummate that the history of the Inuits and their association with death is interesting as it not only draws the not much acknowledged history of the community per se but also shifts the locus of study on the racial history, their concept of death, burial practices and also celebrates the innate culture that is specific to the community of Inuits.

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OF DEATH AND ITS RITES- A TAKE ON NORTH-EAST INDIAN TRIBES

-Ipsita Choudhury

It would be a waste of words to define death, especially when it encompasses different meanings for everyone. Yet one has to acknowledge that Death sets a trajectory to counter human arrogance of taking the living for granted. So, when death arrives, it leaves behind burial rites in its wake.

The dead cannot mourn the loss of their lives so it's the living that does it. It's a space given to us that allows people to mourn with no bounds and to come into understanding of their loss. And when it comes to honouring the dead, burial rites house themselves with rituals which prepare the body and the soul to face the judgement of afterlife. The human belief of afterlife and the journey of the soul after the death is a main component of individual cultures and thereby, in the recent decade, funerary rites are being viewed as storehouses of rich cultural integrity. After all, the construction of death reveals the values and cultural ethos and even sheds light on the changes that come due to eventual evolution of time.

Through this article, we shall look at the death rituals and funerary rites of different tribes of north-east India. The north-east India house several hundred tribes with sub-tribes as well, therefore it would be a mistake to say that funerary rites of all of the tribes have been covered. This piece solely concentrates on a few specific tribes and constructs their burial rites in the pre-Christian past.

Our first look on the complexity and sophistication of death ritual will centre on in central Arunachal. To begin with a common skeletal structure, tribes in central Arunachal do not practice cremation or cutting. Graves are uniform, and are screened off by bamboo, in which the body is placed. Structures varying from earth mounds to large bamboo towers are built over the graves. There are taboos on eating and movement; especially for those who have entered the house of the dead person's family should not enter the house of anyone who is performing a ritual. To put some flesh on these bare bones, we will be considering the funeral rituals of the Apatanis and Idu Mishmis.



The Apatani Tribe

The Apatanis do not display elaborate funerary rituals. After the deceased body is washed, friends and family of the deceased gather in the house and bring assorted items to bury with the corpse. Then, mostly the female relatives gather at the side of the body and sing a mourning song called 'Mourning the Dead' (*Sima Kheniin*) or 'Going down to Neli' (*Neli Toniin*); *Neli* is the land of dead for anyone who has died a natural death. After the mourning song has been sung, the priest (*nyibu*) arrives and he performs a brief ritual, sacrifices a chicken and chants a few lines, calling on various spirits (*wi*) to protect and strengthen the soul during its journey. Finally, the dead is buried with items of importance

of the deceased; while a priest chants briefly and a *mithun* or a cow is killed. It is to be noted that the Apatani funeral chants stress on the land of the dead being a happy and prosperous place but it is important to keep the dead there and therefore if recited incorrectly, it's inauspicious.

Idu Mishmis differ from the Apatanis from material culture to language and ritual practices. When an Idu dies, the priest is called immediately and the family begins to observe food restrictions for ten days. The body is washed then, dressed in new clothes and a few coins are placed in the hand of the dead to buy water in the land of the dead. The mourning songs, mostly sung by women who chant in small groups and rotate in order to keep the wailing continuous till the dead is buried after two or so days. As the priest chants, *mithuns* are killed to prepare feast for the guests. Next, the corpse is carried in a small procession, led by a man who holds a weaving shuttle for a dead woman or a sword for a dead man. When the burial is complete the priest comes to the grave and offers rice, meat and rice-beer in a small bamboo container hung on a fence in front of the grave. The priest then raps the grave with his sword to get the attention of the spirit and addresses the soul for its journey into the land of the dead. The soul is first guided to the north and then back to the grave to have the last meal, before going off to the west. After the soul has departed for the west, the priest returns to the house. There, a structure (*amungo*) made of evena leaves stuck on a bamboo frame has been placed on an inside wall. The priest hurls a broom at the structure, symbolising sending the soul away. When the guests depart (and when leaving the grave as well), the priest uses the evena leaves to sweep away any taint of death that might cling to them. With this ritual (*alu thru* or 'sweeping up'), the funeral is over.



The Cheraw Dance

Next, we shall look at a few Mizo burial rites. Importance is laid on sacrifices near the graves and mourning songs or chants for the deceased burial rites which varied from person to person and the way they had died. For instance, *hlamzuih* refers to the death of a young infant. There's no wake held for the child, only a shallow grave is dug underneath the house. The infant is placed into a large pot, with cotton soaked in the mother's breast milk stuffed in its mouth while an egg is placed in the hands so it will roll on the pathway for the infant to follow in the afterlife. In

the case of *raicheh* which is death during childbirth, the entire village observes a day of rest and working is considered taboo. The taboo reflects the fear of the wondering spirit. In fact, everything that the woman had touched is considered unclean and is considered to bring bad luck. Unless a cleansing ritual is performed, the shadow cast by *raicheh* is considered to pervade in the village. *Raicheh* is believed to lead the woman on a very painful journey to the otherworld so the *Cheraw* or Bamboo dance is performed to help ease the pain

In the case of an unnatural death or *sarathi*, such as drowning, burned alive, mauled by an animal, it is believed that such *sarathi* death is followed by another and the body should be buried immediately to avoid the path of misfortune and great care is taken in the burial rites to avoid

misfortune. A *sarathi* body, when taken into the house for the wake, is taken on foot and placed on the ground, head facing the exit. When the body is carried out for burial, it's done on foot again. Another practice at hand is the rare *kuangur*, which emphasises on the importance of the corporeal body, even if it exists only as bones. This ritual is mostly performed by affluent tribesmen. *Kuangur* constitutes decomposition of the body within the house to extract the bones, on the other hand the family continues to mourn and the process of decomposition takes about three months. The relatives would take out the bones once every year during *MimKut* Festival for the dead and would wash the bones, oil it with pig oil with great care and grieve anew. This was a way of reaffirming their bond with their ancestors. The integrity of the ancestor in their bones becomes a central identity of the clan and the village.

We shall go on to look at a few tribes of Nagaland and their burial rites. Some of the tribes like *Konyaks* and *Ao* would expose the dead on a platform instead of burying them. The *Poumai* Naga would bury their dead, often with religious rites, especially in accordance to *Thaimaingi*, a village of dead where those who did good deeds go. The dead body is ceremonially washed and dressed with fine garments, and is laid on its deathbed till it's buried. This is followed by *Pahdayou*, where a cow is killed in honour of the dead and is distributed in the household. There is no specified cemetery so the body is usually buried near the house. The *Napaoh* or the priest-like undertaker performs the rituals. When a man dies, he is buried with his shield, spear and *dao* (single-edged swords) and when it's a woman, she is buried with *Shaossi*, a specially designed iron walking stick, *Ro-* a basket and weaving tools and clothes. When a married woman dies, it is customary of the people to give a cow or paddy to the maternal nearest relatives as a token of love called *Thaimai Doupeiyou*. It has been noted that, during the burial process all garments and materials are not buried and made sure the number has an even figure for the dead man cannot follow other friends with a heavy load to *Thaimaingi*.



The Khasi Tribe

In the rainy hills of Meghalaya, the Khasi tribe burn their dead on a funeral pyre. The calcified bones and ashes are collected and placed in an earthen vessel and are generally buried in some adjacent spot, a stone being placed over the vase for security. Every family or clan has a separate receptacle for these remains, always covered with a heavy slab of stone; these receptacles are called “Mao-bah”, the great stone and “Mao-shiing”, the bone stone. If within a year, the family of the deceased remains happy and healthy, it means the soul has departed peacefully. If there is great misfortune and illness, the spirit is understood to be restless and an animal sacrifice is required and the bones are removed to be buried in another spot. In case of a person losing their

life in a manner where their bodies cannot be recovered, one member of their family takes some cowries in their hand, looks into the direction where the accident happened and shouts the name of the deceased so as the spirit would return to the cowries. Then the cowries are burned as the bones and the ashes are placed in the bone depository.

These are a few examples of burial rites from the North-east of India. Death is inevitable and it leaves no one. An interesting prospect taken from these death rituals is that there is great emphasis laid on the journey to the afterlife and making sure that the spirit of the deceased does not linger around in the mortal world. There is also the lingering presence of taboo of the dead causing misfortunes. Yet, we see a depletion of rituals due to the inevitable exposure to modernisation and globalisation and the cultural and traditional ways of death experiencing changes. Burial rites now, identify increasingly with the cultural participation it holds dear, rather than performing with for the deceased's family's own sake.

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21st CENTURY AND DEATH TRADITIONS

-Pratishtha Verma

How is the experience of death and grieving changing under conditions of growing religious plurality and secularization, technological arbitration and proliferation? Cultures, throughout history have brought into play different media and objects to communicate with and remember the dead. Since the turn of the 21st century, this accumulation is undergoing extensive and rapid change. New and revitalized ways of treating the body and memorializing the dead are escalating across global cities. What are the beliefs, values, and ontologies interwoven with these emerging death practices? Are they indicative of new cosmologies or amplifications of persistent themes? Are we observing a shifting relationship between the living and the dead? The purpose of this article is to explore these questions and more.

There are two interconnected changes in the rites and practices associated with death that has emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century, which has paved the way for customs that emerged in the 21st century. The first change is the shift in the location of cremation ashes, away from landscapes traditionally associated with burial, internment, and scattering practices and towards the spatial domains of the living. The second change is concerned with the increasing tendency to personalise rituals and practices associated with death. These changes are embedded in each other as they entwine in the practice of incorporating cremation ashes into ash engagement rings and beads and so on.

It is easier to turn a person's remains into cremation diamond today than it was many years ago. There are laboratories which convert remains into cremation diamonds which are diamonds with the same chemical composition and physical structure as that of natural diamonds, while their carbon source comes from the remains of the dead. This difference makes the diamond made from human ashes more valuable as it is a part of everlasting love. Memorial diamonds from human ashes cost much less than natural diamonds, thereby making it affordable for individuals to cherish their loved ones with a one of a kind keep sake.



South Korean Death Beads

With evolving times, South Korea is witnessing an increase in cremation. Space and cost are two of the main factors, along with traditions and the manner in which people are memorialising. One option is to have the cremation ashes turned into beads. Instead of an urn filled with ashes or some jewellery containing a little sprinkle, all the remains can be returned in a more aesthetically pleasing, bead form. The company called Bonhyang (Ashes-to-beads) is base in Seoul. The company takes the ashes, cleans and refines it into fine powder and then heats it to ultra-high temperatures. The process reduces the ashes to a

molten state before they solidify into crystals. On average, the ashes of one body will produce up to 5 cups of beads.

Unlike ashes, hair or other traditional mementos, DNA carry the entire genetic 'blueprint' of an individual. Encoded in DNA is every detail about the human body- the hair colour and ancestral origins, health risks and height. SecuriGene, a Canadian biotech company thinks that the DNA of loved ones should be preserved not just to "celebrate life in its purest form," but also to provide insights into the genetic make-up, should the desire to analyse that DNA arise in the future. This DNA extraction process is now popular in Japan.

Some of the most well-known group of indigenous people who live on the shores of the Amazon are the Yanomami. Many human aid organisations have reported about the native inhabitants and the burden gold-seekers in Brazil have brought upon them in the last decades. The natives, also known as Yanam, Yanomanö or Senema, live in southern Venezuela and north western Brazil and comprise of the largest indigenous tribe in the entire continent of South America. They largely live an indigenous life, in which the religious traditions are almost untouched and are followed by the white settlers and gold-seekers, who hunted the natives to confiscate their land and construct new gold mines in the rain forest. In the religious perspective of the Yanomami tribe, the soul and especially its salvation after the death are of big significance. In contrast to that, in their religious beliefs, death is a very important subject. The religious conviction of the Yanomami rests on the view that the soul needs to be secured after death, a belief that materialized in European antiquity as well. The soul could enter another life form. Due to this, the Yanomami do not hunt special kinds of birds, which are seen as a possible receptacle for the souls of dead tribe members. Following the religious beliefs of the Indians, the soul is only able to achieve a full salvation if the dead body is burnt after death and the ash is eaten up by the family and the relatives of the dead person. In contrast to the funeral customs which are exercised all around the world, the Yanomami do not conceal the corpses.

In a ceremony, the dead body is burned down and the remaining ash and bones are collected by the relatives. During the course of this ceremony, they cry and sing sad songs as their faces and bodies are blackened by soot. After the burning, the bones are crumbled and, together with the ash, the remains are put into a kind of pot, where they are kept till the second part of the funeral ceremony. Between the two phases there could be a long-time span because the Yanomami delay the second step until there is a festivity. As a part of this festivity, bananas, which comprise the most common dishes of the natives, are mashed and the resultant banana mush is mixed with the remains of the dead tribe member. All the relatives gather to consume the mush. The reason for that is a religious belief that the soul of the former tribe member is absorbed by the tribe again and is freed by this procedure to become ready for salvation. If this ceremony is not carried out, the soul of the deceased would not be freed and would be damned to remain in the world between life and death.

Rather than expressing grief, Ghanaian funerals represent a time to celebrate the life of the deceased. The funeral is a large social gathering where the phrase "the more the merrier" fits precisely, since there could be as many as hundreds of funeral attendees, and everyone usually

wears red or black clothing as a symbol of displaying grief. Colourful billboard displays are made to notify everyone about the funeral. Ghana is known for its extravagant coffins in the shape of unique objects, such as a lion, shoe, or chili pepper. The personalized coffins are made to reflect favourite interests and passions of the deceased, such as a fish-shaped coffin for a popular Ghana fisherman. A Ghanaian funeral is basically a party celebrating the deceased's life through music and dancing. The music is typically a Ghanaian mix of jazz, brass bands, and African rhythms; and it is customary to take photographs of funeral attendees, dancing and commemorating the deceased's life. Food and drinks are served, as well.



A Ghanaian Funeral

Another astonishing way of death funeral can be seen in the Tibetan culture. In the autonomous region of Tibet, the tradition and practice of sky burial is known as *jhator* which denotes "giving alms to the birds" and vultures are an essential part of these funerals. In places where there are several *jhator* contributions, the birds sometimes have to be persuaded to eat, which is sometimes concluded with a ritual dance. It is considered a bad omen if the vultures do not eat or if even a small portion of the food remains after the birds fly away. Sky burial is a traditional form of funeral of the Mongolian and Tibetan ethnic minorities, and has a long history of over thousand years in China.

The way we think about death has changed drastically in the past 50 years. There also has been a transition from traditional institutions like cemeteries and funeral homes, with families of the deceased acquiring more control over the process of burial practises. Another trend that we see, is a shift from a private display of emotions to public vehemence. We can experience mourning on social media. Another context, based on environment can be seen as we identify a trend in cremation practices driven by sustainability and environmental concerns. Many cemeteries do not have space left, and many suburban communities are planned without places needed for burial

practises. Ecologically conscious people may choose to be cremated or to be placed in natural burial grounds that eschew embalming and pesticides, in some cases with the promise that that land will remain a public conservation area.

It totally depends on us, how we handle the process of remembering our loved ones in our lives. How do we want to remember them and where do we want to remember them and how are we allowed to remember them?

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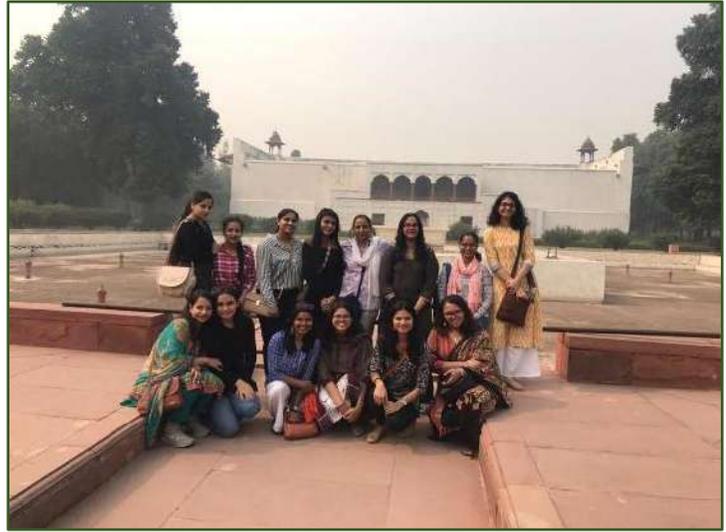
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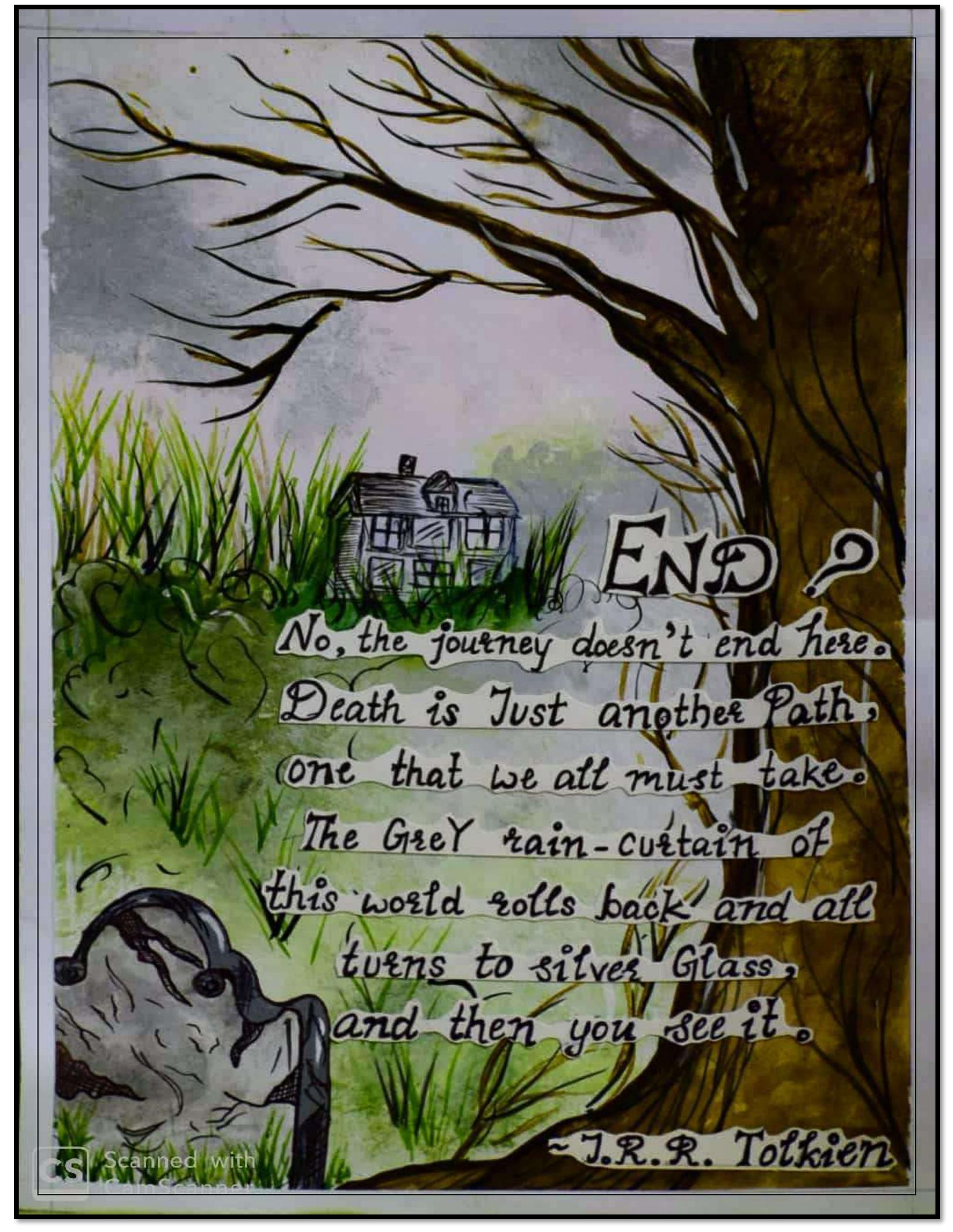
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THE DEPARTMENT AT A GLANCE







END ?

No, the journey doesn't end here.

Death is Just another Path,
one that we all must take.

The Grey rain-curtain of
this world rolls back and all
turns to silver Glass,
and then you see it.

~ J.R.R. Tolkien